



**Convention on the Elimination  
of All Forms of Discrimination  
against Women**

Distr.: General  
31 July 2013

English only

---

**Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination  
against Women  
Fifty-fifth session**

**Summary record (partial)\* of the 1143rd meeting**

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 17 July 2013, at 3 p.m.

*Chairperson:* Ms. Ameline

**Contents**

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention  
(continued)

*Seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern  
Ireland (continued)*

---

\* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent *within one week of the date of this document* to the Editing Unit, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention** *(continued)*

*Seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (continued) (CEDAW/C/GBR/7 and Add.1 and 2, CEDAW/C/GBR/Q/7 and Add.1)*

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chairperson** said that, at the invitation of the Committee, other members of the delegation would be speaking via video link from London.

*Articles 1 to 6*

3. **Mr. Papaleontiou** (United Kingdom) said that the Government was actively looking at how to address the loophole that had been identified in the current legislation on extreme pornography. A new national group on sexual violence against children and vulnerable people, which had a dedicated cyberspace work stream, was promoting a coordinated approach, across front-line government agencies, and with the voluntary sector, to tackle Internet-enabled abuse and sexual violence.

4. **Mr. Devitt** (United Kingdom) said that a historical institutional abuse inquiry had been set up by the Northern Ireland Executive in October 2012 to examine whether there had been systematic failings by State institutions towards the children in their care in between 1922 and 1955. The body directing the inquiry now had the authority to compel persons to provide evidence and was due to submit its report in three years' time. Those who had been resident in the Magdalene laundries in Northern Ireland as a child in between 1922 and 1995 could relate their experiences to the panel members of the Acknowledgement Forum that had been established for that purpose under the inquiry.

*Articles 7 to 9*

5. **Ms. Kvjatkovski** (United Kingdom) said that the 2010 Equality Act addressed not only formal but also substantive equality in a number of key ways: firstly, by prohibiting indirect discrimination and addressing group disadvantage and the disparate impact on women of policies and practices; secondly, by establishing the public sector equality duty, which required public authorities to mainstream gender equality in policymaking and service delivery; thirdly, through positive action provisions, which had been extended to cover recruitment and promotion; fourthly, by retaining women-only shortlists for political parties until 2030; fifthly, by extending the permission for women-only services; and sixthly, through provisions expressly protecting women against discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and maternity, including the right to breastfeed.

6. **Ms. Sutcliffe** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom had ongoing cross-government programmes and plans of action to tackle hate crime. The Ministry of Justice had allocated funding to charities working on the subject and specifically to those working on hate crimes against black and minority ethnic women. One project focused on addressing the hostilities suffered by women entering the United Kingdom through the asylum system and another addressed the underreporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes against women, particularly in urban areas. Lessons learned and best practices were shared to ensure the constant improvement of the Government's response to the issue.

7. **Mr. Armour** (United Kingdom) said that the Home Office was working with the Ministry of Justice to train staff in prisons and young offender institutions how to respond

when they identified victims of trafficking, as well as with NGOs so that they would direct victims to the national referral mechanism through which they would receive appropriate support. The Government had a number of mechanisms and worked with NGOs to help victims of trafficking return home and reintegrate into normal life. The model of care for trafficking victims, for example, established a period of reflection to allow victims to recover.

8. **Ms. Reynolds** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom would uphold its reservation in relation to the exclusion of women from certain posts because the employment of women in certain roles in the Armed Forces could, according to military judgement, be detrimental to the combat effectiveness of those Forces. That exclusion had been fully considered in the drafting of the 2010 Equality Act. The Ministry of Defence had also regularly reviewed its policies on women in ground close-combat roles in accordance with European Union rules on the subject. The results of the most recent review, conducted in 2010, had been inconclusive, and the Ministry had therefore decided to take a precautionary approach. The policies excluding women from roles that might require them to close with and kill the enemy in face-to-face combat had consequently not been rescinded.

9. **Ms. Robertson** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom had entered a reservation to article 9 in order to preserve certain temporary provisions in the Nationality Act of 1981. Since 1983, however, nationality was transmitted in the same way by men and women, and in that regard, the Act had been brought fully into line with the Convention. Also, any child born to a British citizen, whether male or female, could now obtain British nationality, including retroactively, either automatically or by registration and free of charge.

