

UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Tim Suter, Module Lead Solicitor

By email: [solicitors@coronavirus.inquiry.gov.uk](mailto:solicitors@coronavirus.inquiry.gov.uk)

25 November 2022

Dear Tim Suter,

**Reference: Women's Budget Group response to inquiry M2/R9R/WBG/TJS**

Please find below our responses to your questions.

**1. A brief overview of the history, legal status and aims of the organisation or body. Please explain whether the work of the organisation or body is UK wide, or is instead confined to England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland only.**

The Women's Budget Group is an independent and not-for-profit membership network consisting of women's voluntary organisations, academics and policy experts whose aims are to promote a gender equal economy.

We do this through conducting in depth analysis of the impact of policy on women. Our analysis has been used to influence policy debates on a national and local level.

We are a company limited by guarantee.

WBG focuses on policy at a UK level. We have sister organisations in the devolved nations:

- [Scottish Women's Budget Group](#)
- [NI Women's Budget Group](#)
- [Wales Women's Budget Group](#)

**2. A brief description of the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents.**

WBG looks at the impact of economic policy on women and men. We take an intersectional approach so also look at impacts by class, race and disability as well as groups like single mothers.

**3. A brief overview of the work of the organisation or body in supporting or representing the relevant group(s) between January 2020 and Spring 2022 as it relates to the response to Covid-19 of the UK Government.**

Since the start of the pandemic, we have published 16 briefings and 13 reports on the gendered impact of Covid. In addition, we published 11 pre-budget briefings on the impact of Covid in different policy areas before the Autumn 2020 Budget, and 16 pre-budget briefings before the Spring 2021 budget, made 18 submissions to consultations and inquiries into the

impact of Covid and co-signed 14 open letters. All of our work on Covid 19 can be found at <https://wbq.org.uk/topics/covid-19/>

We worked in partnership on polling on the impact of Covid with the Fawcett Society, NI WBG, Engender, Close the Gap and WEN Wales.

We were also part of two teams of academics, one on the [impact of Covid on working class women](#) with academics from the Universities of Nottingham and Warwick and one with the International Centre for Life-course studies at UCL on the [impact of Covid on time use](#). Our role in both was to help translate their academic research into policy briefings and to promote to policy makers and the media.

**4. A list of any articles or reports the organisation or body has published or contributed to, and/or evidence it has given (for example to Parliamentary Select Committees) regarding the impact on the group(s) which the organisation or body supports or represents of the response to Covid-19 by the UK Government. Please include links to those documents where possible.**

We worked in partnership with Fawcett and academics at LSE/Queen Mary on polling to produce three briefings:

- [Covid 19 and BAME women](#)
- [Covid-19 and Disabled women](#)
- [Parenting and Covid 19](#)

We also worked with academics at the Universities of Nottingham and Warwick who were focussing on the impact of Covid on working class women on four briefings:

- [Briefing 1: Employment and mental health](#)
- Briefing note 2: [Housework and Childcare](#)
- Briefing note 3: [One Year On](#)
- [Impact of Covid 19 on precarious work](#)

We secured additional funding for polling work on Covid in partnership with Fawcett, NIWBG, Engender, Close the Gap and WEN Wales to produce a series of briefings:

- [impact of Covid on mothers](#)
- [impact of Covid on Disabled parents](#)
- [people's attitudes and opinions about the government's handling of the pandemic.](#)
- [the impact of the pandemic on young women on low-incomes,](#)
- [the post-pandemic aspirations of young people.](#)

## Consultation submissions

Since the start of the pandemic WBG contributed to over [18 political inquiries](#) about the equality impacts of Covid-19 and recovery plans. Our submissions include:

- Submissions to the Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiries on the unequal impact of coronavirus on 1) [women in the economy](#) 2) [Black, Asian and ethnic minority women](#) 3) [disabled women](#).
- Submission to the Women and Work APPG on the impact of coronavirus on women at work.

