# Achieving Equal Pay in the Workplace

Your Guide to Changing Policy and Practice

## Start Talking About Pay

**Whether you are a worker or a trade union rep, you may be new to the idea of equal pay. If so, there are a number of things to think about.**

Look around and see if women tend to work in one area and men in another, or do they work in the same section.

Talk about pay. **Do women think they get less pay than men, do they think they work as hard or even harder?** If so, they may be right: research shows *(www.njl.nu/uploads/Paper_2007_Jill_Rubery.pdf)* that when women work in female dominated areas, they are even more likely to receive less pay than when they work in mixed environments. Consider why this is the case.

Work done predominantly by women is likely to be undervalued and paid less.

This matters, not just today, but also for future workers. There is not only a current pay gap between men and women, but also a gender pensions gap, so that women enter retirement getting some 30% less than men. Women are also more likely *(https://neu.org.uk/advice/women-and-poverty)* to be in poverty in old age than men.

If you are a trade union rep, do your members know this? Do they talk about pay? In lots of workplaces, people can be wary or discouraged from talking about pay and this greater secrecy gives more power to those who make decisions about pay.

What do your members/co-workers think about their pay? **Do you have a pay system with pay bands and pay spines?** Pay spines add a degree of transparency but they can also be abused by the discretion given to some managers. Can managers determine where a worker is put on the spine? Can they determine how much a worker receives on promotion? Discretion tends to favour male workers and is another reason men get more pay than women.

**Do people receive bonuses or merit pay in your workplace?** These are a major cause of women's lower pay.

**Do you see more men represented in higher grades than women?** If so, this would be unsurprising, since men tend to dominate the higher grades. Research shows *(https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1507126/)* that even when women get to higher positions, they earn less than men. Indeed, the pay gap increases at the higher pay levels.

There is a view that men ask for pay rises, and women don't. This is **not true**; women ask, they just don't get! So don't be side-lined into thinking poor pay is women's fault. Rather it is the system, what some have called the institutionalised undervaluation of women's pay, or others have called inequality regimes. This undervaluing relies on secrecy to sustain it, so let's make pay more transparent.

**If your organisation employs more than 250 people, it is required to complete a return on the gender pay gap.** Have you seen this return? Were you part of the discussion? Is there an action plan with targets and dates? This document is publicly available *(https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/)* on the government website (see Useful Links *(www.equalpayatwork.org.uk/toolkit/useful-links-9/)* ). It's a great tool, enabling you to compare your organisation with others.

Even if you work in a smaller organisation, there is no reason why your organisation could not follow the same framework as an internal exercise. There is more information on pay gap reporting and equality pay audits below.

Start talking about pay and equal pay. Raise pay in your union meetings, in department meetings, during coffee breaks and wherever colleagues meet or socialise. **Talking about pay will raise awareness among colleagues who will start to question the way the pay system operates.** Once you have a good idea of what employees think, if they feel that they have been treated unfairly, you are in a position to get some facts and figures to underpin these general observations.

## Union Stories: Unison, GMB and Unite (2019)

**UNISON members at Glasgow City Council have been fighting for equal pay for over 15 years.**

Women working in caring, catering and cleaning across Glasgow started their long struggle for pay justice in 2007, finally winning a £500m deal to end their long-running dispute in 2019. Close to 16,000 claimants were set to benefit.

But some women are still waiting for their compensation. Meanwhile, the promised new pay and grading system hasn't been introduced, so women are still being paid unfairly compared to men.

In a ballot of just under 9,000 workers, with 52.5% of members voting, 96% of UNISON members voted to take further industrial action in March 2022.

The current dispute centres around whether the new claimants receive the terms of the 2019 agreement, while the council has recently said that it may not be able to finally settle its debt to these women until 2024.

Speaking about the vote, regional organiser Mandy McDowall said: “The overwhelming vote for strike action really shows the strength of feeling from our members. They are so angry about this.

“While we welcome the council’s signals, this isn’t enough progress to resolve the dispute. The talks need to be more constructive, with no conditions and based on applying the 2019 deal to all valid claims. Members simply cannot wait until 2024 for the claims to be paid out. Especially in the context of the cost-of-living crisis, members need and absolutely deserve an interim measure.

“We’ve worked really closely with the GMB, who have already voted in favour of strike action, and Unite, whose ballot returns on 14 March, and will continue to liaise with them in the next steps of the dispute.”

The story of the Glasgow women shows that women campaigning and working together, strong and resolute, ready to take industrial action if necessary, can result in success. But it also shows that women have to be prepared to play the long game. The Glasgow story is not finished yet.

Read more on this story from Union News *(www.union-news.co.uk/unions-reach-agreement-over-14000-equal-pay-claims-at-glasgow-city-council/)*