10. **Mr. Pember-Finn** (United Kingdom) said that the reservation entered by the United Kingdom to article 11 referred to the adult dependency increase provided for in the State pension system and would need to be retained until 2020. The benefit had been introduced after the Second World War mainly to allow a man over pension age to claim an additional pension if he had a financially dependent wife. All new claims had been stopped since 2010, at which time there had been 35,000 claimants. The number of claimants was naturally declining, and all payments of the benefit would cease as of April 2020.

11. **Ms. Sutcliffe** (United Kingdom) said that the United Kingdom wished to maintain its reservation to article 15, paragraph 3, of the Convention, which was based on its understanding that the intention of the paragraph was to deem null and void only the clauses that were discriminatory in the manner described in the article, not necessarily the contract as a whole. The reservation entered by the United Kingdom in relation to article 16, paragraph 1 (f), stemmed from the fact that, under the adoption laws of the United Kingdom, the courts and adoption agencies had to consider the child in the wider context of the family and its relationships. The interests of the child were thus the principal concern but not “paramount” in the way expressed in the article.

12. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** (Country Rapporteur) said that despite the progress made in women’s political representation, only 22.4 per cent of members of the House of Commons were women and the United Kingdom lagged far behind other countries in that regard, ranking only eleventh among European Union member States and fiftieth worldwide. The voluntary use of women-only shortlists had been extended until 2030, but she wondered whether the Government considered that to be enough to improve the situation. Incentives, even financial ones, should possibly be given to parties to ensure that they placed more women candidates on their lists. She wished to know what measures the Government was taking to ensure that the reduction of the number of seats in Parliament in 2015 would not have a detrimental impact on women’s representation. She requested confirmation that the Welsh government was still committed to introducing Norwegian-style quotas to reserve at

least 40 per cent of seats for women, as well as information on the steps being taken to ensure that the initiative would proceed. She also enquired about the results of the strategy launched in 2012 to provide specific support to persons with disabilities who stood for election to public office. The low representation of women in the judiciary was particularly alarming. Only 22.6 per cent of members of the courts-based judiciary were women, and there was only one female Supreme Court judge. She would like to know how the Government was addressing the matter.

13. **Ms. Hayashi** said that the finding of the Government-commissioned report *Women on Boards* that British women preferred a merit-based system to a quota system was based on a survey in which 85 per cent of respondents were women and 25 per cent were serving as board members. It was well known that those who had already achieved high status did not favour quotas, and the Government should survey the opinion of female students, as well as women with young children and women from minority backgrounds, since they would represent the next generation of potential corporate directors. She had also noticed that the report stated that the actions required to ensure more women were recruited to boards were, first, more opportunities and training and, second, quotas. She therefore failed to understand how the report could be used as grounds for not introducing quotas for board appointments in the United Kingdom. A draft European Commission directive aimed to establish that 40 per cent of non-executive directors in publicly listed companies would have to be women. She wished to know the British Government's time frame for reaching that target or if it had no intention of setting such a goal.

14. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that, according to reports received by the Committee, there were some problems with regard to policy coherence in the application of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) at the national level. More information on the Associate Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security tasked with monitoring the implementation of the resolution and its inquiry into the role of women in peace and security in Northern Ireland would be appreciated. The full implementation of the resolution in Northern Ireland could be a key to ensuring not only women's representation in politics and decision-making, but also their involvement in the policies to address the legacy of the conflict.

15. **Ms. Jahan** said that the Committee was concerned that a gender-sensitive and rights-based approach was not applied in the immigration and asylum laws of the United Kingdom. The strategy of regularizing immigration and imposing strict visa requirements endangered many women by exposing them to the risk of trafficking, as well as smuggling networks and fraudsters. Moreover, several immigration rules and policies adversely affected women. They included the immigration points-based system, the provision that holders of an overseas domestic worker's visa could not change employer and the raising of the minimum age for foreign partners to be allowed to join their British counterparts, from 18 to 21. Steps had been taken to improve the asylum screening process, but the rate at which appeals were overturned for women asylum seekers was consistently higher than for men, and there were allegations that women were not adequately heard in asylum processes. There were also concerns about the fast-track procedures and the lack of protection for women who could not return to their countries for various reasons, including fear of persecution. She wished to know what reform measures the Government would take to ensure that the country's immigration and asylum policies were fully gender sensitive and did not have a negative impact on women's rights.

