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Encouraging an increase in the employment of women returners in areas of skill shortage in traditionally male industries

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Christine Turgoose and Linda Hall
Research and Consultancy Service (RCS), Institute of Work Psychology (IWP), University of Sheffield

Dr Angela Carter
Research Fellow, Institute of Work Psychology
Just Development

Dr Chris Stride
Statistician, Institute of Work Psychology
University of Sheffield

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Index / Content

Acknowledgements.....	2
Index of tables and charts.....	6
A. Executive summary and recommendations.....	7
I. INTRODUCTION.....	7
Key Findings.....	7
Recommendations.....	9
Recommendations from the survey and review of current provision.....	9
Recommendations for employers based on employers' views.....	9
Recommendations for government based on employers' views.....	10
B. Main report.....	11
I. INTRODUCTION.....	11
The Institute of Work Psychology.....	11
Rationale for the research.....	11
Objectives of the study.....	11
Conducting the study.....	12
Phase 1	12
Part 1: A literature review.....	12
Part 2: A review of current provision which supports women returners.....	12
Phase 2	13
Part 3: A survey of women returners.....	13
Phase 3	13
Part 4: Consultation with employers.....	13
Definitions.....	14
C. Findings.....	15
REPORT STRUCTURE.....	15
I. CONTEXT.....	15
Women returners.....	15
What do women returners look for in work.....	16
Occupational Segregations.....	16
Why do more women not seek training and work in traditionally male jobs?.....	17
Where do women's attitudes and perceptions toward traditionally male jobs come from?.....	17
Women returners in traditionally male jobs.....	17
What might encourage women returners to seek work in traditionally male jobs?.....	18
Employers attitudes.....	18

Current provision	18
2. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?	19
Summary	19
Findings	19
3. WHAT IS THE PATTERN OF WOMENS' WORKING LIVES?	23
Summary	23
Findings	23
4. WHAT HAS INFLUENCED WOMEN'S LIVES SO FAR?	32
Summary	32
Findings	33
5. ARE THE WOMEN ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL, AND IF NOT, WHY NOT?	37
Summary	37
Findings	37
6. THE FUTURE	44
Summary	44
Findings	44
7. WHAT INFLUENCES WOMEN WHEN THEY ARE LOOKING FOR WORK?	45
Summary	45
Findings	45
8. WHAT MIGHT ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO SEEK WORK IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE JOB?	45
Summary	45
Findings	46
9. EMPLOYERS VIEWS.....	56
Summary	56
Findings	56
Suggestions for employers based on employers' views.....	67
Suggestions for government based on employers' views	68
10. CONCLUSIONS.....	70
Women returners in the labour market.....	70
Why do women seek traditionally female jobs?.....	71
Do womens perceptions and experience about traditionally male occupations reflect reality?	71
Would women consider jobs traditionally done by men?.....	71
What resources are available to support these women and help them explore alternatives?	72
What can be done to encourage women to work in traditionally male jobs?	72
11. Recommendations.....	73

Recommendations from the survey and review of current provision	73
Recommendations for employers based on employers' views	73
Recommendations for government based on employers' views	74

References

Appendix 1: Employer representative question

Appendix 2: Employers questions

Appendix 3: Literature review

Appendix 4: Current provision

Appendix 5: Method

Appendix 6: Employees comments

Index of tables and charts

Tables

1.	Taking the characteristics that most of the women considered important in their ideal job and comparing with the percentage who considered these characteristics 'to apply' or 'definitely apply', to the jobs below	54
2.	Taking the characteristics that most of the women considered important in their ideal job and comparing with the percentage who considered these characteristics 'to apply' or 'definitely apply', to the jobs below	54

Charts

1.	Percentage of respondents from each socio-economic group	25
2.	Pattern of breaks for respondents with different numbers of children	27
3.	Occupation of respondents before their most recent break	29
4.	Percentage of respondents who, in discussion with their employer, are able, or not able, to tailor the number of hours worked	30
5.	Percentage of respondents who, in discussions with their employer, are able, or not able, to tailor when they work	31
6.	Percentage of respondents who used each of the following care options when they are working	32
7.	Percentage of respondents who found the following sources of information helpful when they were looking for work	33
8.	Percentage of respondents who found a job after their most recent break from the following sources	34
9.	Percentage of respondents who gave the following as the way they returned to work after their most recent break for caring reasons	35
10.	Percentage of respondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income	37
11.	Percentage of working respondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income	38
12.	Percentage of non-working respondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income	38
13.	Factors that made respondents think they should look for male jobs	40
14.	Factors that made respondents think they should look for female jobs	40
15.	Percentage of all respondents who considered the factors below were important when looking to return to work	42
16.	Respondents' current job	43
17.	Respondents' ideal job (one they could realistically do, possibly with re-training)	44
18.	Percentage of working respondents who considered the factors below were important in their current job	46
19.	Percentage of working respondents who considered the factors below were important in their ideal job	47
20.	Factors that would persuade respondents to seek work and training in a traditionally male job	51
21.	Percentage of respondents who considered the characteristics below important in their ideal job	53
22.	Expectations if respondents were to do a traditionally male job	56
23.	Concerns about retaining for a new job	57
24.	Percentage of respondents who enjoyed the following training and learning experiences	58
25.	Respondents' opinions in what would assist women returners into traditionally male jobs	59

A. Executive summary and recommendations

1. INTRODUCTION

The research reported in this summary was commissioned by the DTI and conducted by the Institute of Work Psychology (IWP). It is based on a survey of 280 "women returners"¹ and 40 consultations with employers and their representatives. The survey took "women returners" to be partnered women between the ages of 25 and 55, who hold qualifications at NVQ level 3 or below, have taken one or more breaks from work for caring reasons in the last 10 years and are currently either not working or working part-time.

The reason this work focused on partnered women is because these women have not traditionally been the focus of Government policy because they do not necessarily claim benefits or appear as unemployment statistics. However they may indeed be a potential valuable resource in the labour market.

Key Findings

Future work intentions: The vast majority of the women surveyed intend to increase their participation in work. Working women want to increase the hours of work and non working women want to join the labour market. For many this increase is not planned for at least a year.

In the majority of cases they want work of a similar status, either to current work, or to work they did before their break. Women currently working are particularly interested in increasing their pay.

Just under a third of women currently not working, would consider self employment.

Managing work and childcare: Fifty six per cent of women with caring responsibilities want to work flexibly; either by sharing childcare with their partner or by managing their childcare needs themselves. Women who work generally manage their childcare using families and partners, though women in the top two socio-economic groups tend to make more use of formal paid childcare options. This difference may reflect a general attitude towards the different childcare provisions as well as the respective costs.

Just over 40 per cent want to stay at home whilst their children are small and their desire to do so, without government pressure to return to work, is supported strongly by the qualitative comments. For some though, this is clearly not an option: 43 per cent of women who are currently working would prefer to be able to stay at home full-time.

Flexible working patterns: Almost two thirds have contracts that clearly support flexible working patterns and half report that to some extent they are able to influence the hours they work and when they work these hours. This suggests that many women are finding ways to actively manage their current employment in order to support the balance between work and childcare, which is encouraging.

Are women achieving their potential? Evidence indicates that many women are working in, for example, administrative jobs or sales occupations, which for many provide them with the flexibility to manage work and childcare and may also meet social needs. However, many are not working in their ideal jobs. Women clearly want work that they consider is intrinsically interesting and motivating. Some women would require retraining or would need to gain qualifications to work in their ideal job.

Women working under 'feminized' conditions, have jobs that are characterised by low levels of security and low wages (Castells, 2000). This study suggests that almost all the women who participated have sought, or will seek work that is traditionally female. This suggests women are not likely to be achieving their earning potential nor are they likely to be

¹ A general definition of a women returner is a woman who returns to employment after having children or after a period of family caring. For the purposes of this research a narrower definition was used.

in jobs that provide the best terms and conditions of employment. Why do the women focus on traditionally female jobs? Our findings suggest two reasons for this are:

- **Advice, role models and experience:** Findings indicate that advice received, role models and work experience tend to reinforce occupational segregation. Current provision for advice, information and guidance for women returners is patchy, often directed at lone parents. Specific provision for partnered women is almost non-existent. General provision supporting women's entry into non-traditional jobs is available, though often at graduate level. These information sources can be difficult to access if women are not used to making use of such resources, do not use the internet or go into advice centres. It appears that women in this survey may not access the provision as most tend to seek their information through less formal sources such as social networks and newspapers.
- **Employers' attitudes:** Whilst some employers in traditionally male occupations are enlightened and do have flexible working practices and family friendly policies, few made these public, having developed these for current employees. Clearly some employers in traditional male jobs do operate flexible working, however, many do not and there is still a strongly held view that some jobs, by their nature, are considered unsuitable for women with childcare responsibilities. Enlightened employers understand child care is not just a women's issue. They believe it can help stabilise the workforce, keep valuable skilled talent and make it easier for employees to commute outside rush hour.

