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Article

Accepted Version

Scott, P. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1230-9040 (2024) From “pin money” to careers: Britain’s late move to equal pay, its consequences, and broader implications. Enterprise & Society, 25 (2). pp. 376-401. ISSN 1467-2235 doi: 10.1017/eso.2022.44 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/109852/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher’s version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.

To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/eso.2022.44

Publisher: Cambridge University Press

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From "pin money" to careers: Britain's late move to equal pay, its consequences, and broader implications

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Abstract

Despite its importance to gender inequality, household incomes, and labour markets, the reasons behind Britain being one of the last major western nations to introduce equal pay have been relatively neglected. This article first examines the campaign for equal pay from the late Victorian era to its eventual introduction in 1970. Economists predicted that equal pay would produce substantial female unemployment, but policy-makers correctly doubted this – as data collected from West European and North American earlier-adopters showed no significant rise in female unemployment. Female employment rose substantially during Britain's equal pay implementation – while, in contrast to broadly static earnings differentials from 1950-70, there was a significant reduction in the gender pay gap, followed by a longer-term trend of narrowing differentials. We explore why equal pay expanded female employment – given the absence of any sudden rise in women workers' productivity, or substantial acceleration of structural change in favour of female-employing sectors. We find that equal pay compelled employers to re-evaluate the real worth of female workers, given their substantial relative human capital growth since 1945. This had not hitherto been reflected in relative earnings, owing to barriers such as segmented labour markets, monopsonistic employers, and collective bargaining procedures, that fossilised traditional gender pay differentials.

Introduction

Equal pay for women constituted one of the most important labour market reforms of the twentieth century, on a par with the introduction of the 48 hour working week in 1919.[i] However, in contrast to working hours legislation, its international diffusion took much longer – typically between 1947 and the mid-1960s. Britain was an outlier, with equal pay legislation introduced in 1970, (coming into full effect in 1975), much later than the EEC nations, Canada, or the USA. However, despite strong evidence from other countries that equal pay did not produce significant female unemployment or other adverse economic consequences, its announcement was met by warnings from economists of substantial negative economic impacts, including a rise in female unemployment.[ii]

In fact a 15 percent rise in women's relative (to men) hourly earnings from 1973-76 was accompanied by an expansion of the female workforce, and relative female employment, in both the public and private sectors (for numbers employed and hours worked).[iii] Yet the results of this "natural experiment" in pay regulation did not prevent some economists and politicians predicting that the introduction of a National Minimum Wage in 1998 – mainly effecting female workers - would create mass unemployment. Once more, these predictions proved wide of the mark.

In contrast to the National Minimum Wage, there has been relatively little research on the impacts of equal pay legislation. This article first briefly outlines what proved to be the UK's longest labour reform campaign, taking over 80 years to achieve success, and the reasons why policy-makers continued to reject equal pay even after its adoption by most major industrial nations. It then discusses the introduction of equal pay legislation in 1970 and contemporary official research to estimate its likely impacts. The reasons behind equal pay legislation having a positive apparent impact on women's employment are then reviewed, together with their implications for the nature of the British labour market.

Finally, the paper examines a hypothesis proposed, but not fully developed, by Joshi, Layard, and Owen, that the unexpected positive relationship between equal pay and relative female employment was, "simply that employers began to realize the true worth of female labour."[iv] Despite a substantial increase in the working lives of women over the post-war decades, together with a rise in their relative "human capital" (proxied by educational qualifications), collective bargaining systems had fossilised male/female pay differentials, based on convention and previous practice. Equal pay prohibited such discrimination, thereby addressing market imperfections such as monoponistic employers, direct ("Becker") discrimination, and indirect discrimination - through consigning female workers to secondary labour markets.

The long battle for equal pay

Equal pay had been an objective for the Trades Union Congress (TUC), at least formally, since the 1888 "matchgirls' strike." Unions' support for equal pay was partly in response to fears that employers might replace male workers with cheaper females, in jobs where mechanisation could reduce the importance of strength and stamina.[v] In addition to the threat of displacement by lower-paid women workers, this also reflected the trade union movement's goal of the "family wage" - providing the male "breadwinner" with sufficient earnings to support his family and enable his wife to devote her time to housework and child care.[vi] Unions considered that equal pay would prevent substitution of men by women, who were assumed to have lower productivity.

Women's widespread employment in industry during the First World War increased support for equal pay. In September 1918 the War Cabinet appointed the Atkin Committee, "to investigate and report upon the relation which should be maintained between the wages of women and men, having regard to the interests of both as well as the value of the work."[vii] Following its April 1919 report, the House of Commons voted for equal pay in all branches of the civil service and local government, though the government took no action.

The long history of campaigns and enquiries that failed to achieve movement on equal pay is illustrated by the Civil Service. The majority reports of the MacDonnell Commission (1912-1915), Haldane Commission (1918), and 1918 War Cabinet Committee all recommended moves towards equal pay. However, introduction was repeatedly delayed and the 1929-31 Tomlinson Commission failed to endorse equal pay (partly on the grounds that this would provide more favourable treatment for public sector women workers than their private sector counterparts). The campaigning Labour MP Ellen Wilkinson proposed a Parliamentary motion on Civil Service equal pay, passed by 156 to 148 votes in April 1936, which the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, reversed via a vote of confidence.[viii]

Following the great expansion in the volume and range of female employment during the Second World War, a Royal Commission on Equal Pay revisited this issue from 1944-46. However, it was not empowered to make recommendations, only to consider the social, economic, and financial implications.[ix] Moreover, its findings did not unequivocally support the case for equal pay and a December 1946 official working party rejected equal pay in the private sector, partly owing to TUC opposition to enforcing it through legislation. This may have reflected the law lords' extreme anti-union stance - evidenced by three notorious Edwardian court cases *Allen* v. *Flood*; *Quinn* v. *Leathem*; and *Taff Vale Railway Co.* v. *Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants* - which was still strongly evident in the 1940s.[x] Equal pay legislation might have provided a further pretext for judicial interference in industrial disputes. Equal pay in the "non-industrial" (non-manual) public sector was rejected, on the grounds that public sector women workers would have unequally favourable treatment, together with cost considerations. A declaration in favour of equal pay *in principle* was also ruled out, as it was argued that this would compel government to introduce equal pay in the public sector.[xi]

The 1951 Conservative government also rejected equal pay, though in the run-up to the 1954 election (which appeared to be a very close contest) the Chancellor, Rab Butler, decided that conceding equal pay for public sector workers was an important vote-winner - appealing to working women and neutralising a similar pledge from the Labour Party. Equal Pay was eventually granted from January 1955 for the "non-industrial" (executive) Civil Service, phased in over 1955-61, and was soon extended to local government employees and teachers.[xii]

Meanwhile, most leading industrial nations had adopted equal pay legislation. In France a law of 1950 stipulated that all collective agreements should conform to equal pay for equal work. Italy's 1947 constitution enshrined the principle of equal pay for equal work, which, by 1965, was said to be defined broadly.[xiii] West Germany's 1949 "Basic Law" included equality of pay, as part of broader equal rights. However, the Benelux nations had made less progress, despite equal pay legislation.[xiv] Sweden's legislation followed the definition of "equal pay for…equal value", while Norway had a looser definition. Canada had introduced federal equal pay laws and eight provinces had their own legislation, while the USA's 1962 Equal Pay Act prohibited discrimination for similar work (for workers covered by the Minimum Wage Provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act). There were also state-level equal pay acts, the majority of which referred to "comparable work."[xv] Appendix Table 1 summarises the data collected by the Ministry of Labour regarding equal pay legislation overseas, to July 1965.