16. As to the matter of the Magdalene laundries, the Committee deeply regretted the fact that women who had been over 18 at the time they had worked in the laundries would fall outside the remit of the inquiry. Measures should be taken to ensure that all the women victims would obtain full redress and that the perpetrators would be prosecuted and punished.

17. **Ms. Reardon-Bond** (United Kingdom) said that an inquiry conducted under the previous Government with full cross-party support had led to a number of recommendations for diversifying Parliament in terms of the representation of women, persons with disabilities and persons with different racial backgrounds. More work needed to be done, especially at the level of the parties, which had the option to use women-only shortlists, but there had been some progress: a record number of Asian women had run in the 2010 general election, and for the first time there were Asian women in Parliament. Excellent statistics were kept by the House of Commons library, which were used to monitor progress. A cross-party task force to promote the participation of black and minority ethnic women in local councils, which was the level at which many women entered politics, had been set up to encourage more women to step forward, and it was hoped that those efforts would filter through to Parliament.

18. As to the issue of the underrepresentation of women on boards, the Women's Business Council had recently looked into the matter and reached the conclusion that efforts should focus on removing barriers at the middle-management level rather than on establishing quotas.

19. **Ms. Haywood** (United Kingdom) said that opinion varied among States members of the European Union on whether establishing quotas for representation on executive boards was the way to proceed. In the United Kingdom, there was a strong body of opinion against quotas since they would mean moving away from appointment on the basis of merit. A non-legislative approach was considered more appropriate in the United Kingdom and was producing good results. The associated policy measures aimed to change the culture in the workplace and enable women to fulfil their caring responsibilities and remain on the career tracks that would allow them to achieve "board-readiness". For example, the right to request flexible working arrangements would be extended to all employees as of April 2014. New legislation was before Parliament to establish that, as of 2015, either parent could take parental leave during the child's first year. That was expected to reduce the career penalties that many women experienced on account of having spent long periods out of the workplace on maternity leave or in parental-related care.

20. **Mr. Henderson** (United Kingdom) said that the Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Fund launched in July 2012 provided grants of up to £20,000 to persons with disabilities to cover the additional costs they faced in relation to non-disabled persons when standing for election. In its first year of operations, during which relatively few elections had been held, the Fund had received 39 applications, 18 from women.

21. **Ms. Sutcliffe** (United Kingdom) said that, as part of its commitment to diversifying the judiciary, the Government had made it a statutory duty of the Lord Chancellor and the Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales to encourage judicial diversity. In addition, equal-merit provisions for judicial appointments meant that if there were two applicants who in terms of merit were equally suitable, protected characteristics could be taken into account for the purposes of increasing diversity. Part-time work was also now possible in the senior courts, including the Supreme Court, and work was being done with the legal profession to encourage greater flexibility in work arrangements and to see more women in senior positions.

22. **Mr. Cheeseman** (United Kingdom) said that all decision-makers in asylum cases received training in gender issues that had been devised in conjunction with Asylum Aid and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the gender sensitivity of assessments was evaluated on a six-monthly basis. Trends in gender-related performance issues were also monitored over the longer term. An initiative was under way to improve the referral of asylum seekers who were victims of sexual violence to the appropriate support and advisory services. The fact that a higher proportion of women's appeals were overturned by the courts did not reflect a problem with the quality of decision-

making in women's cases. The fact that the courts disagreed with the Home Office on a given asylum case did not necessarily mean that the Home Office had been wrong; changes in the applicant's circumstances and the submission of evidence previously not available could alter the outcome.

23. **Ms. Robertson** (United Kingdom) said that there were specific provisions in place to protect those going through the migration process. The regulations governing families had recently been amended to further support and facilitate the social integration of persons coming to the United Kingdom to join a partner. The minimum age requirement to be eligible for a United Kingdom spouse visa had reverted to 18 years. The probationary period in which foreign spouses must be present in the United Kingdom before they could become permanent residents had been extended from two to five years to ensure that their relationship was genuine. However, foreign spouses who were victims of domestic violence could apply for immediate settlement without having to complete the period. Victims of domestic violence also had access to public funds to facilitate their application for permanent residence. However, in general, persons who applied for permanent residence were not entitled to public funds. Nevertheless, some safety nets were in place for persons with care needs who faced destitution; they could apply to the local authority for assistance.