Job search activities: The majority (57 per cent) of those who currently work, report that returning to work was an active process. For the remaining 43 per cent, finding employment was more a matter of chance.

What influences women when they look for work? As well as flexibility / opportunity to manage childcare, these women are clearly motivated by more intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and companionship, though interestingly they do not believe this companionship needs to be achieved through working with other women. Financial independence is also quite important to the majority of women in this survey.

Would women consider jobs traditionally done by men? To some extent, yes, as long as the job provides them with the intrinsic factors that motivates them. Women perceive that some of the factors they want in a job can be met in some traditionally male jobs. For example, they perceive many jobs would provide opportunities for job satisfaction, to see an end product to their work and enable them to take responsibility for their own work. They are less convinced these jobs would provide companionship, and even less convinced they would provide flexible work opportunities to help manage childcare. They perceive many of the jobs to involve working long hours. Evidence suggests that women with higher level qualifications would be more persuadable to seek traditionally male jobs.

Would women retrain? Training is important to these women. Many women, in previous employment enjoyed learning new skills, gaining experience in a new job role. Women are particularly concerned about receiving adequate training for a new job. They, and employers, strongly believe there is a need for funded government / employer training programmes to ensure adequate retraining that fits in with childcare responsibilities.

What can government and employers in traditional male jobs do to encourage women returners?

Women strongly feel employers need to give greater encouragement to women returners in recruitment information and practices. The practices need to reflect the specific intrinsic and practical factors that women have indicated are important to them such as the opportunity to see an end product from their work and to have responsibility for their area of work. They also need to reflect flexible working options and family friendly policies.

Women feel that employers need to provide retraining opportunities. They also clearly feel that the government has a role to play by providing free pre-employment skills training for women returners. Employers agree with this sentiment.

It is also clear that there is a specific need for gender neutral advice, information and guidance to encourage women returning to employment to consider non traditional jobs. This needs to be provided in such a way that it will be taken up by women who have generally opted for less formal approaches to advice and job search, such as, easily accessible and locally available provision with childcare facilities. It needs to encourage women who are not required by benefit regulations to seek such advice information and guidance. Employers comment that skill shortage is a complicated issue without a simple answer. The types of skills required in male industries are undergoing change

Recommendations

In order to take these findings forward and achieve an increase in the employment of women returners on areas of skill shortage in traditionally male industries, the report concludes by presenting a series of recommendations.

Recommendations from the survey and review of current provision

What can be done to encourage women returners to explore a wider range of employment options, particularly work that is traditionally male in order to manage skill shortages and increase equality of opportunity for women? There needs to be:

- Easily accessible and funded, information advice and guidance provision which focuses on supporting women with caring responsibilities who wish to return to work or train for new areas of work.
- Impartial advice, guidance and counselling, ensuring that women understand all the options open to them, avoiding a focus on traditional female roles
- Information provision that understands informal job seeking patterns and actively targets women through local social networks
- Support to employers in areas of skill shortage, encouraging them to think 'outside the box' in terms of developing flexible working practices and developing jobs that women would find interesting, such as jobs that see an end product from their work, to encourage the recruitment of women returners
- Specific initiatives funded through a partnership between government and employers where skill shortages are particularly prevalent. Initiatives such as: marketing designed to publicise how working in this job / occupation will meet the needs of women returners; funded, flexible re-employment training courses, that can be accessed alongside childcare
- Make jobs more interesting to women by focusing on the factors of the job that appeal to them, such as making them responsible for getting things done or being able to produce a practical end product
- These "Women returners" need to have the opportunity to understand their potential and how that can be practically achieved to enable them to make informed choices about their return to employment.

Recommendations for employers based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- Employers should be encouraged to consider implementing family friendly policies for all employees, part-time and flexible working whether or not they currently employ women
- The policies need to be formal and family friendly policies should be referred to in job adverts to attract women returners
- Employers should be encouraged to redesign vacant jobs, particularly hard to fill vacancies, to establish how they could appear more interesting to women and be done more cost effectively and productively by one or two part-time employees; using, for example, flexible working or even home working

- Employers need to reconsider jobs they feel would be impossible for a woman to do, or improbable that a woman would want to do them, to establish whether this is really the case
- Recruitment practices need to be more innovative in the locations where they are placed and the words used in order to actively encourage women applicants. Employers should consider women returners for training positions. They have a lot to offer, many having built up life skills which are useful to the employer
- As far as possible employers need to improve cleanliness, order, heating, ventilation and lighting. Generally employers with pleasant working environments seemed to have the least trouble in attracting women employees.

Government and key agencies that support employers, such as Sector Skills Councils, can play a key role in championing the issues that can help women return from a break to care for children to employment that uses their current or potential skills.

Recommendations for government based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- Employers look to government to fund the training of adults who want a career change
- Employers look to the school system to provide them with leavers who have the basic qualifications in English, Maths, Physics and Chemistry so that they can take advantage of the training on offer. These subjects need to be taught in a way that appeals to girls if occupational segregation is not to continue. Also the male dominated industries need to be sold to girls at school in a way that appeals to them
- Employers, especially those too small to have a dedicated personnel professional, need help to manage the change that must take place if occupational segregation is to become a thing of the past
- Employers want the benefits and rewards their industry affords to employees to be publicised; to dispel the myths that put people, especially women, off the idea of working in those industries. Government sponsorship of the advertising would be welcomed.
- Provision of quality, reliable and affordable childcare is also something that employers want so that they can employ women with primary care responsibilities without worry that their business will suffer from frequent unscheduled absences.

B. Main report

1. INTRODUCTION

This research was commissioned by the DTI. The purpose of the research is to inform policy decisions about possible interventions to help women return to employment at levels appropriate to their actual or potential skills and education, in areas of skills shortage or economic need. This work was commissioned alongside a separate study, completed by Manchester University, 'Examining the Potential for Women Returners to Work in Areas of High Occupational Segregation' which analysed existing data to seek answers to the questions being considered by this study.

The Institute of Work Psychology

The study was completed by the Research and Consultancy Service within the Institute of Work Psychology, University of Sheffield, between May and December 2005.

Rationale for the research

In order to inform policy decisions the DTI commissioned research by IWP focusing on a number of key research questions.

Objectives of the study

The actual objectives outlined in the invitation to tender were:

- To examine the ways in which women decide to return to work and where they seek information on jobs, training and employment
- To determine what types of support and guidance would be most effective in supporting women's return to work
- To determine the skill profile of women returners
- To compare the profiles of women returners with the skills required by occupations experiencing severe occupational segregation and skills shortages
- To examine how women choose the sectors they return to
- To examine what job tasks and patterns of work are considered most desirable by women who are seeking to return to work
- Do or could occupations or jobs currently experiencing both severe occupational segregation and skill shortages have the factors that women returners seek? If this is the case what is preventing women returners working in these sectors? For example, is it:
 - Employer perspectives or prejudice against flexible or part-time workers?
 - A high perceived, or real, cost of changing the nature of these jobs by making them e.g. part-time?
 - Poor sector image?
 - Women not seeing these as suitable career choices?
 - Lack of clear information?
 - Lack of access to resources for re-training to be able to undertake these jobs?
- Would women be attracted by schemes that would actively support and train them in returning to work in skills shortage sectors?

Conducting the study

To achieve these objectives the study was conducted in three phases and four parts.

Phase 1:

Part 1: A literature review

Part 2: A review of current provision which supports women returners

Phase 2:

Part 3: A survey of women returners

Phase 3:

Part 4: Consultation with employers

These are briefly described below. Further detail can be found in the method section in Appendix 5.