Britain's 1962 bid to join the EEC required acceptance of Article 119 of the 1957 Treaty of Rome, committing each member nation to "maintain the principle of equal renumeration for equal work as between men and women workers."[xvi] Moreover, in December 1961 the EEC resolved to move to full equal pay (for equal work), in stages, by the end of 1964.[xvii] This was more problematic for Britain than for the EEC Six, given that they all had some form of equal pay legislation.[xviii] In the event, the Six failed to achieve equal pay in all sectors, partly due to factors such as differences in tasks between women and men on similar work and differentials reflecting overtime, seniority, night work, unpleasant or dangerous work, bonuses, and geographical factors.[xix]

In 1962 UK officials estimated the cost of equal pay at £350 million, equivalent to an addition of 2.5 percent to annual wages/salary costs. In addition, it was anticipated that male workers might seek higher rates, to preserve male/female differentials. Equal pay was accepted as the price of EEC entry, but officials sought to negotiate greater flexibility, phasing it in over four or five years.[xx] Negotiators also hoped to be allowed to implement equal pay via Britain's traditional method of wage-setting - collective bargaining - before embarking on legislation.[xxi] However, France vetoed Britain's membership before such negotiations commenced.[xxii]

Britain's introduction of equal pay

Britain's 1967 female/male hourly earnings ratio (excluding agriculture) was 59.7 percent, compared to France's 83.5 and West Germany's 69.3 percent.[xxiii] Moreover, there was no evidence of Britain closing the gap; the male/female differential had remained stable since the early 1950s. UK wage rates were mainly set by company or plant-level collective bargaining, or industry/occupation statutory wage-setting through wage councils. Wage councils were independent statutory wage-negotiating bodies, established by Winston Churchill in 1909 to set minimum pay levels in "sweated trades", with low wages and unionisation rates.[xxiv] These comprised representatives of the employer and employee sides of each trade or industry, together with three independent members (who had a vote only in an impasse), one of whom acted as chairman. Agreed proposals were embodied in wages regulation orders, legally enforceable on employers, if they formed part of employees' contracts. Moreover, employers not party to these agreements could be legally compelled to comply with the agreed terms for their industry or trade.[xxv]

In 1962 basic, minimum, or standard, wage/salary rates for about thirteen million employees were settled by collective bargaining, a further five million by individual contract between employer and employee, and about four million by wage councils and agricultural wages boards – mainly involving female workers (around 2,375,000 out of 3,800,000 wage council workers in the late 1960s).[xxvi] Unequal pay was particularly institutionalised in wage councils, which set different minimum rates for men and women.[xxvii] They typically based differentials on established conventions in their sectors, thus fossilising pay inequality. Firm-level collective bargaining also typically institutionalised male/female earnings differentials, largely based on convention and previous practice.

As *The Economist* noted in 1969, while a few western nations had not yet joined the International Labour Organisation, Britain was "virtually alone among advanced countries in its lack of any legal equal pay requirement."[xxviii] In 1969 only 1.5 million of Britain's 8.5 million female employees received equal pay, mainly confined to non-manual public sector workers, some professions, and several textile industries where it had been traditionally practiced.[xxix] Equal pay legislation would therefore involve a major pay rise for a substantial proportion of Britain's workforce.[xxx] By 1968 females comprised about 20 percent of the total national wage/salary bill. The distributive trades and professional and scientific services accounted for almost half the wage/salary bill for women, while manufacturing sectors represented only about one fifth.[xxxi]

The 1963 TUC Conference had passed a resolution calling on the next Labour government to enact equal pay. Rapid growth in women's unionisation (accounting for 70 percent of the increase in trade union membership between 1964-1970), made this a growing priority of the TUC, which had hitherto not always pressed the issue.[xxxii] Labour's 1964 election manifesto included a pledge to introduce equal pay, as one of a seven-point "charter of rights for all employees." [xxxiii]

In January 1965 an Inter-departmental working party was established, chaired by the Minister of Labour, Ray Gunter, to examine the economic and social implications of equal pay. However, this merely recommended voluntary methods of implementation, via tripartite discussions with the TUC and employers' organisations - in line with Britain's tradition of setting wages and conditions via collective bargaining.[xxxiv] In June 1968 Gunter's successor, Barbara Castle, announced that she would be entering into new discussions with the CBI and

TUC, with a view to agreeing a timetable for the phased introduction of equal pay.[xxxv] It was largely down to Castle's determined and skilled championing that equal pay finally passed into law. Castle had a long-standing interest in equal pay and seized the opportunity to intervene in the June 1968 women machinists' strike at Ford's Dagenham plant, triggered by a new job evaluation scheme that undervalued their work. She was able to broker a settlement, while also focusing attention on the wider problems of low and unequal pay. [xxxvi]

Both the main ministries involved, the Ministry of Labour/Department of Employment, and the Treasury, had long-standing hostility to equal pay legislation. For example, a 1965 Ministry of Labour memorandum suggested that government should confine its activities to introducing equal pay for the industrial civil service over seven years and promoting equal pay in the private sector via exhortation and example.[xxxvii] The Treasury demonstrated extreme hostility, citing incomes policy and balance of payments considerations. Raising women's earnings would significantly increase aggregate household income and thus threaten the Treasury's long-term priorities - restoring the City's international role and sterling's role as a major international, convertible, currency. These objectives were vulnerable to any substantial rise in aggregate demand, given Britain's low currency reserves.[xxxviii]

Treasury officials launched a concerted campaign to block the 1970 Equal Pay Bill, pressing the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins, to persuade Castle to moderate her comments on equal pay, in Parliament, Labour's National Executive, and at the Labour Party conference.[xxxix] Other tactics included lobbying other ministries that equal pay would get in the way of their priorities.[xl] When direct opposition failed, they turned to delaying tactics, advising the Chancellor to play for time, by calling for more research.[xli] Opposition continued even after the passing of the Act; Treasury officials pressured the Department of Employment not to call for reductions in earnings differentials prior to the end of the five year transition period (contrary to the intention of the legislation).[xlii]

Castle had commissioned a study of the probable economic and social consequences, via an “Interdepartmental Group on Equal Pay” - in collaboration with the TUC, CBI, and related organisations - presented to Cabinet on 28th August 1969.[xliii] It focused on 13 industries with substantial numbers, or proportions, of female workers (see Table 1); estimating their costs of moving to “equal pay for the same work” (rather than the wider “equal pay for work of equal value,” as estimating equal value was impracticable, given the general absence of job evaluation studies). [xliv] Equal pay for the same work had also been adopted by the EEC and this strongly influenced the approach to legislation, given an expectation that Britain would eventually join.[xlv]

The Interdepartmental Group was aware “equal pay” did not mean parity of earnings. For example, hourly earnings of women clerical workers in the “non-industrial” civil service were 80 percent of those for men, despite equal pay, owing to women working at lower points on the incremental scale and sometimes for lower hours. Moreover, occupations with higher proportions of women typically had below average wages.[xlvi] Unequal promotion opportunities was another factor creating disparities, even where equal pay for similar work had been achieved.[xlvii] An economy-wide analysis of the likely total costs of equal pay (Table 2) found substantial differences by broad sector, with variations largely reflecting their proportions of female workers. Meanwhile, the study of sectors with high female employment (Table 1) showed that there were much larger variations within these sectors.

[Tables 1 and 2 near here]

The Group estimated the direct costs of equal pay (pay increases for women doing similar work, but previously at lower rates); “consequential direct costs” – increases in other components of remuneration, such as pension contributions; and indirect costs – changes in wages/salaries "as a result of repercussions." [xlviii] Some 304 firms were approached, 225 of whom returned the questionnaire in time. Apart from the hotel, catering, and retail trades, the majority of women in surveyed firms were found to be doing semi-skilled manual work involving a fair degree of manual dexterity, often in traditionally "women only" occupations. Almost all sectors surveyed had jobs where women and men were not regarded as interchangeable, owing to the nature of the work or "long-standing practice," thereby reducing the cost on a "same work" basis.[xlix] Anticipated impacts were found to vary considerably, both between broad sectors and within narrow industries (e.g. clothing 3-31 percent range in expected wage/salary rises between firms examined; retailing, 0-31 percent, and electronics, 0-18 percent). Median impacts also varied widely, from zero for three manufacturing industries to 18 percent for clothing and 13 percent for retailing.