24. **Ms. John** (United Kingdom) said that the Welsh government was seeking to introduce quotas for appointments to public bodies in Wales with a view to ensuring that at least 40 per cent of appointees were women. It was also using non-legislative means to ensure gender balance in public bodies and the inclusion of women from ethnic minorities.

25. **Mr. Devitt** (United Kingdom) said that around 40 per cent of persons working for the Northern Irish judiciary were women. The Commissioner for Public Appointments was working with a number of departments of the Northern Irish Executive to devise measures to address the underrepresentation of women in public life.

26. **Ms. Reardon-Bond** (United Kingdom), replying to questions regarding Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), said that the position of her Government, which had been endorsed by the First Minister of Northern Ireland and the Democratic Unionist Party but not by the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland or Sinn Féin, was that the situation in Northern Ireland did not constitute an armed conflict as defined under international law. The situation in Northern Ireland demonstrated the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding. The United Kingdom had been one of the first countries to devise a national action plan in support of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) and was working with relevant actors to develop it further.

#### *Articles 10 to 14*

27. **Ms. Acar** said that gender segregation in education was still prevalent in the United Kingdom and that girls were underrepresented in fields of study such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Drawing attention to the recommendations made by the Women and Work Commission relating to the role of education in eliminating gender stereotypes and gender inequality, she noted with concern that the Education Act did not adequately cover those issues or mention the role of education in implementing policies concerning gender equality. She asked why that was the case and how the State party was planning to bridge those gaps.

28. There was also a noticeable gender bias in vocational training programmes, such as modern apprenticeships. She noted with concern that sexual and reproductive health, human rights and women's issues were not a compulsory part of the secondary school curriculum. She asked why that was the case and whether the State party planned to remedy that shortcoming. She requested statistical data on the women adversely affected by budget cuts in higher education institutions and asked whether an impact assessment had been

carried out. Noting the horizontal and vertical segregation and unequal access to research funding among women in academia, she requested up-to-date statistical data on those women disaggregated by professional rank, discipline and the ranking of the university where they worked.

29. **Ms. Patten** said that the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom was still wide in spite of the efforts to narrow it. Recalling that a large number of businesses had agreed to adhere to the principles of gender equality reporting established in the Government Equalities Office *Think, Act, Report* policy paper, she asked how many of those businesses had actually reported on gender pay gaps and how the efficiency of the transparency framework set out in the annex to the paper was assessed. She enquired as to the measures adopted by the State party to prevent the gender pay gap from widening as a result. She also asked whether the State party was planning to introduce a national strategy to address the root causes of the gender pay gap. Noting that a large proportion of black and minority ethnic women were unemployed or performed work for which they were overqualified, she asked whether the impact of job cuts on those women had been assessed so that specific measures could be taken to assist them. Noting with concern that many women with disabilities were discriminated against in the labour market and that the funding allocated to the Access to Work scheme had been curtailed, she asked what practical measures had been envisaged to address the high unemployment rate of women with disabilities.

30. **Mr. Bruun** said that the Committee had received reports that pregnant working women often faced discrimination in the workplace. Recent changes in employment policy had made it more difficult for women to exercise their rights during pregnancy. As of 2013, pregnant women who wished to bring a claim before an employment tribunal were required to pay a fee. He asked whether the authorities assessed the financial circumstances of such claimants. Noting the high cost of childcare in the United Kingdom and the absence of a universal childcare system, he asked whether the State party had envisaged measures to remedy that situation. Despite the efforts made by the State party, in practice women were still the primary caretakers of their children. He requested up-to-date statistical data on the number of fathers electing to take parental leave. He also wished to know the measures adopted by the State party to minimize the impact of further job cuts in the public sector and of the results of the programmes launched to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

31. **Ms. Nwankwo** said that female prisoners generally did not enjoy good health, particularly mental health, and that self harm was prevalent in women's prisons. The mental health strategy entitled "No health without mental health" stated that all offenders should have access to the same mental health services as the rest of the population. She asked what the State party was doing to ensure that women had access to those services and whether the strategy had been reviewed. Given that asylum seekers had no access to public funds and that female asylum seekers in particular could fall victim to violence and exploitation, she enquired as to the safety nets in place to protect those women.