Phase 1

Part 1: A literature review

The aim of this stage was to review the relevant literature about the profiles of women returners, particularly in relation to skills and the way they return to the job market. This included literature covering the factors influencing a woman's return to work or otherwise following the birth of a child/children, and the area of skills and training. Both areas will need to be considered in order to determine the profiles of women returners, particularly in relation to skills.

The literature covered a wide range of sources including:

- Literature published in academic journals
- Articles in practitioners' journals
- The internet, including media and training websites
- The grey literature including trade union magazines and websites.

The reports identified have been quoted throughout the following report in the relevant sections and the literature review itself can be found in Appendix 3.

Part 2: A review of current provision which supports women returners

The aim of this section was to understand what provision is currently available to facilitate women returning to the workforce, with a particular focus on provisions that encourages women to explore a wider range of options including work in jobs considered traditionally male. It also sought to understand how widespread/accessible provision is and how and where it is publicised.

This work was carried out using desk research contacting by telephone, bodies such as, government departments, local authorities, the EDC and Learning Skills Councils etc.

The review sought to identify different options available to women returners including:

- Advice and guidance services which include careers guidance, help with CVs and job applications and finding work
- Locally run events, courses and training designed to help women increase their skills and education, (re-)gain confidence, etc
- Local funding options to help with the practicalities such as help with travel to work, advice on appropriate childcare.

Phase 2

Part 3: A survey of women returners

A face-to-face survey of 280 women returners was conducted. Acknowledging the difficulty of accessing the relevant population of women, a national market research company, TNS, was used both to identify the survey sample and then to conduct the face-to-face interviews.

The women included in the study were between the ages of 25 and 55, and had taken one or more breaks from work for caring responsibilities in the last 10 years either to have a child, look after children or to look after an adult. The women in the study were either in part-time work (30 hours and under) or were not working. They currently held qualifications equivalent to GNVQ level 3 and below. All had a partner at the time of the study.

To select the sample of women for interviews, TNS included a short questionnaire, developed by IWP, in their normal cycle of weekly surveys, which allowed identification of women who satisfied the criteria, based on the sample definition above. They achieved the sample from interviews with 5766 women. Agreement was sought from the women identified, that they would be prepared to take part in a longer interview specifically related to the study, at a later date.

Pre-survey face to face interviews were conducted with women returners in Sheffield, Chesterfield and Derbyshire to gain an understanding of the relevant issues for women returners. The actual survey lasted 45 minutes and was carried out by trained interviewers working for TNS in the women's own homes.

The aim of the survey was to seek an understanding about the women's experiences, perceptions and attitudes relevant to the research questions. The interview included questions about employment, education and skills profile, reasons for deciding to return to work, reasons for not returning to work or what would influence their decision to return to work. It also examined how women seek information about jobs and training, key factors of both jobs and working environments that are perceived to be important in decisions on returning to work, and women's perceptions of jobs/sectors in which there are skills shortages. Details of how the analysis was conducted are given in Appendix 5: Method.

Phase 3

Part 4: Consultation with employers

The final part of the work involved consultation with employers or employers' organizations in specific sectors that do not currently attract women returners, as to how available work might be adapted to meet the needs of women returners. The consultation took place through face to face, email or telephone interviews. A total of 40 employers were interviewed from a range of traditionally male industries. Alongside this seven other organisations were interviewed such as employee representative bodies, training bodies and trade unions.

The consultation topics covered:

- Employers' views on both their industry and their own organization's attractiveness to women returners seeking flexible working practices and their willingness to recruit women returners if it addressed their problems in recruiting and retaining skilled labour
- The extent to which they currently offer family friendly policies such as flexible or part-time working into their organization and their views on the feasibility of, and barriers to, introducing (additional) family friendly policies into their organization to encourage women returners into their hard to fill vacancies
- The type of training and recruitment process that their industry and their organization needs for women returners to help them fill current vacancies in skill shortage areas
- The support in the form of interventions that employers need from the government to enable them to implement such approaches.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study the following definitions were used.

A 'woman returner' is all of the following:

- A partnered woman between the ages of 25 and 55
- One with qualifications equivalent to GNVQ level 3 and below
- One who has taken one or more breaks from work to undertake caring responsibilities in the last 10 years, either to have a child, look after children or to look after an adult
- One who is economically inactive or only partially active, i.e. engaged in part-time work outside the home of 30 hours or less.

A 'career break' is a break from paid work outside the home lasting more than a year.

A 'partnered woman' is a married woman or a woman living with a partner in the same circumstances as if they were married.

C. Findings

REPORT STRUCTURE

The aim of the report is to present the findings from the different phases of the research. Rather than just present the different phases as individual sections of the report, the main findings section has been structured in order to bring the different elements together wherever possible. Each phase of the report has, however, been written up as a separate report and where these are not included in the main findings section they can be found as an appendix to the main report.

The reports structure is as follows:

- **Section 1 - Context.** This brings together the findings from the literature review and the review of current provision
- **Sections 2 to 8 – Survey findings.** These sections detail the findings from the survey
- **Section 9 - Employers views.** This section details the findings from the consultation of employers.

1. CONTEXT

The aim of this section is to outline the context in which the research has been conducted. It draws upon current literature relevant to the study (see Appendix 3) and the review of current provision (see Appendix 4).

In order to set the context the report will look at what is known about:

- Women returners
- Occupational segregation
- Employers attitudes to women returners
- Availability of current provision to support women in non traditional jobs.

Within these sections we will also identify relevant government initiatives and policies.

Women returners

When women leave work for caring reasons the pattern of their return to work can depend on many factors, such as their current skills and education level, where they live, the opportunities they have for childcare, their reason for returning to work, the opportunities available to them locally. Their decisions can be influenced both by their own experiences and the experiences of others as well as their own perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and values. Work by Tomlinson et al. (2005) indicates that women returners make up over a quarter of the women in the labour force in the UK.

Whilst 70 per cent of women of working age are in employment, when there are children under five in the family, this drops to 53 per cent of women in employment (Key Indicators of women's position in Britain. 2004). Tomlinson suggests, however, that current trends indicate that they are likely to return to work as the children grow older.

A number of authors (Gregg & Waldfogel (2005), Shaw et al. (2000) indicate that this is changing for younger women, and they are increasingly returning to work after short periods out of work, often to the same terms and conditions as before. For example, Gregg & Waldfogel (2005) suggest that 63% of women who work before having a baby return to work within twelve weeks after giving birth, and over half of these return to full-time work. However, Tomlinson et al. (2005), found that women returning to full-time work tend to be clustered in occupations, such as teaching and management. There is evidence to suggest that for other women, who are currently not working in such occupations, the patterns for return to work differ. For example, Houston & Marks (2003) suggests that when many women return to the employment market after their break they often return to work below their current skill or education level prior to childbirth.

It is likely that many women with small children will be working part-time. Whilst more than two fifths of all women work part-time, this figure is higher (64 per cent) for mothers with children under 16 (Key Indicators of women's position in Britain, 2004). Part-time work is characterised by lower pay and less security because women with caring responsibilities need the flexible hours and practices (Rosenblatt & Rake (2003). Women who return to work part-time tended to work in areas such as administrations, sales and customer services, caring and personal services and administration. Tomlinson et al., (2005). Generally, these jobs have lower wages and from the available research women appear to be making compromises both in terms of hours worked, pay and skill utilisation.

Several studies have shown that motherhood incurs a 'wage penalty' (e.g. Avellar & Smock, 2003). That is, once returned to work, mothers earn significantly less compared to women with no children. However, this may also be changing for recent returners. Women returners gain financially from each qualification they have and data indicates that recent returners (i.e. those who have been looking after their children in the past three years) have more qualifications and higher wages compared to other part-time working mother (Tomlinson et al, 2005).

What do women returners look for in work

Hakim (2002) found that equal opportunities policies have led to the emergence of three groups of women, those who see themselves as home-based carers, those who see themselves as primary wage earning career women and those who can be seen as adaptive, combining both work and family care. In order to combine work and care the women look for jobs and employers that will facilitate the combination.

