

## Press release: Alok Sharma: 'There is still an urgency for us to act' on women's economic independence

Women's economic independence was in the spotlight today as Employment Minister Alok Sharma met with Reading residents involved in a local employment project.

Run by Oxfam, the Future Skills project supports women into work with skills-based training and work experience in its charity shops.

While there are more women in work than ever before and the gender pay gap is at a record low, Alok Sharma highlighted that there is much more to do to tackle employment inequality.

The project has involved over 200 women across 5 cities, with 8 women having built their experience at the Caversham charity shop.

Employment Minister Alok Sharma said:

While there are more women in work than ever before and the gender pay gap is at a record low, there is still an urgency for us to act to remove barriers that prohibit women from working and limit their progress.

Being able to work and earn a wage is vital for women's economic independence and a fundamental pillar of gender equality.

Projects like this one in Caversham sit alongside support from the jobcentre and our efforts to improve support for childcare through Universal Credit as well as supporting women once they are in work, to earn more and climb the ladder.

Visiting the Caversham Oxfam charity shop today, Mr Sharma spoke with 2 participants who have been involved in the project and heard from leaders at Oxfam about the impact of the project.

Head of Oxfam UK Programme Kirsty Davies-Warner said:

We have consistently heard from women who've taken part in our Future Skills programme across the UK that as well as fair pay they need flexible and secure jobs and access to affordable childcare.

Our work has been supporting them to gain the skills and confidence they need to address the barriers they face in accessing decent work.

Oxfam is committed to working with partners, including the government, to help women in or at risk of poverty into well paid, and secure work.

Supporting women into employment is a focus of a number of projects in jobcentres up and down the country, including work in Birmingham Yardley to help British Bangladeshi women build their confidence and knowledge of the opportunities out there.

As well as women-centred projects, jobcentre sector-based work academies offer jobseekers the opportunity to develop their skills and gain work experience in sectors including hospitality and retail.

Meanwhile, the government is supporting women once they are in work to increase their hours and progress, helping them improve their circumstances.

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