32. She requested additional information on the three-year State-funded programme aimed at raising women's awareness about contraception. She also wished to know whether the State party planned to make sexual and reproductive education compulsory in secondary schools. She would appreciate further details of the measures in place to combat the discrimination faced by many women living with HIV/AIDS and the State party's efforts to change negative attitudes towards pregnant women with disabilities.

33. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that, in Northern Ireland, women were still bound by the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861, which provided for life imprisonment for women who were found to have terminated a pregnancy. There were currently no legislative provisions allowing an abortion to be carried out on the grounds of rape, incest or foetal impairment. An abortion could be carried out legally only if termination was

necessary to prevent serious permanent injury to the woman's health. However, the failure of a health professional to provide access to an abortion when continuance of the pregnancy led to the woman's death did not carry an equally severe penalty under the Act. Contrary to the Committee's previous concluding observations, no public consultation on abortion had taken place. Moreover, the language used in the most recent Northern Ireland draft abortion guidelines appeared to be more restrictive than existing law. She reminded the State party that, in accordance with the Northern Ireland Act, the Northern Irish Executive was responsible for fulfilling the international obligations relevant to it but that the ultimate responsibility for implementing the Convention lay with the central Government of the United Kingdom. She asked whether the Government of the United Kingdom was planning to carry out any reform that would grant women in Northern Ireland access to abortion. Noting that the eligibility criteria for fertility treatment appeared to discriminate against lesbian women and women without a partner, she requested additional information on that issue in Northern Ireland and in the other countries of the United Kingdom.

34. **Ms. Haywood** (United Kingdom) said that the practice of discriminating against pregnant working women was illegal and unacceptable. The reform of the parental leave system would provide an opportunity for her Government to remind employers of their obligations and to provide them with new guidance on that subject. Her Government planned to carry out another study on discrimination against pregnant working women so that the latest findings could be reflected in the new shared parental leave system. Her Government would also examine the question of breastfeeding in the workplace in order to provide employers with information on the best practices in that regard.

35. The proposed new law on the parental leave system would most likely be passed and implemented by April 2015 at the latest, as consideration of the relevant primary legislation was well under way in Parliament and drafting of the regulations and other statutory instruments needed to bring the law into play had already begun. More than 60 per cent of men already took time off work to attend antenatal classes with their partner. The new legislation would expressly include the right to such leave and the right of adoptive parents to leave for appointments that were a routine part of the adoption process. A large proportion of men also availed themselves of the two weeks of paid paternity leave provided for by law. In a limited number of cases, mothers who had returned to work early after having had their baby could transfer their remaining maternity leave to the child's father under recent amendments to the law. However, given that the amendments had only just been introduced, very few people had taken advantage of that option. Under the new system of shared parental leave mothers and fathers would be able to take leave at the same time and to exchange it freely. Recognizing that the new system would entail a significant cultural change, she said that it would take time for the number of parents making use of the system to reach the desired level.

36. Her Government did not intend for employment tribunal fees to stop people from bringing genuine claims, whether they were associated with pregnancy discrimination or any other form of unfair treatment in the workplace. Only persons who could afford to do so should contribute to the costs of processing their claim. A remission scheme was in place to ensure that those who were not in a position to pay were not prevented from bringing a claim. It should be noted that formal legal action was only one way of settling a dispute and that there was also a range of cost-free options available. There were plans to change the regulations governing early conciliation in 2014 in order to encourage people to discuss their grievances and to take legal action only as a last resort. Under the new regulations, a prospective claimant would be required to contact the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service before they could institute any formal legal proceedings in an employment tribunal.



37. **Mr. Devitt** (United Kingdom) said that it was lawful to perform an abortion in Northern Ireland only when it was necessary to preserve the life of the mother or when there was a risk of a serious adverse effect on her physical or mental health that was long term or permanent. A public consultation was taking place based on a guidance document on abortion for social and health-care professionals. However, the outcome of that public consultation would not change the law on abortion. Rape and incest were not in and of themselves grounds for the termination of a pregnancy. There were no plans to amend the law on abortion in Northern Ireland. The guidelines published by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on fertility treatment stated that eligible couples should be offered up to three cycles of treatment. However, given that those guidelines had been published before the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety of Northern Ireland had entered into an agreement with the Institute, the guidelines had not been endorsed in the country. Currently only one cycle of treatment was provided to eligible couples. The Department was currently reviewing the Institute's guidelines on the subject, including those on fertility treatment for same-sex couples, and assessing the financial impact of their implementation.