Current research suggests that the elements women may look for include:

- Part-time working
- Pattern of hours that fit in with partners hours to provide consistent family care
- Flexible working
- Near home or near good quality child care that suits their child, be that paid care or care of a relative
- Sufficiently well paid to cover child care costs with a reasonable amount left over so the family is not suffering a financial loss or losing benefit as a result of the mother working
- Employer's support with child care provision and/or cost
- The opportunity to work from home
- A job that does not leave them too exhausted to enjoy their family time
- Employer and colleagues who are understanding and provide social support.

Occupational Segregations

In the UK three-fifths of women are employed in just ten occupations. This occupational segregation, where men and women tend to be employed in different jobs is a phenomenon that is not peculiar to Britain (Anker 1997). There are many reasons for this, some of which are briefly discussed below and Government, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) and many other organisations are addressing these issues.

Current skills shortages are most acute in skilled trades where women are not traditionally employed (NESS, 2003) such as construction manufacturing and engineering. Interestingly, whilst Government statistics suggest that girls are now more likely to gain NVQ at level 3, women do not tend to work in jobs that have the greatest need for skill level 3. It is important, therefore, to ensure that young women make use of these skills and consider non traditional jobs throughout their lives.

Occupational segregation can be seen as having a negative impact on Britain's ability to compete, in that we have roughly half our potential skilled workforce not participating in the full range of jobs where their talents are desperately needed and to a certain extent, with respect to non-working mothers, not participating at all ('Work and families: choice and flexibility.' Government consultation August 2005 by the DTI).

There is a need to turn around the situation described by Castells, (2000) in which there is a growing division between 'masculinized' labour which entails workers with high-level skills and the prospect of a career and low-skilled labour which entails workers without credentials of both sexes working under 'feminized' conditions which are characterised by low levels of security and low wages.

Why do more women not seek training and work in traditionally male jobs?

Three of the key factors identified that currently inhibit the reduction of occupational segregation are perceived to be:

- The attitudes and perceptions of women towards non traditional jobs
- The lack of impartial information and advice and training opportunities to encourage women into non-traditional jobs
- Employer's attitudes.

The situation is improving slowly; however for example, the EOC in 2004 reported that any efforts made by employers to increase the number of women in non-traditional jobs are usually not sufficiently integrated with mainstream policies.

It is clear that women who do seek to enter non traditional jobs often find hurdles in their way. For example, women found it significantly more difficult to secure work experience placements with employers in order to complete their NVQ qualifications than their male counterparts (Dale et al., 2005). In mainstream training women often experience isolation if they are the only woman, where the training has inflexible hours and there is little support.

Gender segregation is also observed in apprenticeships and it has been stated that the current system only maintains the segregation, or even makes it worse (EOC May, 2005).

This research seeks to understand more about women returners' attitudes towards traditionally male jobs and the extent to which they could be encouraged to seek training and employment in these areas.

Where do women's attitudes and perceptions toward traditionally male jobs come from?

Many women are interested in non-traditional jobs when younger, but are discouraged, not supported, or not given the appropriate advice and guidance by teachers and careers advisers when at school or in further education. They are often not given the information on subject choices for non-traditional career routes (Dale et al., 2005), thereby reinforcing occupational segregation.

Research suggests that more work needs to be done to encourage young women to consider non traditional jobs. Smithson (1999) found that many young people between the ages of 18 and 30 form traditional gender specific plans and expectations about their future lives. The factors that can influence young women's career plans (Marks & Houston, 2002), include attitudes (Whitelaw et al., 2000), perceived social pressure (Roger & Duffield, 2000), and their mothers as role models (Tuck et al., 1994).

Dale et al (2005) and others suggest that careers advice and information, both at school and as an adult, for example through Jobcentre Plus tends to inhibit rather than encourage women to consider traditional male jobs. Furthermore, some women encounter resistance from their husbands or partners to embark on non-traditional skills training. Their success in a male domain in addition to them possibly earning more money than their partner can trigger resentment (Dale et al., 2005). This means that for many women (young or older), unless they specifically choose to enter a traditional male job, and they persist at this, they are unlikely to consider these as a serious option.

The decisions individuals make contribute to the continuation of occupational segregation, however, perceived occupational segregation in turn influences individuals' choices (Miller et al (2004).

Women returners in traditionally male jobs

Women currently working in male dominated professions generally agree that their career progression would have been easier had they been encouraged to peruse a non-traditional job (Dale et al (2005).

Women in Science Engineering and Technology (SET) occupations tend to have children when they are older (or not at all) compared to other occupations (Bebbington, 2002). Women occupy only two per cent or less of professional posts in many areas of SET (Bebbington, 2001).

What might encourage women returners to seek work in traditionally male jobs?

Women who currently work in non traditional skills sector experience considerable benefits from training and working in this sector, for example, the construction industry offers scope for self-employment. Some women move into male dominated sectors for the better pay they receive for doing traditionally male jobs (Dale et al., 2005). However, long and irregular hours of male-dominated professions with early starts and late finishes remain a barrier to women with children or caring responsibilities (Dale et al., 2005).

Employers attitudes

Employer provision of support for working parents is known to make it more likely that a mother will return to work (Marks & Houston, 2002).

There is some evidence that employers are increasingly recognising the benefits and added value to the businesses of employing more women. This is partly due to the fact that women need to be more highly skilled than men to succeed, therefore, they tend to be highly skilled and committed employees (Dale et al., 2005). Many organizations are more considerate, with a recent study (2005) finding that over a third of survey respondents (36 per cent) make special arrangements for employees with caring responsibilities and a third of organisations in the survey also provide childcare. Elder care provision, however, is only offered by a fraction of employers (4 per cent) (CIPD 'Flexible working', 2005).

Furthermore, some employers in the Information and communication technology (ICT) industry have demonstrated flexibility with regards to working hours in support of women trainees (e.g. early finish time and providing broadband at home) (Dale et al., 2005).

However, there is still a lot of evidence of employers' negative attitudes toward women in the male-dominated professions and even in employment in general. Women in training, as well as in employment face both overt and covert discrimination from employers. In some cases employers actually refuse to train or employ women (Dale et al., 2005). Employers often hold traditional views about the suitability of men or women for certain jobs and are sometimes unable or unwilling to consider flexible working and childcare issues. Some employers in the construction industry still believe that women should not work in construction and are not competent to do so (Dale et al., 2005). Jobs in the construction and plumbing sector often lack the flexibility required for combining work and caring responsibilities. A further problem is that some companies lack the facilities for women (e.g. female toilets) (Dale et al., 2005). Although it was by no means the norm, there was evidence that, in some situations, 'women were laughed at, bullied, faced antagonism, were given the worst jobs to do and were expected to make the tea' (Dale et al., 2005). There is evidence of cases of sexual harassment, occurring when women are isolated in male-dominated training courses and workplaces (EOC, 2004)

Women found that the male-dominated industry did not understand or cater for the requirements of flexibility around older children's needs (Dale et al., 2005).

Gender segregation is also observed in apprenticeships and it has been stated that the current system only maintains the segregation, or even makes it worse (EOC May, 2005). Any efforts made by employers to increase the number of women in non-traditional jobs are usually not sufficiently integrated and sustained (EOC, 2004).

Current provision

Much of the focus of support for women returning to work after caring responsibilities focuses on lone parents. This is an active process on behalf of government aimed at increasing their participation in work and to decrease their dependence on benefits. There is limited support of this nature directed at partnered women because they rarely claim benefits themselves.

There appears to be virtually no advice and support directly to help partnered women returners to enter male dominated skilled occupations. There are however some facilities that are targeted more generally that they could access given sufficient inclination time and resources to find them.

Generally, with a few exceptions, the help facilities are uncoordinated and subject to fluctuations in funding. It is also a matter of luck and timing to find the right web site, or person who is willing to inform and is capable of giving full and accurate information.

These help facilities can be divided into direct help to find work and training and help from pressure groups who work to improve circumstances that would facilitate an increase in working mothers or more women in traditional male occupations.

Government policy advisers are seeking to understand more about how women returners, particularly where they seek advice and information and how they find work in order to establish what extra needs to be done to support and encourage women to seek work in non traditional jobs.

