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International Women's Day: 8 March 2007

Comment from Marcella Maxwell, Chief Executive, Chwarae Teg, the organisation leading the way for women in Wales.

International Women's Day is celebrated the world over and serves as an important reminder of the struggle of women to participate in society on an equal footing with men.

This year, Chwarae Teg celebrates 15 years as the independent organisation working in Wales to ensure this important campaign continues.

Much has been achieved to open up opportunities for women but celebration should not overshadow what remains to be done to redress the balance between women and men in the economy.

Women make up 51% of the population and 47% of the workforce, yet remain under-represented in certain occupations, and in senior positions in organisations, on Boards, and in public life. Women continue to make up the majority of low level, under-valued part time work and are often forced into economic inactivity through persistent inflexible working practices. All these factors contribute to the continued gender pay gap between women and men.

Girls consistently outperform boys educationally; an achievement not paralleled in career progression, wasting talent and investment, both at an individual and a wider economic level. And twice as many men are likely to start a business, closing the door on a possible three quarters of a million business start ups and a £23bn boost to the UK economy.

Gender inequality is a damaging and significant constraint on the economic growth of Wales. Chwarae Teg, in setting out its manifesto for the next 15 years will focus on its continuing role as a positive force for real change to ensure the talents and skills of more than half of the population are not wasted.

Today should be about everyone spending time to reflect on the role women currently play in the economy in Wales and to envisage a thriving 21st century economy made up of, and supported equally by women and men.

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