38. **Ms. Wilson** (United Kingdom) said that, while the mental health strategy referred to by the Committee stated that all offenders should have access to the same mental health services as the rest of the population, the fact remained that they could not have access to the same treatment, as treatment was prescribed on the basis of individual needs. Currently there were no plans to review the mental health strategy.

39. As to the provision of antenatal and maternity services to women asylum seekers and to women with an uncertain immigration status, she said that the health of the mother and the unborn child remained her Government's top priority. Even if those women might not have access to public funds, they did have access to good quality antenatal and maternity care. Her Government was planning to improve the services that were available to women with HIV/AIDS. Turning to the question raised about discrimination against women with disabilities who were pregnant, particularly women with a learning disability, she said that her Government had worked with a number of representative organizations of people with learning disabilities with a view to providing adequate support to parents with learning disabilities and to their families. Thus, the practice of placing the child of parents with a learning disability in care from birth was now rare.

40. **Ms. Fevrier** (United Kingdom) said that there were more women in the workforce than ever before. Increasing women's participation in the labour market was the key to reducing the gender pay gap. Welfare reforms such as the equalization of the State pension age and strategies to encourage single parents to seek work also played an important part in that endeavour. It was important to ensure that women's needs in respect of flexible working arrangements and childcare were met to make it easier for them to take up employment. It was inaccurate to suggest that more than 50 per cent of black and minority ethnic women were unemployed. However, it was true that the economic activity rate of women in certain ethnic minority groups remained low and that her Government needed to do more to address that situation. A large number of persons with disabilities were economically inactive and reliant on government support. Her Government nevertheless recognized the need to provide better support to persons with disabilities in the workplace, especially women with disabilities. To that end, it had devised an employment strategy to complement its general strategy to empower persons with disabilities, entitled "Fulfilling potential". A review of the Access to Work scheme had revealed that few people were aware of its existence. In the light of the recommendations formulated by the review panel, her Government had streamlined the process of making direct payments to persons with disabilities so that they could enter the labour market and maintain employment. In addition, a significant proportion of the budget should be allocated to affording persons

with disabilities access to a wider range of opportunities such as internships and traineeships.

41. **Ms. Smith** (United Kingdom) said that the Equality Act, including the provisions on public sector equality duty, were also applicable to schools. Assessing gender equality was an integral part of the school inspection framework and close attention was paid to each institution's ability to provide equal opportunities to all students. The national curriculum covered gender and human rights issues but the Government gave individual schools the freedom to teach gender issues in the manner most appropriate to their pupils' needs. Sex and relationships education was compulsory for all maintained secondary schools but schools awarded academy status had greater autonomy in their approach to the subject. Both maintained secondary schools and academies must follow the Secretary of State's guidance on sex and relationships education, particularly on topics such as contraception methods, family planning and healthy relationships. In an effort to address the issue of abuse and exploitation of women and girls and help to stop sexual violence, the Government also provided funding to the Personal, Social and Health Education Association so that it could encourage schools to teach students about sexual consent.

42. **Mr. Clarke** (United Kingdom) said that in England girls outperformed boys at all stages of the educational system and were more likely to stay in education past the minimum school-leaving age of 16. Unfortunately, however, the subject choices of boys and girls after the age of 16 continued to differ significantly, with far fewer girls choosing non-traditional subjects such as physics. In an effort to reverse that trend, the Government intended to take steps to improve the quality of education and raise the standard of teaching. Efforts had also been made to strengthen the careers guidance offered to students and in 2011 the Government had required schools under the Education Act to provide independent and impartial careers guidance to all school pupils aged between 13 and 16. From September 2013, the age range for such advice would be extended to all school pupils aged between 12 and 18. Schools would shortly be required to provide data disaggregated by sex on the career and educational choices of young people, and it was envisaged that such increased transparency would have a powerful effect on schools and the careers guidance they provided. The Government was also supporting special initiatives to tackle gender stereotypes and encourage girls to study non-traditional subjects in order for them to be able to pursue careers in the scientific, engineering and technology fields.