- [Submission](#) to the Health and Social Care Committee on the impact of coronavirus on the funding and workforce in the social care sector.
- Submission to the APPG on a Green New Deal RESET inquiry, where our ideas about investing in care post-Covid featured in the [final report](#)
- [Submission](#) to the House of Lords Covid-19 Committee on their 'Life Beyond Covid' inquiry
- Submissions to the Treasury Select Committee to their 1) [Tax After Coronavirus](#) and 2) [Decarbonisation and Green Finance](#) inquiries
- [Submission](#) to the House of Lords Economic Affairs inquiry into 'Employment and Covid'
- [Submission](#) to HM Treasury on the Spending Review and women.

The Women and Equalities Select Committee report on the gendered impact of Covid cited WBG research widely. WBG work on Covid was cited in 16 separate debates in the House of Commons and House of Lords relating to Covid over the last year.

### **Other research**

[Inequalities in academia – impact of Covid on early career researchers](#)

[Gender Furlough gap](#)

[Lessons Learned: where women stand at the start of 2021](#)

[Analysis of the gendered impact of the Self Employed Income Support Scheme](#)

[Impact of Covid on women in employment](#) (analysis of ONS data, March 2021)

[Access to childcare post Covid 19](#)

[Building back fairer for women and girls](#) (with Fawcett Society, Women's Aid, Young Women's Trust, Imkaan, Maternity Action and WEN Wales)

- 4. The view of the organisation or body as to whether the group(s) it supports or represents was adequately considered when decisions about the response to Covid-19 were made by the UK Government. Please also explain the reasons for the view expressed by the organisation or body in this respect.**

The Government's measures in response to Covid exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and created new ones that have disproportionately impacted women. It is the view of WBG that Government did not carry out robust Equality Impact Assessments of its responses to Covid-19.

### **Furlough**

- Overall, more women than men were furloughed across the UK, with young women particularly impacted<sup>1</sup>. Since the furlough scheme only covered 80% of earnings, more women than men have taken a pay cut last year.

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<sup>1</sup> WBG (2021) Lessons Learned: Where Women Stand At The Start Of 2021  
[Where-Women-Stand-V5.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](#)

- Women were the majority of employees in industries with some of the highest Covid-19 job losses, including retail, accommodation, and food services<sup>2</sup>. Sectors such as these where women predominate have high numbers of part-time and zero-hours workers<sup>3</sup>, meaning they were insufficiently protected should they become ill, have hours decreased or be made redundant.

## Childcare

- Nearly half (46%) of mothers who were made redundant during the pandemic cited lack of adequate childcare provision as the cause<sup>4</sup>. The lack of formal childcare provision during Covid had ‘the biggest impact on the poorest in childcare’ with lasting impacts on the attainment gap<sup>5</sup>. A disproportionate number of nursery closures were in poorer areas<sup>6</sup>.
- The Covid pandemic and the government’s response exacerbated the crisis in childcare. Continued underfunding, and the decision to stop funding at pre-Covid attendance levels in January 2021, caused lasting damage to the sector. In the six months up to March 2021, there was a 4.4% net loss of childcare providers and 1.1% net loss of childcare places, driven mostly by childminders leaving the sector<sup>7</sup>.

## Work

- Women, as the majority of employees in industries with some of the highest Covid-19 job losses and due to a lack of gender sensitivity in the furlough scheme, were hit hard by the pandemic.
- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women began the pandemic with one of the lowest rates of employment (62.5%) and the highest rate of unemployment at 8.8% (compared with 4.5% for White people and 8.5% for BAME people overall). Between Q3 2019 and Q3 2020, the number of BAME women workers had fallen by 17%, compared to 1% for White women.
- Employment for disabled people fell more rapidly during the crisis than for non-disabled people (1.9% compared with 1.1%) and disabled people are currently 2.5 times more likely to be out of work than non-disabled people.

