

REPORT OF BPW UNITED KINGDOM AUTUMN 2003 TO SUMMER 2004

Autumn Weekend:

A weekend was organised in Newcastle-upon-Tyne entitled "Women Making the Difference". In the morning we looked at various ways in which women can become involved in public life and therefore able to take part in decision making especially through the proposed Regional Assemblies. The challenges for women working in male dominated professions were also explored. We were fortunate to hear from Dr Tom Shakespeare, Director of Outreach for the Policy, Ethics and Life Science Institute who is involved with the Human Genome project and that produced some lively debate.

Annual Conference April 2004:

A truly inspirational Gordon Holmes Memorial Lecture was delivered by Baroness Greenfield who Professor of Pharmacology at Oxford University, Director of the Royal Institution and has recently produced "SET Fair: A Report on Women in Science, Engineering, and Technology". Her theme was "Women in the 21st Century Workplace".

There were two panel sessions on "Women and the Criminal Justice System" and Women in Sport. The theme of women and the criminal justice system panel led to an emergency motion being presented at conference called for the development of community sanctions for women who have committed offences in order to achieve a significant reduction in the use of prison for women so that they can make amends for what they have done, get the support they need to change their lives, and lead a law-abiding life in the community. This topic will be worked on by BPW members as a project throughout the year.

Other motions passed at conference related to carers and the tax and benefits system, the implementation of gender equality by UK companies who trade overseas and the cost of identity cards.

We were fortunate that Lena Hokfelt, BPW International European Co-ordinator was able to join us and we heard about the situation for women in Sweden and her work in Europe.

The speaker at the Gala Dinner was Sue Stockdale, the

Special interest groups:

We have an environment group that is headed by Pat Lunn who is the Chair of the BPW International Standing Committee on the Environment.

A further committee on mental health is being planned.

Wales Women's National Coalition:

Doreen Atkinson, BPW Llandudno, will be representing BPW UK on this body. The WWNC is a partnership of national women's voluntary organisations in Wales and other organisations whose majority of members are women. The WWNC works to promote understanding and co-operation between women's voluntary organisations in Wales; works together to influence policy makers; takes note of how European and international issues affect the lives of women in Wales; acts as a forum for the Welsh Assembly Government and other bodies to consult with women; promotes the participation of women in Wales in decision making at all levels.

Northern Ireland Assembly Elections November 2003 Women's Manifesto:

BPW Northern Ireland was one of the women's groups and organisations who endorsed the joint manifesto produced by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Women's Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the Women's Policy Group. The manifesto highlighted a number of key gender equality areas that needed to be addressed by the incoming Assembly. These included economic independence, the community women's sector, women and decision making, sexual and reproductive health and domestic violence.

Gender Expert Group on Trade:

BPW UK have been invited to be part of this group whose aim is to provide expertise on gender and trade on both the long-term development of the UK's input to the EU trade policy for World Trade Organisation negotiations. Consultation with women's organisations on gender issues will form an integral part of the work of this group. The paper prepared for the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, being held in Brazil this week, centred around women's rights: women's right to participate, women's right to information, women's right to influence (representation/consultation), women's right to security (against violence, harassment, food security).

Women's National Commission:

BPW UK is a partner organisation at the Women's National Commission where we serve on the International Working Group and the Violence Against Women Working Group. The WNC is the official, independent, advisory body giving the views of women to the Government.

Joint Parliamentary Groups:

We have accepted an invitation to a joint meeting of the All Party Group for Children and the All Party Group on Domestic Violence.

Commission on Equality and Human Rights:

BPW UK is currently taking part in the consultation process shaping the Commission that the Government propose to set up in 2006.

Sue Brown
National President