

Women will bear brunt of cuts, say equality groups

With a much higher proportion of women working in the public sector, they are particularly vulnerable to the public sector cuts

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WOMEN will take a disproportionate hit in the fallout of the Chancellor's spending review, according to various organisations and individuals.

"It is women who will be the main losers as jobs are cut, public services are rolled back and benefits are slashed," said the Fawcett Society in response to the review on October 20th.

They say that of all social categories – men, children, Black, Asian, pensioner, disabled, householder, socio-economic group A, socio-economic group D, in a job, out of



AUSTERITY AXE: A protester wears a mask depicting the face of Chancellor George Osborne outside the Treasury ahead of last week's long-anticipated spending review

Over 40 per cent of female jobs are in the public sector

work, staying at home, being a carer or other – women will have to take the heaviest brunt of the benefit and public sector changes.

"Sixty-five per cent of public sector workers are women, and more women work in the low paid, low grade and insecure work ... This comes on top of the 1 million women already unemployed in the UK – last month, 75 per cent more women signed on to unemployment benefit than men," said the Fawcett Society.

Groups like the Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality in work, home, and public life, have been cautioning about the imbalance that the Coalition government's policies would produce.

Diane Holland of the Unite union told the UK Trades Union Congress that there are 11 times more millionaires in the UK Cabinet than women. Other delegates speaking on September 14th pointed out that 65 per cent of public sector workers are women, that more women than men relied on benefits, and cuts in nursery care will hit women first as they remain the default for

child care and homemaking.

The Equality and Race Relations Council (EHRC) says 25 per cent of women over 50 are involved in informal care. The summary of their recent report *How Fair is Britain* states: "Women make up 83 per cent of people employed in personal services; and over 40 per cent of female jobs compared to 15 per cent of male jobs are in the public sector, making women particularly vulnerable to public sector cuts."

The EHRC says that occupational segregation continues to feed pay differences, especially in the private and voluntary sectors where at age 40 men are earning on

average 27 per cent more than women.

"The large proportion of women in part-time jobs also contributes to this," the EHRC states.

A video overview of the report says that an "astonishing" 25 per cent of women in their 50s have caring responsibilities for partners, relatives, or friends.

"This can take its toll on their health and income," says the video narrative. "Again, this is not just an individual issue, it's relevant to the whole of society. Without proper support, carers may find it difficult to get involved in volunteering, charity work, and other forms of civic action

that greatly benefit their local area."

This is re-iterated by Carole Cochrane, chief executive at The Princess Royal Trust for Carers, who comments on the Trust website that local councils' cuts will result in carers receiving less crisis help.

This would induce a higher risk of physical and mental breakdown, so the person being cared for will go into hospital or residential care and the carer will become a patient also, she says. The cost to the country will be enormous, especially when "carers save the UK an estimated £87 billion per year through caring at home."

There is a predominance of

women in schools and nurseries as teachers, support workers, and volunteers.

Conor Ryan was senior adviser on education to David Blunkett and Tony Blair. She comments on the spending review on publicfinance.co.uk: "Osborne admitted, per pupil funding and Sure Start funding will only be protected in cash terms, not in real terms." She says there is a likelihood that local authorities will be able to reprioritise key grants, which will worry many schools.

"Some experts are predicting up [to] 40,000 job losses among teachers over the next few years," says Melissa Benn, journalist and author of

Madonna and Child: Towards a New Politics of Motherhood and other books on education, democracy, and children. Also on publicfinance.co.uk, she says this is "again disproportionately affecting women, who heavily outnumber men in the profession".

As the normal recipients of Child Benefit, at least £1,000 a year, women in households where there is a higher-rate taxpayer will lose independence and freedom to broaden their children's lives.

The change in state pension age for women, a rise to 66 by 2020, will prevent some women in their fifties from receiving thousands of pounds in the last years they would have

had in paid retirement.

The government expect the nearly half a million people losing public sector jobs over the next few years will find new ones created by commercial firms. Some of this will need great flexibility in corporate attitude.

In July, just after the Emergency Budget, the website Personnel Today asked: "Could working mothers be the ultimate beneficiaries of the coalition government's policies ...?"

The article stated: "There is obviously a demand for flexible jobs if recruitment websites like Workingmums.co.uk are anything to go by. With almost 90,000 applicants registered on

the site, it seems unlikely that the market alone will respond to this demand and supply the roles."

It suggests that some Labour instigated approaches, such as the Quality Part-Time Work Initiative were beneficial, and grants to cover the extra costs involved in job sharing or training programmes to help women return to work after long absences for childcare "are essential if the government wants the private sector to challenge the norm and explore different ways of working".