Firms were also questioned regarding expected employment impacts. Many argued that equal pay would produce a shift from employing juveniles and part-time workers in favour of fewer, better-quality, workers, used more intensively; together with more extensive mechanisation; more rigorous streamlining of the labour force; critical examination of jobs (especially women's jobs); and termination of production in some chemicals and food plants with mainly female employees. Some expected a considerable reduction in female employment, but others were very doubtful this would occur, and a few suggested that equal pay would draw more married women into employment. Not only were women considered indispensable in some jobs, but in some locations they constituted the only untapped source of labour.[l] Indeed employers in some sectors thought they were at considerable risk of being unable to compete for the necessary female labour if better-paid jobs for women became available. Some predicted easier recruitment if more women were encouraged to enter the labour force, together with better attendance and lower labour turnover (though several considered the opposite to be more likely), together with more efficient utilisation of female labour, where mechanisation could take the strength element out of jobs previously done by men, especially if legislative restrictions on overtime and shift work were lifted.[li]

The Interdepartmental Group estimated a 5.5 percent increase in labour costs (5.0 percent in pay and 0.5 percent in national insurance contributions etc.), equivalent to a 4.0 percent increase in total costs, with a roughly equivalent rise in prices. However, this assumed that equal pay would not have any substantial effect on women's productivity, which was "doubtful… in some employments, female labour is used extremely wastefully because of the extreme cheapness with which much of it can be obtained. A sharp increase in women's rates of pay is, almost certainly, likely to… get more effective work from them." [lii]

Abolishing gender pay differentials was predicted to weaken job demarcation lines and promote more efficient labour utilisation:

> there is a tendency for some firms to make use of low paid but also low productivity women workers. It is by no means certain that costs are necessarily reduced by this process. If women's earnings are relatively higher, these firms will be persuaded to… make more use of male labour or increase the efficiency [of]… their female labour.[liii]

However, it was also noted that some low productivity sectors with very high female/male ratios and low wage rates, such as clothing and electronics, might see further increases in the cost pressures they were already facing from lower-income countries.[liv]

The report's conclusions, based on the most conservative (highest cost) assumptions were that the upper limit of the rise in the national wages/salary bill would by five percent over the implementation period, representing an average increase in women's earnings of about 25 percent, with manual workers in manufacturing having the largest pay gains. However, it was not improbable that the additional wage bill would be only three percent.

The CBI asserted a higher upper limit, of six percent, claiming that in some industries the figure could be up to 25 percent.[lv] Manufacturing costs were predicted to rise by four percent or less, though some sectors, such as clothing, pottery, and electronics, would be much more heavily impacted.[lvi] It was concluded that equal pay would be unlikely to significantly increase aggregate unemployment, though it was likely to increase the number of women available for employment, while decreasing the growth of job opportunities for them (though, presumably, the remaining job opportunities would be better ones). Similar conclusions were reached even for the Development Areas (areas of high unemployment in Britain's declining regions).[lvii]

On September 25th 1969 Castle informed the Cabinet that she proposed to introduce a bill to phase in equal pay by the end of 1975 (a compromise between the two year period pressed by the TUC and the nine years that the CBI wanted for full implementation).[lviii] Both the TUC and CBI had emphasised the desirability of allowing firms and sectors to make their own arrangements in moving to equal pay. The legislation would provide a framework for negotiations, before they were compelled to act in 1975.[lix]

Section 1 of the Equal Pay Act 1970 came into full operation on 29th December 1975, with an intermediate stage on 31st December 1973, when women would be entitled to receive treatment which ensured orderly progress towards full equality.[lx] Employers were required to offer equal pay and terms and conditions, for work of the same or broadly similar nature, or that, though different, had been assessed of equal value under a job evaluation scheme.[lxi] Meanwhile, a private members bill by Baroness Seear on sex discrimination was referred to a House of Lords Select Committee, which found compelling evidence of widespread malpractice. The Conservative government drew up proposals in 1973, which were extended by the 1974 Labour government, in the White Paper, *Equality for Women*.[lxii] This formed the basis of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act, which prohibited unequal treatment in non-pay aspects of employment, such as hiring, promotion opportunities, job transfer, training, and dismissal procedures, enforced by the Equal Opportunities Commission.[lxiii] Its powers included conducting formal investigations and - where appropriate – issuing legally enforceable non-discrimination notices. [lxiv]

Workers could take complaints to industrial tribunals and appeal the tribunal's decision to the Employment Appeal Tribunal. Meanwhile sections 3-5 of the Act allowed referral of discriminatory wages agreements, wages orders, or pay structures to the Central Arbitration Committee to amend or remove. Given that "material differences" between jobs were hard to codify, the tribunal system played an important role in interpreting cases and setting precedents. However, most commentators argue that the Sex Discrimination Act (hereafter SDA) was much less important in equalising pay than the Equal Pay Act.[lxv] The specific impacts of SDA on the firms the London School of Economics' Equal Pay and Opportunity Project (hereafter EPOP) investigated were found to be minimal.[lxvi] However, despite its limitations, the SDA did substantially increase job opportunities, for example by compelling employers to open up their training programmes to women.[lxvii]

While women's earnings grew faster than men's from 1970-1976, in 1976 they still amounted to only 64.3 percent of average male earnings.[lxviii] Many companies found ways around the Equal Pay Act, such as changing jobs of mixed genders into single sex jobs; the inclusion of additional job content for men to maintain pay differentials; moving women workers to minimum grades, rather the appropriate grading for their work; and tightening women's piecework rates in order to recoup higher basic rates.[lxix] These abuses were at least partially curbed by the Equal Pay (Amendment) Regulations 1983, to comply with a European Court of Justice ruling that the UK was in breach of the E.U.'s equal pay directive. Women were granted a statutory right to equal pay for equal value, rather than the previous weaker definition of equal pay for "like work" (substantially similar or "equivalent" work).

Equal value was defined as work that was similarly demanding, in terms of factors such as effort, skill, and decision-making.[lxx]

Turning the law of supply and demand on its head? Female earnings and employment under the Equal Pay Act

There was relatively little public controversy regarding the Equal Pay Act; probably reflecting the wide diffusion of equal pay legislation in other western nations. Moreover, the government had published its research into the estimated costs and impacts,[lxxi] and the legislation was to be phased in over five years. P. J. Sloane and B. Chiplin provided the most detail analysis, arguing that higher women's wages would probably lead to substantial substitution by men and machines. They also claimed that, `viewed dynamically, both from their own and the firm's viewpoint women offer poor [training] investment prospects and hence tend to congregate in lower-skilled occupations, further depressing the wage rate.'[lxxii] Meanwhile, married women might react to higher wages by working fewer hours and devoting more time to their household duties. Thus, they argued, the Equal Pay Act might simultaneously reduce the demand for, and supply of, female workers.[lxxiii] However, they acknowledged that it was `*theoretically* possible to raise the female wage rate… without creating female unemployment', owing to elements of monopsonistic or segmented labour markets.[lxxiv]

Meanwhile two leading dual labour market theory economists, Nicholas Bosanquet and Peter Doeringer, argued that the Act would accentuate labour market duality, by increasing the proportion of `women only' jobs, and (by implication) overall male/female earnings differentials, while also indirectly reducing incentives for training:

> Equal pay legislation may well increase the number of occupations that are segregated by sex. Where piece-rate and individual incentive schemes are replaced by time rates, workers will become more interested in improving promotion opportunities through collective bargaining, in place of the system of economic advance through proficiency on a particular job.[lxxv]

The non-academic press was also relatively relaxed regarding the Act (compared to the later introduction of the National Minimum Wage). The author's search of the online versions of the British broadsheet national newspapers identified only very limited coverage of the legislation and no strong condemnations of this intervention.[lxxvi] An October 1969 *Economist* article predicted that the Bill would not help poorly-paid women, who would be substituted by more efficient male workers and driven back into all-women occupations. Conversely, professional women were predicted to benefit, as they, unlike their less skilled counterparts, were subject to `uneconomic discrimination.'[lxxvii]

Neoclassical demand and supply analysis suggests that a rise in both women's relative wages and employment following equal pay legislation could only be explained by an un-related upward shift in the demand curve for women's labour - due to either women suddenly becoming more productive or, more plausibly, by the greater relative growth of high female-employing sectors compared to male-dominated sectors. However, while some economists have retrospectively suggested that this was the explanation for Britain's successful introduction of equal pay, very few, if any, were predicting this in the run-up to the Equal Pay Act.