2. WHO IS THIS RESEARCH ABOUT?

Summary

The women in the survey are from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and regions, with a median number of two children, the average age of which is 11 years. Half of the women own their own home and 93 per cent consider that their partner is the family's main wage earner. Around a quarter of women in this survey have level 3 as their highest level of qualifications and 53 per cent have level 2 as their highest qualification.

Findings

This section describes the circumstances of the women included in the sample.

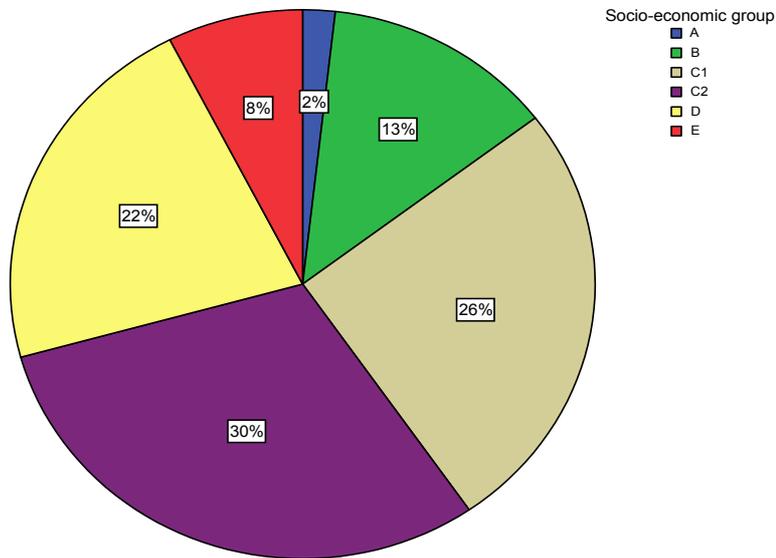
The women included in this survey:

- Are between the ages of 25 and 55, with an average age of 36
- Represent a spread of views from across the country with 31 per cent living in the North, 31 per cent living in the Midlands and 38 per cent living in the South of England
- All are partnered, with 93 per cent stating that their partner is the chief income earner
- Have between one and seven children; the median number of children is two. The children's ages range between 1 and 28 with an average age of 11 years
- Have had, or are currently on a career break with 69 per cent having had just one break in the last 10 years, 22 per cent having had two breaks and 9 per cent having had three or more breaks
- Are either unemployed or working part-time. The majority of the sample are currently not working (63 per cent), 37 per cent are employed part-time, and 2 per cent are self-employed. Of those who are currently working, the majority (61 per cent) are working 16 hours and less, with 39 per cent working between 17 and 30 hours
- Are working in a variety of jobs, primarily, in sales occupations (28 per cent), caring and personal services (28 per cent) and administrative jobs (13 per cent)
- Are from a range of socio-economic backgrounds (see Chart 1 below).

NB. The calculations for all charts are generated automatically and are subject to rounding to the nearest whole number.

Chart 1

Percentage of respondents from each socio-economic group



What type of qualifications do they hold?

The study focused on women who have qualifications at NVQ level 3 and below. The majority (53 per cent) of women gave their highest qualification as NVQ level 2 or equivalent, with 22 per cent holding NVQ level 3 equivalent qualifications. Nine per cent had no qualifications. The most frequently cited qualifications were CSE grade 1 (32 per cent) and 'O' levels (26 per cent), these last two are equivalent qualifications.

Some have A levels (14 per cent), these are predominantly:

- English Literature/Language
- Biology and Human Biology
- Mathematics.

City and Guilds (C&G) qualifications are held by 18 per cent. Mostly, they are uncertain what their C&G subject area was, those who knew identified their subjects areas as:

- Leisure, travel and tourism
- Retail and commercial enterprise
- Health, public service and care
- Information and communication technology.

To provide context to the findings and a greater understanding of the group of women interviewed, the following section provides a profile of the women by their level of qualification. The qualifications were split into 4 groups which broadly equate to:

- NVQ level 3 and equivalent
- NVQ level 2 and equivalent
- NVQ level 1 and equivalent
- No qualifications

Profile of women with qualifications at NVQ level 3 and equivalent

Most of the women in this group have reported taking one break in the last ten years and 57 per cent were not working when the survey was conducted. Prior to their most recent break 70 per cent were working full time. Thirty per cent worked in administrative occupations with 14 per cent in caring and personal service occupations.

Just over 40 per cent have returned to work, the vast majority intending to return to work sometime in the future. Encouragingly, 72 per cent of those who are working have found work that provides flexible working or term time working in order to combine work with child care responsibilities.

Women in this group are generally not returning to the same employer (64 per cent) and the majority have taken work with fewer hours than they worked before the break. Just under two thirds are working in administrative jobs with 24 per cent working in caring personal service occupations. Further analysis shows that very few are actually working in what they would consider their ideal job.

Profile of women with qualifications at NVQ level 2 and equivalent

Most of the women in this group have reported taking one break in the last ten years and just under two thirds (62 per cent) were not working when the survey was conducted.

Prior to their most recent break just over half were working full time. The areas of work differ from the previous group in that the majority of women work in three occupational areas: sales occupations (19 per cent), administrative occupations (17 per cent) and caring and personal service occupations (17 per cent).

Just over half of the women in this group have returned to work again, of these women the vast majority (85 per cent) have returned to a different job, again the majority also reduced their hours of work, compared with their job before the break. Over a third (35 per cent) are now working in caring and personal service occupations and 27 per cent are working in sales.

Further analysis shows that again very few are actually working in what they would consider their ideal job. Whilst 30 per cent state they want to work in caring and personal services occupations, less than half of those currently working in this area of work stated this was their ideal area of work.

Profile of women with qualifications at NVQ 1 level and equivalent

Most of the women in this group have reported taking one break in the last ten years and 55 per cent were not working when the survey was conducted.

Prior to their most recent break 64 per cent were working full time. Again the areas they worked in differ from the previous groups with 30 per cent working in sales occupations.

Forty four per cent of the women in this group have returned to work again, 75 per cent have returned to a different job, almost all taking a job with less hours of work than they worked before the break. Almost half returned to work in sales occupations, others working in a range of occupational areas. Given that 41 per cent in this group state they want to work in caring and personal services occupations, clearly again few are working in their preferred occupation.

Profile of women with no qualifications

A higher percentage (76 per cent) of this group are currently not working at present. Before their first break 28 per cent were working in caring and personal services and 20 per cent were in sales. They gave their ideal job as caring and personal service (42 per cent). The sample size for those without qualification who have returned to work was too small for meaningful analysis.

What does this mean?

What is clear from these profiles is that the types of jobs sought are different between each group, for women with qualifications below level 2 are more likely to work in sales occupations and caring and personal services occupations. Women with higher qualifications are more likely to work in administrative jobs.

The findings suggest that many women are taking work that provides them with flexible working patterns and we can surmise that the difference in work areas reflect the type of work they are able to get with their current educational level.

Further analysis was carried out to see if any of the differences noted between the groups was significant. They were not, probably because of the different sample sizes. However, the data does suggest some trends that are useful to consider.

Women with higher level qualifications appear:

- More likely to have a current job which provides flexible hours. This could suggest that the more qualifications you have the greater the choice of employment options
- Slightly more likely to return to the same job

The majority of women are not working in their ideal job, some clearly because they do not have the qualifications to do so, some possibly because the opportunities are not available to them.

3. WHAT IS THE PATTERN OF WOMENS' WORKING LIVES?

Summary

The majority (69 per cent) have had just one break, 22 per cent have had two breaks, with the average break being just under 5 years. Mostly what prompts a break is having a baby, but it is not as simple as taking time off for each child then going back to work before taking time off for the next. Some are going back between pregnancies and some are not. Some are taking extra breaks when their children are older. Nearly half (43 per cent) have left employment to care for their families and have never gone back to work outside the home.

Before the women's most recent break half worked full-time and now they work part-time or not at all. Findings show a narrowing of options when women return to work.

Half of those currently working have chosen jobs where they can influence the hours they work, and when they work them, at least to a moderate extent.

Most of the employed women in the survey are supported by either partners or family taking on the care responsibilities while they are at work.

Returning to work would seem to be an active process for 57 per cent of the women who had returned to work after their most recent break; for 43 per cent this was more of a passive process, reliant on chance. A third of the women in the survey said that they had not looked for work. However, of these 91 per cent do intend to increase their participation in work outside the home at some time in the future even if this is in more than a year's time.