It also says the Equality Act 2010 will help women as "the scope for employers to take positive action will significantly increase".

Chancellor's spending review ties the arts in a mixed bag

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The Chancellor's spending review has left the UK arts with a mixed bag.

Free entry to national museums will remain but hundreds of regional museums, galleries, theatres, and music organisations are

under threat after the Art Council England (ACE) takes a 29.6 per cent funding drop.

"The Secretary of State has asked us to try to ensure that funding for arts organisations is not cut by more than 15 per cent over the next four years – the tipping point that we identified to the Chancellor some months ago," Alan Davey, Chief Executive of ACE said in a statement.

"It will be a tough task but we are determined to manage the cuts in the best possible way for the benefit of the whole arts and cultural sector," Mr Davey said.

ACE will have invested £1.3 billion of regular funds in around 880 arts organisations across England, including the Royal Opera House, Birmingham Royal Ballet, Punchdrunk, BALTIC, and

Southbank Centre from 2008 to 2011.

The Department for Culture, Media, and Sport's funding of ACE will consistently drop for the next four years going from £387.7 million in 2010/11 to £359.2 million, £351.6 million, then £349.4 million by 2014/15, according to the Council's website.

Administration cuts of 50

per cent are also demanded.

National touring programmes, broadcasting partnerships, the Cultural Olympiad, and investment in events such as the Manchester International Festival were scrutinised at the ACE National Council meeting on Monday, October 25th.

Other organisations like Tate Modern, the British Museum, and the British

Library will keep the capital invested in them, according to the *Financial Times*. Tate Modern has a bill for £215 million for the Herzog and Meuron extension. The British Museum will have an extension by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners worth £135 million.

Over 5.6 million people visited the British Museum in London last year and 14

million visited its collection online.

Neil MacGregor, director of the Museum since August 2002, said in a statement that he was pleased that Jeremy Hunt, culture, media and sport secretary, and Ed Vaizey, culture minister, recognise the "unique role museums play in the world today and reaffirmed their support of free admission".

"We are also particularly encouraged that they have reconfirmed the government's support of the British Museum's planned new World Conservation and Exhibition Centre," he continued.

However, English Heritage funding has been cut by 32 per cent, and the Renaissance in the Regions programme lost 15 per cent.

Nuclear sub runs aground at Skye

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A Royal Navy hunter-killer submarine, the HMS Astute, ran aground near the Isle of Skye off the coast of Scotland on Friday morning, according to the British Forces News website.

The sub, which is the Royal Navy's newest nuclear submarine, was towed free by a tug boat the same day. Rescuers could not assist the vessel until high tide had passed.

The Astute ran aground while conducting a personnel transfer during sea trials.

The vessel was examined for damage in deeper waters over the weekend, and returned to its base in Faslane on Tuesday, October 26th, according to British Forces News.

"There will clearly be a full investigation in due course into the incidents leading up to this untoward event," Navy spokesman Captain Karl Evans said in a statement.

The hunter-killer submarine is not armed with nuclear weapons but is nuclear powered. There is no sign of environmental impact, according to the Ministry of Defence.

"No part of Astute's nuclear propulsion system was damaged or was in danger of being damaged. The reactor is completely safe," the MoD said in a statement. "No personnel were injured in the incident or were in danger of injury throughout the process."

Eye-witness Ross McKerrich told the BBC that the submarine ran aground about a mile from his home. "When I woke up [on Fri-

day] morning and looked out my bedroom window I could see the submarine," he said. "I am very surprised how far in it has come as there are good navigational buoys there."

The incident occurred around 8.19 a.m., according to the BBC.

The 97-metre (323-foot), 7,800-tonne Astute, launched in 2007, was designed to find and sink enemy submarines. The Astute is armed with Spearfish Torpedoes and Tomahawk cruise missiles.

It is 50 per cent larger than any other submarine in the Royal Navy and is also quieter than its predecessors.

The Royal Navy's website calls the Astute "the Navy's best" and one of the "largest and most powerful nuclear attack submarines ever built for the Royal Navy, equipped with the world's

most advanced sonar system".

Commander Andy Coles, OBE, called the craft, "a world-beating piece of technology".

The first of a new class of nuclear submarine, the profile of HMS Astute is "more like one of her Russian counterparts than anything Britain has owned before".

Commissioned into the fleet in August, it is said to be the most advanced submarine in the world and "more complex than the space shuttle".

In September this year, the *Daily Record* reported Astute had caused a traffic jam on the bridge joining the mainland to the Isle of Skye.

While motionless in the water by Kyle of Lochalsh, the sub became a focus of many commuters travelling from the mainland.

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