In the event, the theoretical possibility noted by Sloane and Chiplin – that a frictionless labour market was an illusion, due to distortions that made even the sign of the changes in female pay and employment impossible to predict by such analysis - proved to be the most likely explanation for equal pay coinciding with both higher women's employment and incomes. As Table 3 shows, the gap between female and male mean earnings narrowed markedly between 1970 and 1976, after being broadly static over the 1950s and 1960s. Moreover, this proved the start of a long-term reduction of male/female earnings differentials, as shown in Figure 1. Over 1971-6, women's relative hourly earnings rose by 15 percent (mainly over 1973-75) for both manual and non-manual workers, in contrast to a long period of stagnant relative pay from the late 1950s to early 1970s; while female relative employment rose by 11 percent (concentrated among part-time workers).[lxxviii]

[Table 3 near here]

Relative female employment rose from 59 percent in 1970 to 72 percent in 1980 for numbers employed and from 43 to 53 percent in terms of hours.[lxxix] Over 1971-77 activity rates for women aged 20-64 rose from 52 to 60 percent, then stabilised at this rate in the late 1970s, followed by a longer-term, more gradual, rise from the 1980s (see Table 4). Married women's activity rates grew more sharply, from 46.8 percent to 57.0 percent from 1971-77, also stabilising in the late 1970s before resuming a slower upward trend, while the ratio of female/male aggregate hours worked also rose.[lxxx] Meanwhile unemployment, which had been roughly equal for men and women in the early 1970s, diverged from the mid-1970s - with women having lower unemployment, despite rising relative earnings.[lxxxi] However, there was a growing gap between women's full-time and part-time pay rates – suggesting that secondary labour markets persisted, largely drawing on part-time female labour.[lxxxii]

[Figure 1 near here]

Most traditional labour economics models assume that employment is demand-determined, at least after a large positive wage shock, implying that equal pay legislation should have reduced the relative employment of women. An early study by Chiplin, Curran, and Parlsey found that changes in working hours, and the industrial, occupational, and age distribution of the workforce only explained a small proportion of the increase in female/male earnings over 1970-76.[lxxxiii] However, this was challenged by Borooah and Lee, who argued that structural change in favour of sectors with higher female/male ratios explained most of the rise in women's relative earnings and employment, an argument partially supported by Sloane and Theodossiou.[lxxxiv] These findings were in turn challenged by Alan Manning, who argued that the evidence for any significant upward shift in the demand curve for female labour was not convincing and the rise in female employment could be much better explained in terms of imperfect, monopsonistic, labour markets.[lxxxv]

[Table 4 near here]

Rising relative employment in high female-employing service industries was a long-term phenomenon of the twentieth century, but had not raised female relative earnings prior to the 1970s.[lxxxvi] Therefore, for a rise in the female labour demand curve to explain a rise in female employment, despite higher wages, would require a substantial shift in the trend growth of the main female employing sectors.[lxxxvii] Figure 2 examines the contribution to the total workforce of these sectors: retail and wholesale distribution; insurance, banking and finance; professional scientific and technical services (including education and health); and miscellaneous services, including hotels and catering. We exclude public sector workers (given that many already had equal pay) but their inclusion would not change the pattern of essentially linearly growth in these sectors' proportion of total employment over 1960-1980, shown in Figure 2. The average cumulative increase in the proportion of employment accounted by these sectors was 1.017 percent annually over 1971-77, only marginally higher than its average growth rate over 1960-1980, 1.015 percent. Meanwhile traditional female industries, such as clothing, textiles, and pottery, continued their longer-term secular decline and could not account for this expansion. The rising female demand curve explanation thus appears implausible.

[Figure 2 near here]

The absence of any significant rise in unemployment was in line with the government's enquiries regarding the impacts of equal pay legislation in other nations, discussed above, and with the impacts of later National Minimum Wage (NMW) legislation, in Britain and elsewhere. Equal Pay is similar in nature to a NMW, in that it raises minimum earnings. Females accounted for almost three quarters of those impacted by the initial British NMW, with part-time female workers accounting for over 50 percent of those covered.[lxxxviii] In contrast to the Equal Pay Act, the NMW was introduced in a much more polarized political climate, with economists and economic consultancies routinely lobbying against `interventionist' government policies. The consultancy Business Strategies forecast that Britain's NMW would cost 80,000 jobs, while the monetarist economist Patrick Minford put the figure as high as 250,000.[lxxxix] Yet its employment impact was subsequently estimated from very low to slightly positive, while impacts further up the wage distribution were minor, with no significant earnings spiral.[xc]

This outcome is again consistent with labour market imperfections such as monopsonistic or segmented labour markets. It is unlikely to have been due to unrelated labour demand factors, given the shorter time window for the NMW's introduction compared to the Equal Pay Act, which should have enabled commentators to factor-in trends that might impact on their estimates.[xci] The lack of any substantial negative employment impact has been explained in terms of direct and indirect changes in female workers' behaviour following the legislation, such as higher worker productivity and reduced labour turnover (and associated costs).[xcii] Inferring causation from association is problematic, but given the large number of "natural experiments" in equal pay and NMW legislation that yielded positive or insignificant employment impacts, the cumulative evidence appears very strong. A particularly interesting natural experiment was New Jersey's 1992 minimum wage, rising from $4.25 to $5.05 per hour. Comparisons of employment in fast-food restaurants in New Jersey and neighbouring Pennsylvania (where the minimum wage was held constant) found no evidence that it reduced employment, despite New Jersey being in a recession at the time.[xciii]

Fortunately, British policymakers had largely ignored labour market modelling when assessing the likely impacts of equal pay, turning instead to survey methodology and the rich evidence available from West European and North American nations that had already introduced similar legislation. Evidence assembled for the 1965 interdepartmental working party on equal pay, via overseas Labour Attaches, was "virtually unanimous: that the implementation of equal pay… abroad had virtually no effect on participation rates."[xciv] A 1969 follow-up study, for West European nations, also found no evidence of significant increases in unemployment after equal pay legislation.[xcv] Meanwhile evidence regarding equal pay in the UK non-industrial public sector indicated that female civil servants' low wages largely reflected convention, rather than any innate gender productivity differences, implying that significant unemployment would be unlikely.[xcvi]

These results are best explained by imperfections in the labour market, including monopsonistic employers; labour market segmentation; and discrimination. These models predict that equal pay is likely to raise earnings (removing the exploitative element of lower wage rates), without significantly reducing female employment. The lack of any substantial employment response to the introduction of equal pay provides strong evidence of labour market imperfections. As Manning noted, “the position that the labour market was in a competitive equilibrium both before and after the Equal Pay Act is unsustainable.”[xcvii]

Monopsony does not have to be absolute (the “company town” model); it is present in any situation where the elasticity of labour supply to the firm is not zero. Several studies have proposed monopsonistic labour markets (especially for women) as the solution to the paradox of equal pay legislation not creating unemployment.[xcviii] Female labour markets are likely to be substantially more monopsonistic than male labour markets, as married women’s job search and mobility are particularly constrained by both family circumstances (such as housework and child care) and transport limitations, especially before the 1980s, when two car households were uncommon. Moreover, house location choices are mainly determined by the travel to work journey of the household’s primary earner, rather than the convenience of secondary earners.[xcix]

Another key feature of female labour markets is segmentation. Labour segmentation theory envisages the labour market as a number of sub-markets with very limited movement of labour between them. Labour markets can also be segmented within firms. The most widely used segmentation model is the Dual Labour Market (DLM) model, where labour markets are divided into two essentially distinct segments – the *primary* and the *secondary* sectors. Primary sectors provide relatively good pay and conditions, with earnings sometimes based on seniority, to reduce turnover of skilled staff; offer some degree of protection from labour market forces; and provide internal on-the-job training and career advancement, following specific “progression ladders.” Training represents a corporate investment in the primary workforce and thus provides both an incentive to keep workers, even when operating below capacity, and a rationale for clear promotion paths to incentivise workers not to leave voluntarily.