43. **Ms. Smith** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had recently introduced a new policy to increase the availability and affordability of childcare in the United Kingdom, which would, inter alia, help schools to offer more afterschool and holiday care, encourage nurseries to expand their capacity and working hours and increase the number of childcare agencies. Under a new tax-free childcare scheme, parents would also be able to claim 20 per cent of their childcare costs, up to an annual cap of £6,000 for each child under 12. A new universal credit scheme would also help to cover childcare costs for low-income families in need of additional support. In addition, all children aged between 3 and 4 had access to the national early education scheme and from 2013 the Government had expanded the scheme to cover 40 per cent of all children under 2 years old from the lowest income households.

44. **Mr. Morgan** (United Kingdom) said that, after a slow start, over 100 companies had signed up to support the *Think, Act, Report* initiative but unfortunately only a few currently published data on the gender pay gap. The Government encouraged all companies that had voluntarily joined in the scheme to provide data on the gender pay gap and the representation of women at all levels within their organizations. Despite the cuts in the public sector, the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom had steadily decreased and there was no reason why such progress would not continue. The Government was committed to

tackling the gender pay gap issue and would be reporting on the situation annually within the *Think, Act, Report* framework.

45. **Ms. Irving** (United Kingdom) said that the Scottish Parliament shared the concerns raised about the need for affordable, high-quality childcare and was committed to increasing the amount of funding for early childcare provisions through the children and young people bill. It also intended to invest a further £4.5 million in the Communities and Families Fund grants programme to develop childcare provisions in the community. Efforts were being made to support organizations that delivered early learning and childcare services and to promote social entrepreneurship. The role of fathers in caring for their children had also been emphasized and Parliament had set up a review process and working group to bring about a more informed childcare policy. Although the number of women participating in apprenticeships had steadily increased over the past five years, more work needed to be done in order to promote a better gender balance and to encourage applications from as wide a pool of candidates as possible.

46. **Mr. Bruun** expressed great concern about the impact of the State party's new welfare reforms on gender equality. In particular, he asked whether the Government had assessed the possible discriminatory effects on women of the recently introduced universal credit scheme, a new single payment which would replace many of the current benefits that people could claim, and whether it would implement measures to ensure that women were not economically disadvantaged. He urged the State party to closely monitor the impact of the new scheme on women's economic independence and asked whether it would consider paying the new universal credit either in part, or in full, directly to women.

47. **Ms. Al-Jehani** asked the delegation to provide information on the Government's response to discrimination against older women and women with disabilities under the Equality Act. She wished to know what measures had been taken to reduce the effects of the Government's economic austerity measures on organizations providing assistance and support to women and to assess the impact of increased transport costs and reduced social assistance benefits on rural women. She also asked whether studies had been carried out to assess the effects of the reduction of social assistance benefits on persons with disabilities. She expressed concern at plans for universal credits to be paid directly to one person in the household which could, if the payment was made to the male head of the household, negatively affect the ability of women victims of domestic abuse to escape their situation. Lastly, she sought clarification on the steps taken by the State party to address the concerns raised in the Committee's previous concluding observations (CEDAW/C/UK/CO/6) concerning discrimination against women from Traveller communities.

#### *Articles 15 and 16*

48. **Ms. Jahan** said that very little progress had been made in terms of the number of women serving short-term prison sentences for minor offences since the Committee's consideration of the fifth and sixth periodic reports of the United Kingdom. In its recent report on women offenders, the House of Commons Justice Select Committee had stated that matters regarding women detainees were often dealt with as an "afterthought" and that prison reforms had not provided enough support to women offenders. She therefore wished to know what concrete measures had been taken to reduce the number of women being sent to prison for minor offences and what efforts had been made to respond to the recommendations contained in the Home Office report by Baroness Jean Corston on women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system, *The Corston Report*, and the recommendations of the House of Commons Justice Select Committee on the physical safety and rehabilitation of women offenders in prison. Lastly, she urged the State party to investigate the reasons behind the overrepresentation of black and ethnic minority women in the prison population and to take appropriate remedial action.

49. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** asked why the Government had decided not to implement provisions addressing public sector duty on socioeconomic inequalities, gender pay gap information and multiple discrimination under the Equality Act and what alternative measures had been put in place to tackle those issues. She expressed concern at the three-year time bar applied to civil cases of child abuse in Scotland and wished to know whether the Scottish Parliament intended to remove such time limitations.