When looking for work the greater percentage of women in the survey find newspapers (54 per cent) and social networking useful sources of both job information and actually finding work.

Findings

This section describes the pattern of women's working lives up to the point at which the survey took place. It includes the length and nature of the caring breaks, the types of jobs taken, the influence they have over their hours, the type of child care they use and the help they receive when returning to work.

Length of recent breaks from work

The length of the women's most recent break ranges from under a month (having just started their break) up to 25 years; the average length of break is just under 5 years (59 months). Of these women, 15 per cent have taken a break that has lasted over 9 years.

Because of the small sample size for the latter group, we have chosen in the main to report only on the two most recent breaks.

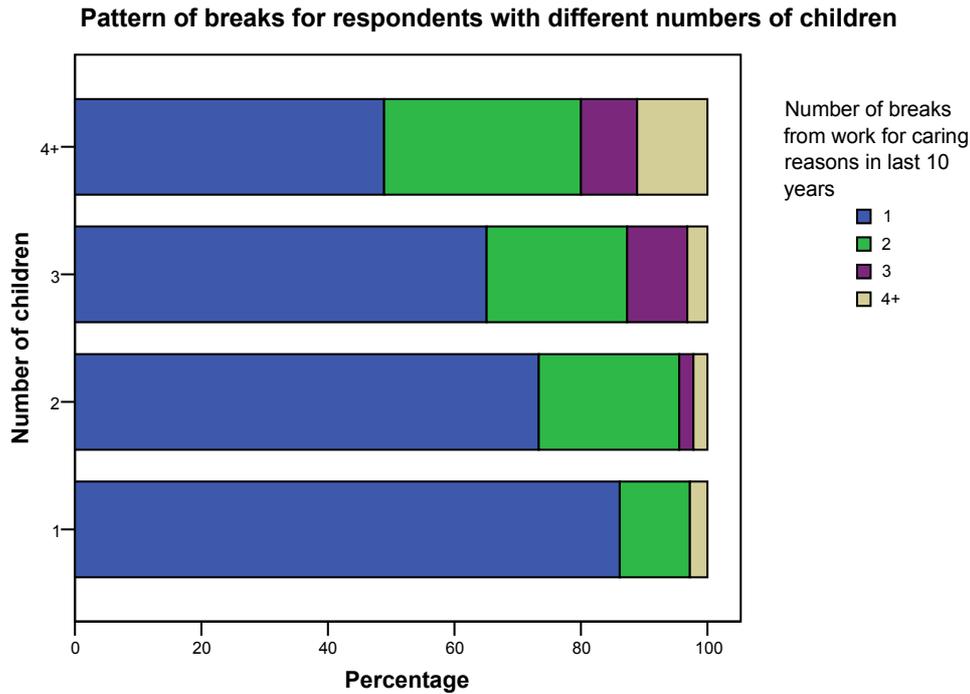
Nature of the breaks

Of those interviewed, 43 per cent have had one break from work for caring reasons, and are currently unemployed. The average age of their oldest child is 9.6 years, and roughly two thirds of those who have left work and are currently unemployed have eldest children between the ages of 3 and 16. The average age of the mother is 35, and roughly two thirds of those who have left work and never gone back are between the ages of 29 and 41. The most common reason given for taking the most recent break was to have a baby (75 per cent). The second most common reason was taking a break to look after children (55%). Only 4 per cent of the women had a break solely to look after an adult.

Pattern of breaks

As expected, having more children is associated with having more breaks ($r=.23, p<.01$). However, as can be seen from Chart 2 it is not as simple as taking time off for each child then going back to work before taking time off for the next. Some are going back between pregnancies and some are not. Also some are taking extra breaks when their children are older. As mentioned previously breaks can be prompted by the necessity to look after children, not always because they are having a baby.

Chart 2



Working lives prior to the break

Half of the women worked full-time before their most recent break (over 35 hours) and now they work part-time or not at all.

The working women have a range of work contracts, with 36 per cent of women undertaking flexible work, 26 per cent of women had term time working and 35 per cent worked fixed hours contracts. Interestingly, 5 per cent are self employed.

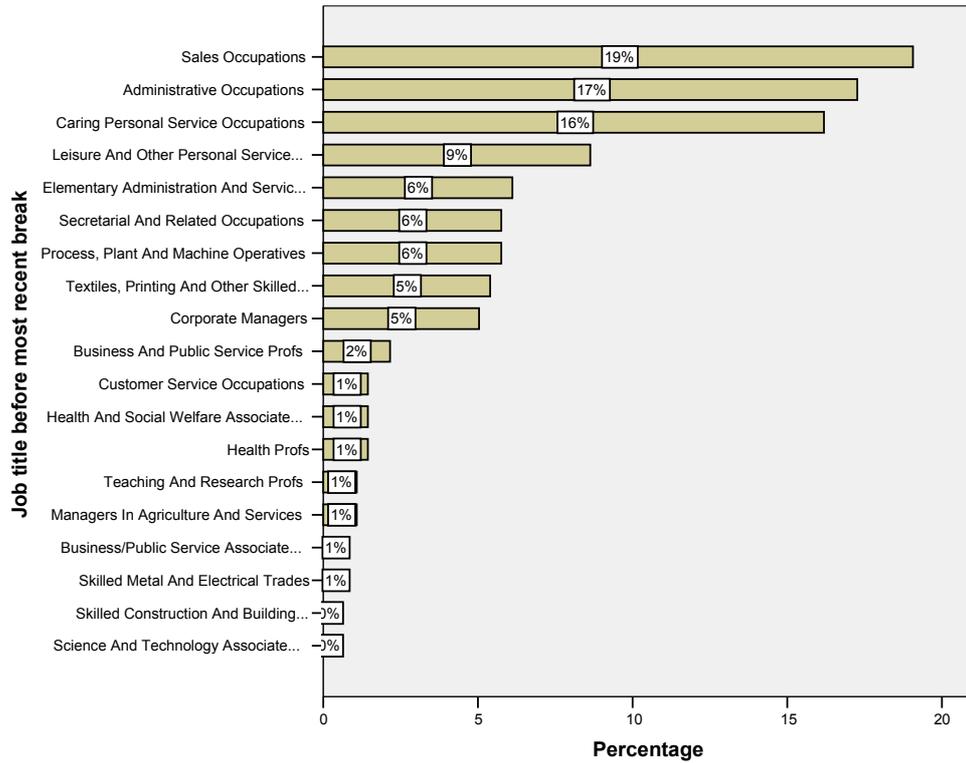
On returning to work after this break, most women changed their job and reduced their hours of work (67 per cent). While 45 per cent, took a lower paid job in a different organization, 28 per cent reported an increase in pay. This may in part be due to the rises in average pay that have occurred during their career break.

Patterns of occupations

Prior to taking their most recent break from work, the women worked in a variety of occupations; however the three most frequently cited were sales, administrative and caring and personal services (see Chart 3).

Chart 3

Occupation of respondents before their most recent break



The women in the survey can be split into two groups; one group who have had several breaks, i.e., they have had experience of returning to work after break(s), and those who have had one break and not returned to work. The latter group have come from a greater mix of work backgrounds. They were less likely to have been working in sales and administrative occupations prior to taking a break, than those women who have had experience of returning to work. Interestingly, when compared to those who have had experience of returning to work, 6 per cent more of women with only one break had been corporate managers and process plant and machine operatives before they left work.

This finding might suggest that there is a tendency for women who previously had higher level jobs and less traditionally female jobs to be the ones who are less likely to return to work once they have left. Maybe this is because there is less opportunity provided by employers for family friendly work in higher level and traditionally male jobs (please refer to the employers comments section on 'The nature of the job' and particular the part of the narrative that relates to pivotal roles).