Conversely, secondary sector workers are lower paid, with poorer conditions, low training and very limited advancement prospects. Secondary markets are also typically less stable, with high labour turnover. Thus workers who are not expecting a long career are more attractive, as their low skills and high turnover make them cheaper.[c] For example, Chiplin and Sloane's analysis of the 1970 *New Earnings Survey* found that females had substantially flatter lifetime earning profiles than males, suggesting very limited promotion prospects. Female earnings progression flattened out after 25-29 age range, compared 30-39 for male manual workers and 40-49 for male non-manual workers.[ci]

British labour markets were traditionally highly segmented by gender, based on an expectation, in the pre-1940 era, that women would permanently leave work on marriage. This made gender an ideal "screening device" for market segmentation. EPOP found evidence of labour segmentation by gender. For example, one company, "specified different and higher entry requirements for boys… because it was assumed that boys would pursue a career in the industry while girls would do the bulk of the low-grade, repetitive clerical work".[cii] They also found that skilled jobs typically required completing apprenticeships, thereby restricting them to time-served workers, segmented by gender.[ciii] DLM theory implies that equal pay would generate only a small substitution effect from women to men, as the factors that segment these markets by gender would protect female workers from replacement by males.[civ]

In addition to indirect discrimination by consignment to secondary labour markets, direct discrimination also appears to be a significant factor perpetuating gender wage differentials. Gary Becker modelled direct discrimination using the concept of a "discrimination coefficient," a non-pecuniary element to monetary costs/rewards applied to the group discriminated against, by employers, customers, and/or workers, that does not reflect the perceived productivity of the discriminated group. Given that sectors involving frequent interaction with customers and clients typically had high female staff ratios, especially in customer-facing roles (for example retail and office work) “Becker discrimination” from customers appears unlikely. However, there is strong evidence of Becker discrimination from male workers, who appeared to regard maintaining pay differentials with women co-workers as a key priority.[cv]

The importance male employees placed on defending pay differentials with female colleagues was repeatedly raised in discussions regarding the costs of introducing equal pay.[cvi] EPOP noted several attempts by male workers to maintain gender differentials. In one case male workers went on strike over this issue, which was resolved by the company giving them a guaranteed 103 percent of women’s bonus earnings. In another, a man being put on the same grade as women workers prompted the male workers on that grade to demand transfers.[cvii] Some male workers also used their control over wage-bargaining to negotiate more favourable incentive schemes or rates for male-dominated departments, via job upgrading, changing job titles and/or additional bonus pay.[cviii]

Realizing the true worth of female labour

As George Clark noted, female labour supply cannot be treated as a discrete subject.[cix] For example, married women’s labour supply interacts intricately with labour demand; married women’s “unemployment” having a different economic and social meaning than male unemployment. There is no simple “supply” of married women seeking work, as many are looking for “suitable” employment and, if this is not available, might decide to devote their time to the household and/or voluntary sectors, opting out of the “labour supply.” This is reflected in major historical differentials between married and single/divorced women’s activity rates, with many more women being potentially “active” in the labour market, should suitable and convenient work be available. Moreover, factors such as whether available work is regarded as fulfilling and of suitable status are much more important in determining married women's activity rates than men's.[cx]

During the inter-war era women typically left work on marriage (except in a few sectors, such as textiles), reducing women's work to an activity that filled the gap between school and marriage, rather than a "career." This facilitated their segmentation into secondary labour markets. While primary labour markets are created to retain workers with scarce and valuable enterprise-specific skills, developed via on-the-job training, secondary sector jobs "are, above all, jobs in which there is a low investment in human capital."[cxi] Baron and Norris identified five main attributes that typically define secondary workers, dispensability (the ease with which an employee can be removed from a redundant job); clearly visible social distance; little interest in acquiring training; low "economism" (the relative importance a worker places on monetary rewards), and lack of solidarity.[cxii]

An important feature of secondary workers is high voluntary turnover. A 1930 official study noted that, "The industrial life of women is, in general, a short one. This makes them unwilling to spend much time on … training… For the same reason, managers are unwilling to train up [women] workers for skilled occupations…"[cxiii] Social pressures to quit employment on marriage were reinforced by employers' "marriage bars" – compulsory redundancy on marriage. Marriage bars increased the dispensability of women workers, by providing a relatively uncontroversial means of getting rid of older women workers, on adult wage rates, who could be replaced by juveniles on much lower "girls'" rates.[cxiv] Marriage bars became less important during the post-war era (mainly owing to tight labour markets), but were only finally outlawed by the Sex Discrimination Act.

Over the post-war decades women's labour market behaviour changed in ways that made the "pin money" view of their work unrealistic, owing to rising educational qualifications, longer working lives, and shorter career breaks. Changing social norms, together with innovations such as new "labour-saving" homes; consumer durables, easy-clean fabrics, processed food, and better child-care facilities, substantially shifted the relationship between labour market participation and marital/family circumstances. Helen McCarthy's study of working wives identifies the emergence of a new moral economy of working motherhood during the post-war decades, with women looking to part-time work not only as a source of extra income, but also an opportunity and a relief from the home and the "meaninglessness of middle age," by spending time in the company of other married women. However, the interviews she summarises, for working-class mothers, generally made it clear that the wife's income was a source of supplementary income, and an enjoyable change from household duties, rather than a career.[cxv]

By the late 1960s, mothers doing some paid work was more widely regarded as being "aspirational."[cxvi] While women born before 1914 typically left work on marriage and generally returned (if ever) only after their children became teenagers, women born after 1920 typically left the labour market on motherhood, rather than marriage.[cxvii] The diffusion of the contraceptive pill in the early 1960s and legalised abortion (from 1968) played important roles in enabling women to postpone parenthood, and/or have fewer children. The total period fertility rate fell from a post-war peak of 2.94 in 1964 to 2.41 in 1970 and 1.90 in 1980, remaining under 2.0 thereafter.[cxviii]

Career gaps due to motherhood also shortened. The rapid increase in working married women during the 1960s typically involved mothers with children aged 10 or more, while during the 1970s there was a growing trend for women to return more rapidly after the birth of their last child and, increasingly, between births.[cxix] This contributed to an increase in married women's labour participation rates from around 10 percent in 1931 to 21.7 percent in 1951, and 42.9 percent by 1971, without which overall labour force participation rates would have fallen and the working population would have stagnated.[cxx] Another rationale for women's relegation to secondary labour markets, the gender gap in qualifications,[cxxi] had also narrowed considerably, particularly for younger women. Women had caught up with men, in terms of having any formal qualifications (academic or vocational) for birth cohorts from 1945 onwards and, for birth cohorts from around 1960, had also closed the gap for tertiary qualifications. For birth cohorts from the late 1970s women had higher qualifications on both these measures.[cxxii] Career gaps owing to pregnancy also became shorter; by 1980 a quarter of all mothers re-entered the labour force within a year of giving birth.[cxxiii]