50. Turning to the issue of legal aid for women, she noted that while it was available to them in theory, in practice only those who could prove that they had been victims of domestic abuse qualified for such assistance. The costs associated with such proof, such as medical records, were often high. Women were no longer eligible for free legal aid in most family law cases, including divorce cases, which often were their only means of gaining economic independence. She asked whether women who sought remedies on matters such as child custody or division of marital property had to prove that they had been victims of domestic abuse before being eligible to qualify for free legal aid. Noting that legal aid restrictions often forced women to seek remedies through informal justice mechanisms, such as religious tribunals, which often operated in a discriminatory manner, she asked whether the Government had implemented any measures to address the situation. Lastly, she stressed that the economic rights of women in de facto unions should be safeguarded to the same extent as married women and asked the State party to provide further information on any follow up to the Law Commission's report, entitled "Cohabitation: The Financial Consequences of Relationship Breakdown".

51. **Ms. Reardon-Bond** (United Kingdom) said that women with disabilities and older women had access to free public transport in Wales and Scotland.

52. **Ms. Fevrier** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had considered the impact of the social welfare reform on women but that a gender impact assessment had proved difficult as data on social assistance benefits tended to be broken down by household rather than individual persons. The new universal credit scheme had been designed to be as analogous as possible to the world of work. As many of the claimants would be working or only temporarily unemployed and most employees in the United Kingdom received a monthly salary payment, the monthly universal credit payment schedule would not pose any difficulties to the majority of claimants. As for those persons from low-income households used to budgeting on a fortnightly basis, the Government would provide a range of guidance and support services, including localized support services, to ensure that they adapted effectively to the new system. For a very small number of claimants, an alternative payment system would be required and the Government was currently defining which types of persons would be eligible. Although the new universal credit scheme had been designed to be paid on a per household basis, the Government had also taken into account how the system would affect vulnerable women and women victims of domestic violence and had devised several methods to ensure that such groups would have access to support and enjoy financial independence. In exceptional circumstances, the Government would have the discretion to award split payments between individuals of a household.

53. **Mr. Barnett-Page** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had accepted 40 out of 43 of the *Corston Report* recommendations on women offenders and progress had been made in reducing the size of the national women's prison population and the rate of self-harm among women offenders. A total of £4 million per year had been made available for women's centres as an alternative to prison, and in March 2013 the Government published its strategic priorities on women offenders, which included the development of robust community penalties as an alternative to custodial sentences for low-risk women offenders. Far from being considered an "afterthought", the provision of appropriate support and assistance for women offenders had been made a priority under the latest prison reform.

54. **Mr. Tucker** (United Kingdom) said that free legal aid was available in cases involving the protection of victims of domestic violence and child abuse without any requirement to provide evidence. Free legal aid was not available for most private family law cases, with the exception of the above-mentioned cases. As a result of consultations on legal aid in private family law cases involving domestic violence, the Government had greatly expanded the scope of evidence admissible to be eligible for free legal aid and had worked closely with evidence providers to ensure that any applicable charges would be kept to a minimum. During its passage through Parliament, the Government had made a commitment to review the provisions of the legal aid reform on a regular basis.

55. **Mr. Morgan** (United Kingdom) said that the Government had decided not to implement the provisions on public sector duty on socioeconomic inequalities and multiple discrimination under the Equality Act as it had considered the additional provisions to be unnecessary and the costs of implementing the provisions to outweigh the benefits. In cases of multiple discrimination, those persons affected could make separate claims before the courts for each type of discrimination that they had suffered.

56. **Ms. Irving** (United Kingdom) said that, in terms of historical civil child abuse cases, the Scottish Courts could use their discretion to waive the three-year time bar, if they believed it to be equitable to do so. The Scottish Parliament had held consultations in order to formulate a conclusive response on the issue and would be presenting its conclusions in the near future.

57. **Mr. Henderson** (United Kingdom) said that the Government's position on the property rights of couples in de facto unions remained unchanged and no amendments would be made to current legislation as it was not considered to be discriminatory towards women.

58. **The Chairperson** asked the delegation to provide a detailed written reply to the Committee's question on women's participation and representation in academia.

59. **Ms. Reardon-Bond** (United Kingdom) said that the State party would submit a written reply on the issue at the earliest opportunity and reiterated the State party's commitment to its obligations under the Convention.

60. **The Chairperson** urged the State party to consolidate its efforts in implementing the Convention, with a special focus on migrant and vulnerable women. She stressed that it should also strive to strengthen dialogue with civil society in order to respond more effectively to the issues raised by the Committee.

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*