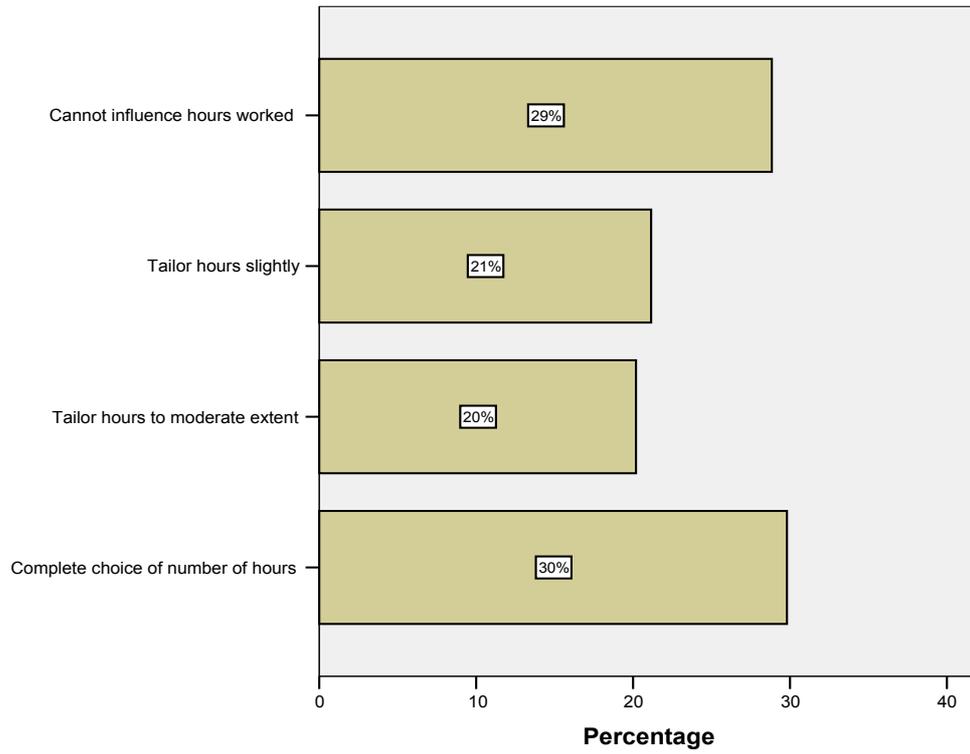
Interestingly there are currently proportionally fewer women working in 'leisure and other personal service occupations' than there were before their last, most recent break.

Extent of influence over current working conditions

Half of the women currently working have chosen jobs where they can influence the number of hours they work, at least to a moderate extent (see Chart 4).

Chart 4

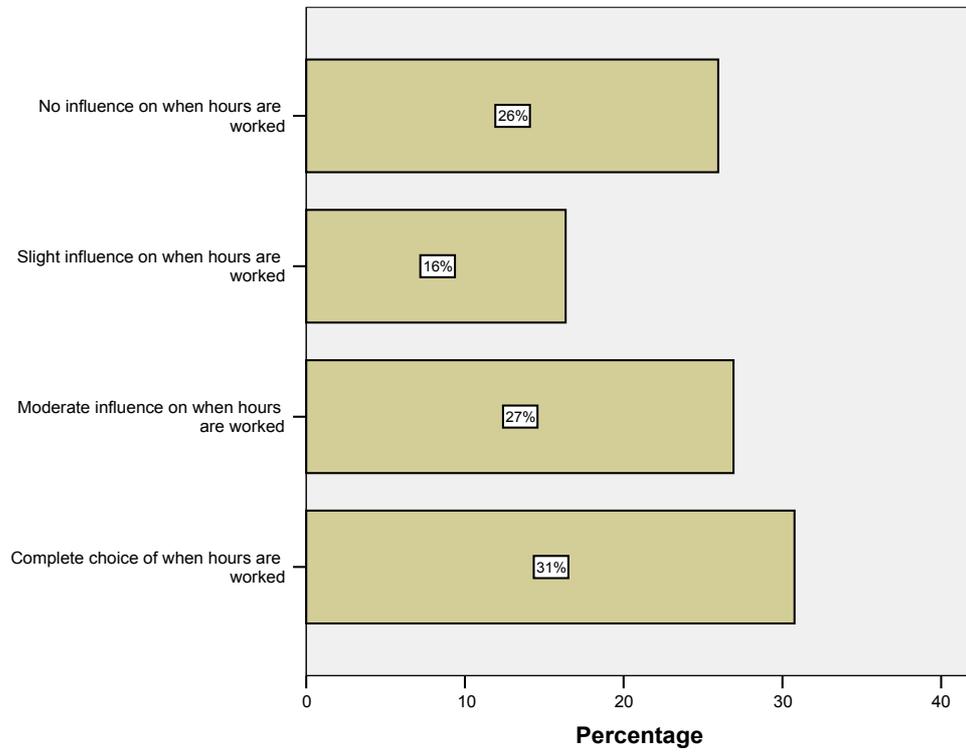
Percentage of repondents who, in discussion with their employer, are able, or not able, to tailor the number of hours worked



Over half of those currently working have chosen jobs where they can influence when they work their chosen hours (see Chart 5).

Chart 5

Percentage of respondents who, in discussions with their employer, are able, or not able, to tailor when they work

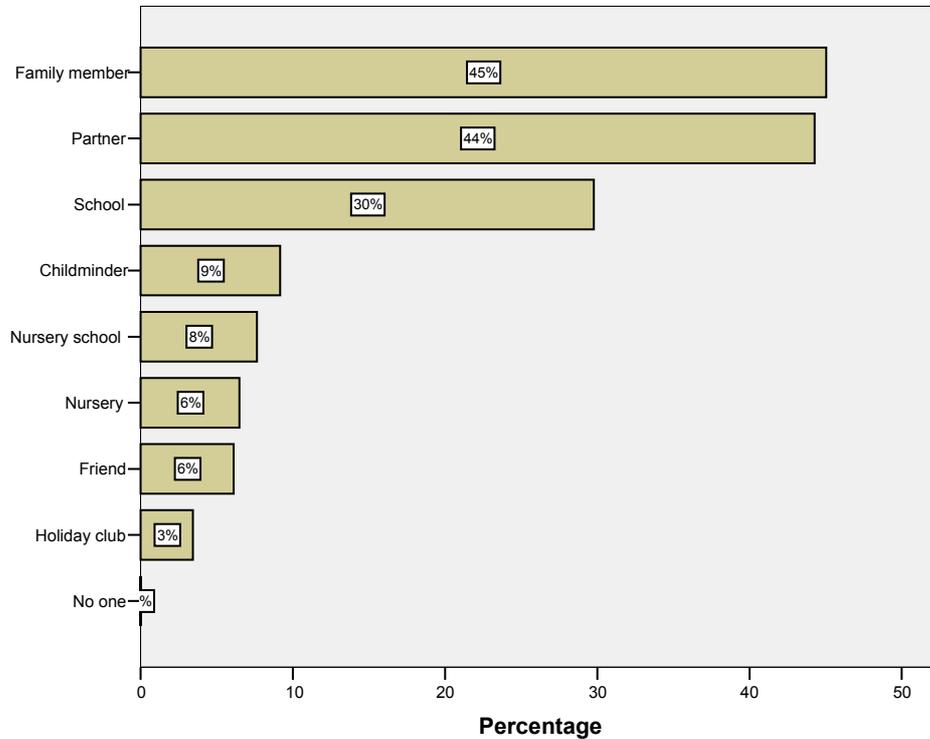


Child care patterns when they work

Most of the employed women in the survey are supported by either partners or family taking on the care responsibilities while they are at work (see Chart 6).