Table 5 shows the growing proportion of women with qualifications beyond `0 levels' for later birth cohorts in 1979, together with the declining proportion of women with no formal qualifications. The trend of converging qualifications for men and women has continued, removing the gender gap in educational attainment in the 2000s; women below 55 are now more educated than men in the same age cohorts. Most of the convergence in earnings over the last 25 years can be explained by the closure of the education gap, while other policy initiatives to reduce male/female earnings differentials have had relatively little impact.[cxxiv]

[Table 5 near here]

Nevertheless, secondary labour markets persisted during the 1960s and early 1970s, as long-standing conventions regarding job sex-typing and differential rates for men and women formed the basis of collective and statutory wage bargaining. Women consigned to secondary labour markets, with unattractive pay, conditions, and prospects, reasonably developed less "attachment" to their jobs than workers in primary labour markets, that offered "careers."[cxxv] This may account for employers' complaints regarding women workers' relatively high absence and turnover rates and poorer time-keeping, together with an attitude that they should be allowed to work part-time and take holidays when convenient for their family, rather than for their employer. However, while the 1969 Interdepartmental Group on Equal Pay found that some employers thought equal pay would not improve such behaviour (and might produce demands for reduced hours), others believed that equal pay would produce equal effort.[cxxvi]

Equal Pay effectively weakened the "lock-in" of women workers into secondary labour markets and the low attachment this fostered. Shirley Dex's research on women's attitudes to paid work from the 1940s -1980s identified a long-term trend of greater orientation towards work, reinforced by narrowing male/female educational differentials.[cxxvii] Individual employers were unable to break this lock-in, as they did not know how their female workforce would react to equal pay, without embarking on unilateral changes that might be difficult to reverse if they proved unsuccessful. The Equal Pay Act resolved this impasse, constituting a national experiment that compelled a collective switch to (or at least towards) equal pay.

The longer-term success of this transition is evident from the continued trend of growing female labour force participation and the gradual (and still incomplete) reduction of male/female earnings differentials, following the larger immediate impacts of the legislation. Moreover, Britain's male/female earnings differentials declined not only absolutely but also in comparison to other OECD nations – with the UK moving from being a negative outlier to a country in the middle of the OECD gender gap league table by the early 2020s.[cxxviii] Indeed, given the rising quality of female labour (proxied by educational qualifications) prior to the Equal Pay Act, Britain's status as one of the last West European nations to introduce any equal pay legislation may have impeded its post-war productivity and labour force growth, in contrast to the Treasury view that equal pay was a luxury Britain couldn't afford.

However, while women's job opportunities, and earnings differentials, have substantially improved following the equal pay and anti-discrimination of the 1970s, more recently both male and female workers have been adversely impacted by the "casualisation" of the labour market. By the late 1990s traditional internal labour markets were being replaced by "market-based" labour solutions such as de-layering, individualised rewards systems, outsourcing, pay structure fragmentation, and privatisation of public services.[cxxix] Since the late 1970s the proportion of UK workers whose pay was subject to collective agreements fell from 77 percent to around 47 percent by 1990, while the proportion of unionised civilian workers fell from 53 percent in 1979 to 37 percent in 1990.[cxxx] Thus, while British labour markets have become more equal by gender, other changes in labour market practices in the UK (and elsewhere) have acted to increase the precariousness of the job market.

Conclusions

Britain's belated adoption of equal pay has several important implications for our understanding of the UK labour market. Labour market modelling has a very poor record in predicting the employment and other impacts of equal pay legislation or related labour market interventions, such as the NMW. This, in turn, is most convincingly explained by substantial labour market imperfections, such as monopsonistic employers, market segmentation, and outright discrimination, together with wage-bargaining systems – especially for lower-wage industries - that often perpetuated traditional male/female wage differentials. Collectively, these market distortions prevented the growth in women's relative human capital (as proxied by qualifications) over the 1950s and 1960s being reflected in their relative pay. Therefore regulation (for equal pay and, later, minimum wages) was not so much a "distortion" to a frictionless labour market, as a partial "correction" to a very imperfect one. Equal pay also increased the female labour supply, given that (especially married) women's labour supply is determined by complex interactions between labour demand and a "supply" of female labour strongly influenced by not only the availability of work, but also its status and prospects.

This study also illustrates the advantages of an evidence-based approach, drawing on the experience of other nations, or early-adopter sectors in the same nation. Information on the impacts of equal pay overseas proved a much more accurate predictor of its impacts in Britain than either economic modelling, or surveys of firms' opinions (which were often contradictory and may have contained an element of bias against a reform that would require major changes in their workforce organisation and pay structures). Given the unusually strong imperfections in labour markets, modelling struggles to deal with factors such as market segmentation, direct discrimination, and monopsonistic employers, that can have a considerable impact on the magnitude, or even the sign, of the employment effect.

Finally, this study implies that Britain's rejection of equal pay prior to the 1970s may not have improved its competitive advantage and probably damaged it - by reducing productivity and workforce growth, preventing the optimal allocation of its (formal and domestic) workforce, and deterring women from undertaking investments in education and training. From the Second World War to the early 1970s the UK suffered from labour shortages, with governments sometimes finding it necessary to deter job creation in some sectors, for example via Selective Employment Tax. Given the strong trends towards women returning to work after marriage and of narrowing gender differentials in educational and other qualifications, adoption of equal pay in the early post-war era, when France, Germany and Italy made this transition, might have provided both a larger and more productive workforce. These findings also have contemporary policy-implications; despite considerable progress since the 1970s, truly *equal* pay is still to be realised, owing to gender segregation in labour markets, barriers to equal pay for equal value, and discrimination in both hiring and promotion practices. The survival of such more subtle methods of gender discrimination in contemporary Britain (and overseas), has not only social, but also economic, disadvantages, by preventing labour markets from achieving social and economic optimisation.

[Appendix Table 1 near here]

Table 1: estimated direct costs of equal pay as a percentage of the adult wage & salary bill, for the sectors examined by the Department of Employment and Productivity in 1968

Sector	No. of returns	Median % of women in adult labour force	% increase in wage/salary bill	
			Median	Range
Cotton spinning	13	52	0	0-0.4
Paper & board	7	20	0	0-1
Chemicals	11	33	0	0-8
Hotels & catering	31	55	1	0-32
Wool textiles	5	39	1	0-4
Engineering & electronics	41	28	2	0-18
Soap & candle	10	37	2	0-10
Footwear	7	58	6	0-16
Food	26	57	8	0-21
Pottery	9	43	10	2-17
Laundries	11	75	11	6-16
Retailing	36	68	13	0-31
Clothing	18	76	18	3-31

Source: TNA, LAB 8/3507, Department of Employment and Productivity, `Enquiry into the cost of equal pay', July 1969, para. 25.

Table 2: Expected costs of equal pay by sector, 1969

Sector	% increase in:		
	Wages & Salaries	Total labour costs	Total costs
Agriculture	1.75	1.75	0.50
Fuel (including water)	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Construction	0.75	0.75	0.25
Manufacturing	5.50	5.75	3.00
Distributive trades	10.00	11.50	6.75
Transportation	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Financial, professional & admin. services	3.75	4.50	4.50
Other services	2.50	3.00	1.75
Public administration	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible
Total	3.50	4.00	3.00

Source: T328/339, Treasury brief regarding equal pay legislation, H.G. Walsh, 3 September 1969. Annex A.

Notes: The analysis does not allow for inter-sector repercussions.