## Unpaid Work

- Since March 2020, the number of unpaid carers has increased by an estimated 4.5 million, 58% of them women<sup>8</sup>. Overall, nearly 3 million unpaid carers are also juggling paid work with care<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> WBG (2021) Gender Differences in Access to Coronavirus Government Support [LDP-briefing-1-FINAL-report.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LDP-briefing-1-FINAL-report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> WBG (2021) Covid-19 and economic challenges for young women [Covid-19-and-economic-challenges-for-young-women.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Covid-19-and-economic-challenges-for-young-women.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> WBG (2021) Childcare, gender and Covid-19 [Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> WBG (2021) Childcare, gender and Covid-19 [Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> WBG (2021) Childcare, gender and Covid-19 [Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Childcare-gender-and-Covid-19.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> WBG (2022) [Spring Budget 2022: Childcare and gender - Womens Budget Group \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Spring-Budget-2022-Childcare-and-gender-Womens-Budget-Group.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> WBG (2021) Lessons Learned: Where Women Stand At The Start Of 2021 [Where-Women-Stand-Ex-sum-V4.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Where-Women-Stand-Ex-sum-V4.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Carers UK (2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on <https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>

- During the pandemic, almost two thirds (64%) of unpaid carers were not able to take breaks from their caring role<sup>10</sup>. 81% of unpaid carers are providing more care, and 8 in 10 carers saw the needs of the person they care for increase<sup>11</sup>.

## SEISS

- By the end of 2020, 546,000 women had made SEISS claims, compared with 1,376,000 men<sup>12</sup>. There was a clear gendered difference in actual take up rate, with only 51% of eligible women claiming, compared to 60% of eligible men<sup>13</sup>.
- Women who had taken maternity leave in the three years prior to the pandemic lost out because of the way SEISS payments were calculated based on average income over that period. It has been estimated that this has affected an estimated 75,000 women<sup>14</sup>.

**6. Whether the organisation or body raised any concerns about the consideration being given to the group(s) which it supports or represents with the UK Government when the Government were making decisions about their response to Covid-19. Please provide a list of any such correspondence or meetings with the UK Government, including the dates on which the body or organisation wrote, or such meetings were held, to whom the correspondence was addressed or with whom the meeting was held, and any response received from the UK Government addressing such concerns.**

The disproportionate impact of coronavirus has remained a large focus of our parliamentary work over the past year. All our findings were sent to the relevant Ministers on publication. In addition, we raised the findings of our research on the impact of the pandemic at meetings with:

- The women and equalities select committee (members and clerks)
- Treasury Select Committee (members and clerks)
- Work and Pensions Select Committee (members and clerks)
- Department of Work and Pensions officials
- Treasury Officials
- GEO Officials

**7. A brief summary of the views of the organisation or body as to any lessons, if any, that can be learned from any consideration which was given to the group(s) that the organisation or body supports or represents by the UK Government when they were making decisions about their response to Covid-19**

In 2021 its report Unequal impact? Coronavirus and the gendered economic impact, based on a consultation of 47 submissions, the Women and Equalities Select Committee (WESC) highlighted that there was 'little evidence that the Government has conducted any robust or

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<sup>10</sup> Carers UK (2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on <https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>

<sup>11</sup> Carers UK (2020) Caring behind closed doors: six months on <https://bit.ly/39vTRW5>

<sup>12</sup> WBG (2021) Women and employment during Covid-19 [Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> WBG (2021) Women and employment during Covid-19 [Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> WBG (2021) Women and employment during Covid-19 [Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf \(wbg.org.uk\)](https://www.wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Women-and-employment-during-Covid-19-1.pdf)

meaningful analysis of the gendered impact of its economic policies during the Coronavirus crisis'. This included not anticipating:

*how inequalities were likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic and ensure that it influenced the policy response, including in relation to employment, welfare, childcare and pregnancy and maternity.*

Under PSED all public bodies have a duty to have due regard to equality in carrying out their functions. A public inquiry should look at whether Government and other public bodies met their PSED duties during the pandemic and can highlight some of the obvious equality impacts, not just on women, but on other protected characteristics.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mary-Ann Stephenson', written in a cursive style.

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson, Director

24 November 2022