Table 3: Raw gap between female and male mean earnings as a percentage of male earnings

Year	Full-time manual employees		All full-time employees
	Per hour	Per week	Per hour
1921	53	_	_
1931	53	_	_
1941	46	56	_
1951	38	45	_
1961	40	50	_
1971	40	48	37
1976	30	40	27
1981	31	39	27
1991	-	37	22

Source: Alex Bryson, Heather Joshi, Bozena Wielgoszewska, and David Wilkinson, `A short history of the gender wage gap in Britain', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 36, 4 (2020), 836-854, p. 838.

Table 4: activity rates for women aged 20-64 and aggregate female/male hours worked, 1901-1980.

Year	Activity rates for women (%)			Aggregate hours
	All	Married	Single, widowed, divorced	Female/Male
	(A) Aged 20-64			
1901	33.9	13.0	65.6	n.a.
1911	32.5	10.5	66.4	n.a.
1921	30.6	9.4	65.2	n.a.
1931	31.6	10.9	66.7	n.a.
1951	36.3	23.2	70.0	41.3
1961	41.0	31.6	73.3	39.2
1966	48.3	41.8	72.0	39.8
1971(a)	51.5	45.9	72.7	41.2
1971(b)	52.0	46.8	72.9	41.2
1972	52.7	47.6	72.4	43.2
1973	55.6	51.4	72.3	43.5
1974	57.3	53.4	72.5	44.9
1975	57.4	54.0	72.2	46.9
1976	58.6	55.3	71.7	47.0
1977	60.0	57.0	71.4	47.6
1978	59.9	56.7	71.7	48.2
1979	59.8	56.5	72.4	49.2
1980	59.7	56.2	72.0	50.5

Source: Heather E. Joshi, Richard Layard, and Susan J. Owen, `Why are more women working in Britain', Journal of Labor Economics, 3 (1985), S147-S176, pp. S151 & 171.

Notes: activity rates 1901-1971(a) based on Census data (1901-1931 England & Wales only; 1951-1971 Great Britain); 1971(b) - 1980 based on Department of Employment Gazette data, adjusted to exclude students.

Table 5: highest qualifications for economically-active men & women (percentage for each age group), UK, 1979.

Qualifications	Males	Females:					
	All ages	All ages	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
Degree or equivalent	10.8	3.8	4.8	9.0	4.9	2.8	2.0
Teaching qualification	1.0	3.8	3.5	6.7	4.7	4.6	2.9
Nursing qualification	0.3	4.0	4.4	4.9	4.9	4.7	3.5
Trade apprenticeship	21.1	2.1	1.7	2.3	2.6	1.9	2.0
ONC/OND City & Guilds	4.5	1.8	3.6	2.7	1.7	1.4	0.9
A level	4.3	4.6	10.0	7.1	3.8	2.7	2.2
O level	8.9	16.8	28.0	20.0	16.2	10.5	6.1
Other	8.8	13.2	16.2	12.9	11.8	10.2	9.5
None	40.3	49.9	27.8	34.9	49.4	61.2	70.9
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.5*	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total (thousands)	14,257	9,577	1,302	1,017	2,160	2,128	1,978

Source: George Clark, `Female labour supply, a review', Manpower Services Commission Report, Nov. 1981, p. 20, based on EC Labour Force Survey data.

Notes: "Degree equivalent" includes first or higher degrees, HNC, HND, corporate or graduate membership of a professional institution. "Other" includes: CSE below grade 1, other professional and vocational qualifications, still studying, not known, and not stated.

* Error is in the original source.

Appendix Table 1: Summary of progress towards equal pay in some major European and North American nations, to July 1965 (Panel 1)

Nation	Definition	Method & timing	Public sector	Private sector	Effects in practice
France	No discrimination in rate for any specified job	Legislation regulating collective agreements (differentiation barred from 1950).	Complete (central and local authorities)	Over 3 million women in industry covered, little known about agriculture and other family work	9-10% average rate differential attributed to supplementary allowances for work & labour market pressures on male rates.
West Germany	Separate rates for men and women in any job prohibited, but application outside `common' work' depends on how job is classified.	Constituion, as upheld in Labour courts.	Complete	Complete application claimed by government and employers (except leather industry), but unions allege discrimination in some occupational classifications.	Substantial earnings differentials attributed to differences in skill level, length of service (linked to seriority bonues) and shorter female hours.
Belgium	"Equal pay for work of equal value"; not merely `mixed' or `common' work.	Government precept and example for collective bargaining; timing limited by progress in other E.E.C. countries and full implementation on a broad definition some years ahead.	Complete in government service	Coverage of contracts (1964) Female/Male % of workers 100% 43.7 95-99 26.0 90-95 17.5 Under 90 12.9[(a)]	Wide variation in earnings, see previous column
Netherlands	Concept of "equal value" accepted in principle but practice restricted to "common work".	Govt. exhortation; no pressure on timing, in the light of developments in other E.E.C countries and full implimentation on a broad definition some years ahead.	Complete in government service	Differentials cut to 95% or less in banking, insurance, and office work in several industries. 90% level still general in manual work.	Rates at 90-95% level. Occupations not hitherto rated in agreements as "common" still outside scope of application.

(Panel 2)

Nation	Definition	Method & timing	Public sector	Private sector	Effects in practice
Italy	Broadest practicable interpretation of "work of equal value" in light of economic situation and technical difficulties of comparison.	1947 Constitution, supported by subsequent administrative circulars. Implimentation geared to renegotiation of collective agreements under the terms of national agreements on job classification and the reduction of differentials.	Applies to non-industrial and (since 1962) industrial Civil Servants; local authority employees.	Parity for common work already largely achieved throrugh the renewal since 1960 of 133 agreements.	Average contractual wages (per day), industrial (%) Men Women Year All Manual All 1955 100 91 81 1959 100 91 79 1963 100 90 80
Norway	Practical interpretation of "equal work" left to local negotiators, at least until expiry of transition period	Cental agreements between employers and trade unions providing for implementation through collective agreements over 1963-67 in industry and 1963-65 in commerce.	Applies in central and local government and government-controlled servies	Overt discriminsation in basic rates paid by federated employers virtually eliminated. Unions probably police this, but no statistics avaialble.	Current policy confined to eliminating differentials in basic rates in collective agreements.
Sweden	Equal pay for work of input of "eqaual value", based on actual performance.	Central agreement between employers and trade unions providing for implimentation through collective agreements over 1960-65.	Applies in public services	Applies to salaried employees. Overt discrimination in basic rates within industry already virtually eliminated.	As for Norway. Present reforms rarely produce same pay for men and women (differential in 1961 was between 0.5-8.5 percent).

(Panel 3)

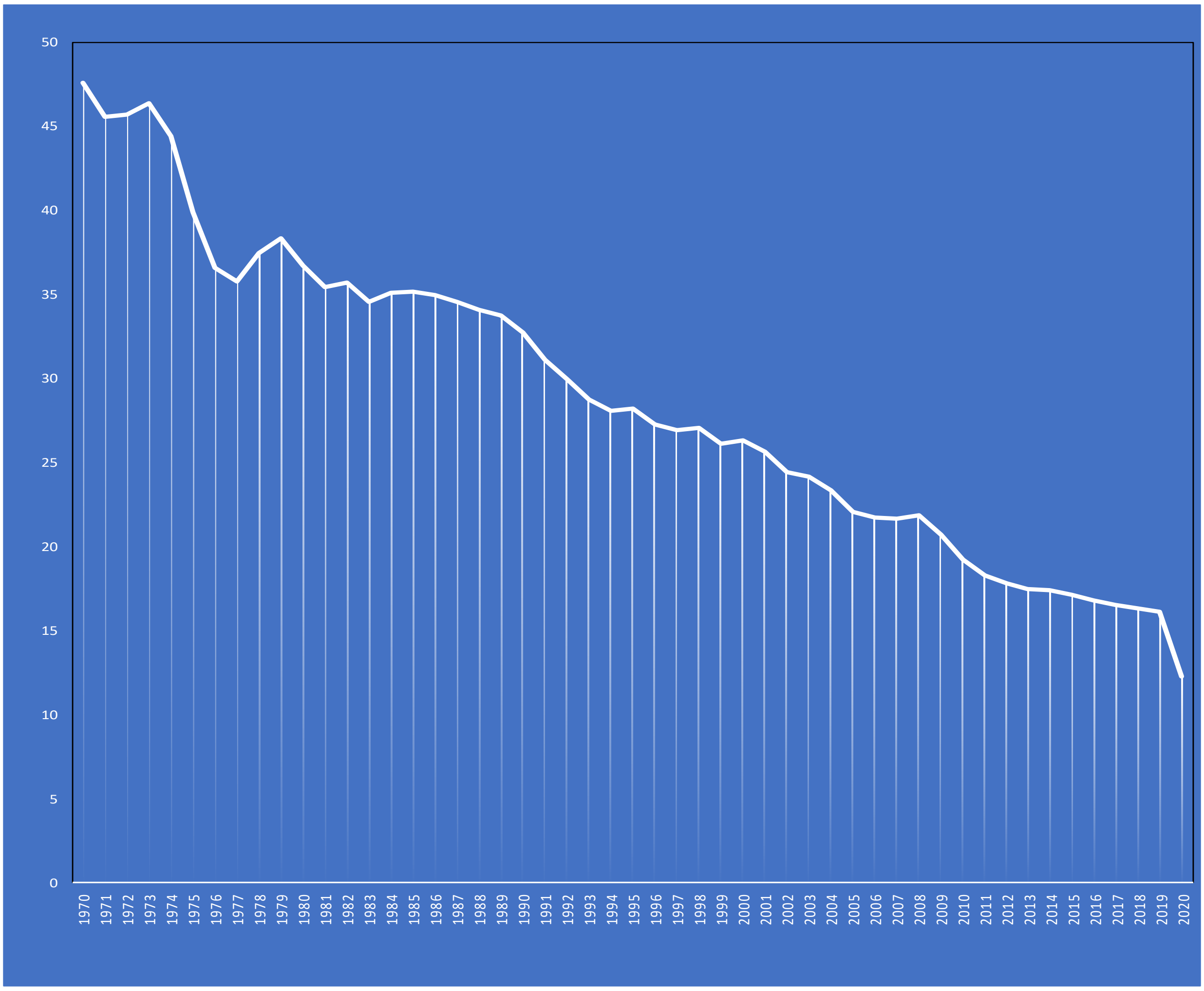
Nation	Definition	Method & timing	Public sector	Private sector	Effects in practice
USA	Federal legislation covers only jobs requiring equal skill, effort and responsibility and performed under similar circumstances. State laws have varying definitions.	State and federal legislation. Federal law restricted to employees protected by minumum wage provisions of the Fair Labour Standards Act, became generally effective since June 1964 except for some agreements expiring June 1965. No date set for full implimentation.	Equal pay by general service classifications in Federal Civil Service since 1923, but only two laws cover public employment.	About 8 million women covered by Federal Law. State coverage unknown. No legislation in predominantly agricultural states and scope of laws in public/private employment varies. Federal and all state laws apply to manufacturing.	
Canada	"Identical" (Federal Law), or "same/compareable" work in same establishment.	Provincial and Federat legislation.	Civil Service jobs classified by content irrespective of sex.	Wide theoretical application but limited in practice by desination of `male', `female' work. Increasing trend to partity in minimum wage laws.	
Luxembourg (b)					Rate of women workers is normally 90% of the rate for men.

Sources: all countries except Luxembourg, TNA, LAB 10/2382, summary of the application of equal pay in Europe and North America, 26 July 1965; Luxembourg - LAB 13/1634, `Equal Pay in the Six", Ministry of Labour document, undated, c. March 1962.

Notes: (a) EEC alleged some discriminatory classification of work where female labour was predominant.

(b) Luxembourg data are for 1962.

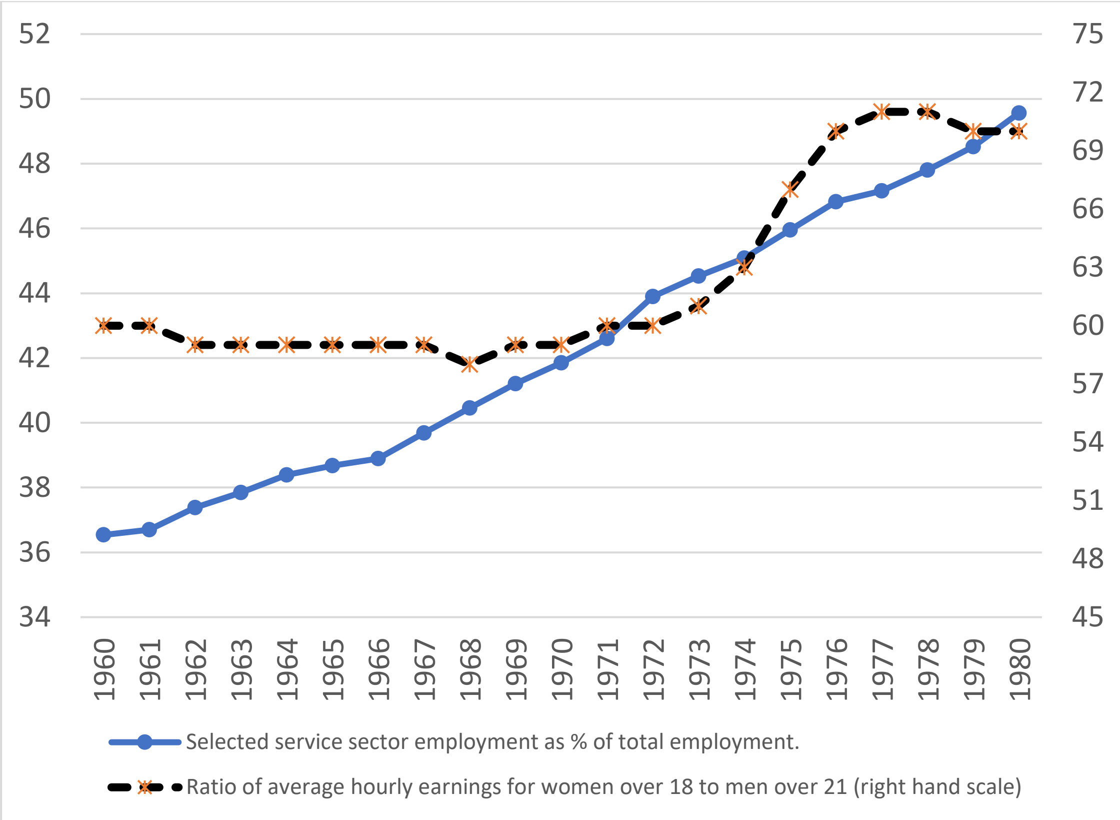
Figure 1: The UK gender wage-gap ratio, 1970-2020.



Source: OECD (2021), Gender wage gap (indicator). doi: 10.1787/7cee77aa-en (Accessed 1st September 2021)

Notes: Defined as the difference between median earnings of men and women relative to median earnings of men.

Figure 2: the proportion of total employment accounted for by the main private sector service industries with high female employment ratios and the ratio of female/male hourly earnings for all workers (women over 18 and men over 21), 1960-1980.



Sources: employment -Bank of England, `A millennium of macroeconomic data for the UK dataset', version 3.1, field A53, accessed 24 September 2021, Hourly earnings, Heather E. Joshi, Richard Layard, and Susan J. Owen, `Why are more women working in Britain', Journal of Labor Economics, 3 (1985), S147-S176, p. S158.

Notes: service sector employment variable includes retail and wholesale distribution; insurance, banking and finance; professional scientific and technical services (including education and health); and miscellaneous services, including hotels and catering.

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