Chart 6

Percentage of respondents who used each of the following care options when they are working



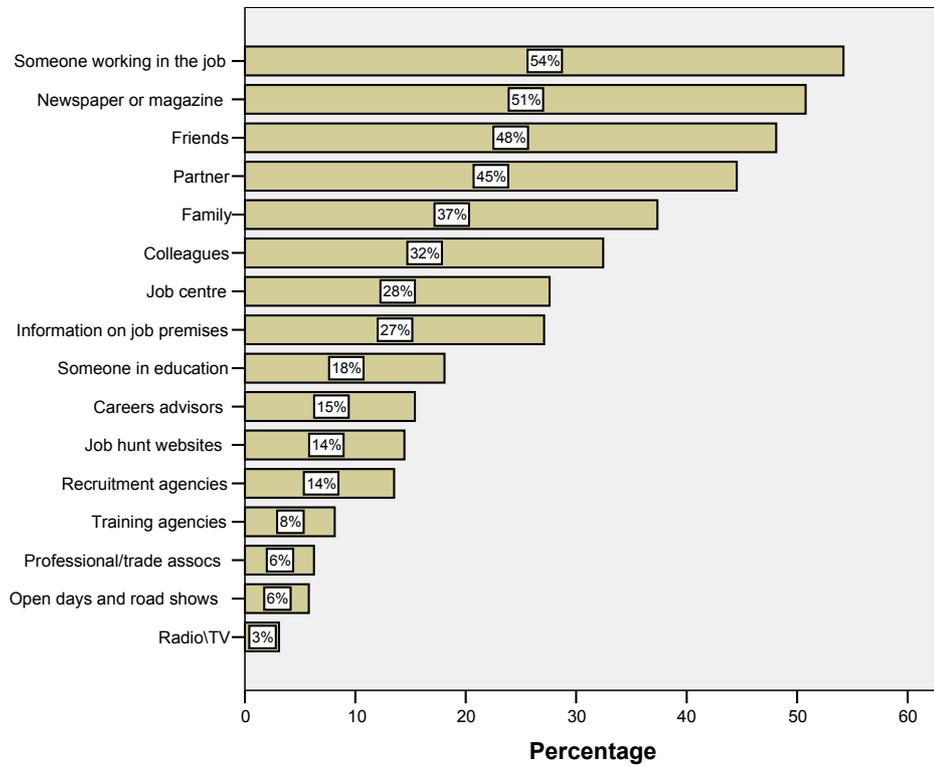
Findings suggest the three key options namely, partner, family and school, or a combination of these, are the main options for all socio-economic groups, however, when we look at child care options (nursery and childminders), which cost money, these are used to greater extent by those in socio-economic groups A and B. Partners as a child care option, are used to a greater extent by people in socio-economic groups D and E.

Information sources that supported women's return to work

When looking for work the greater percentage of women in the survey find newspapers and social networking useful sources of information; fewer find the more formal sources of information helpful (see Chart 7). Employers say that they use social networks to recruit to fill traditionally male vacancies. It is unlikely, however, that the same social networks are used by women returners and employers with traditionally male jobs to offer.

Chart 7

Percentage of respondents who found the following sources of information helpful when they were looking for work

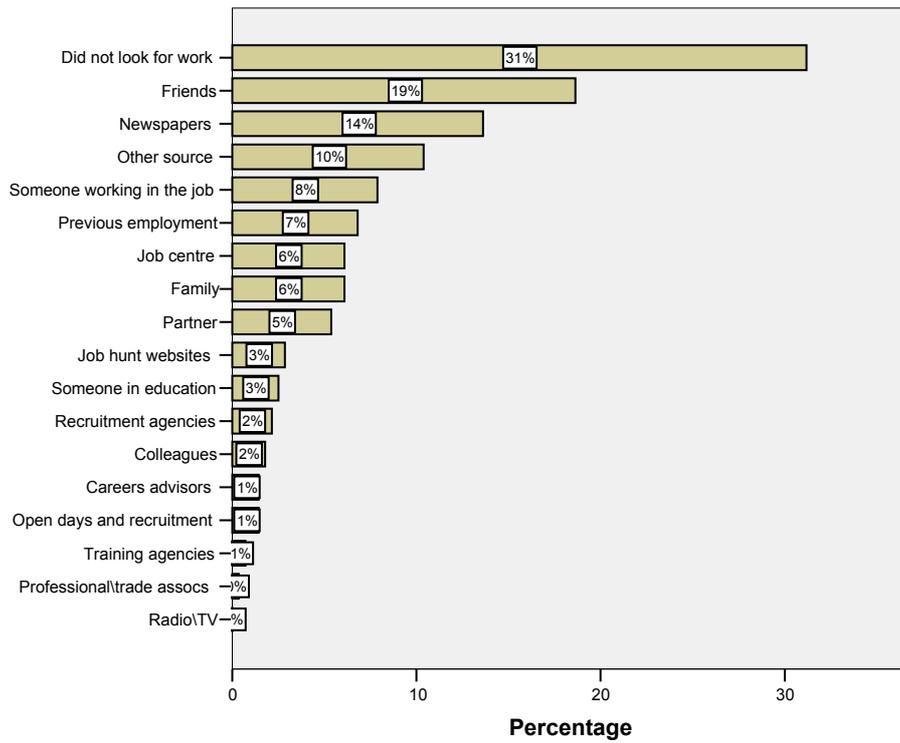


Where women found work after their first most recent break

Of the women who looked for work after their most recent break, the highest percentage found their jobs through friends and newspapers (see Chart 8).

Chart 8

Percentage of respondents who found a job after their most recent break from the following sources



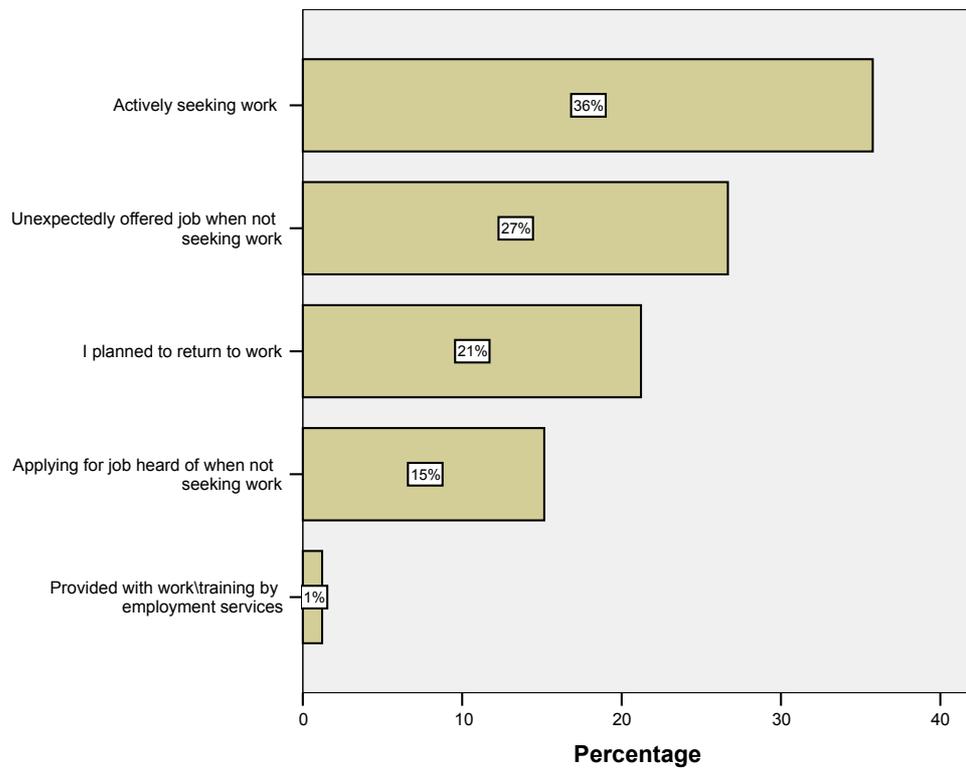
A third of the women in the survey said that they had not looked for work. However of these, 91 per cent do intend to increase their participation in work outside the home at some time in the future.

Is returning to work an active process?

Returning to work would seem to be an active process for 57 per cent of those who had returned to work after their most recent break; for 43 per cent this was more of a passive process, reliant on chance (see Chart 9).

Chart 9

Percentage of respondents who gave the following as the way they returned to work after their most recent break for caring reasons



4. WHAT HAS INFLUENCED WOMEN'S LIVES SO FAR?

Summary

Women overwhelmingly prefer a style of mothering that does not involve them in full-time work; almost half (49 per cent) preferring to be a traditional 'stay at home' mum. Women are not necessarily living their lives as they would wish. Of those who are currently working, 43 per cent would prefer it if they could stay at home full-time, and of the women who are currently not working, 42 per cent would like to be able to work part-time.

Women have a strong belief in equality of opportunity, but in practice 54 per cent feel it is the woman's role to stay at home if a child is ill. Women perceive that advice given at school and since then has encouraged them to look for traditionally female work more than traditionally male work. What has happened subsequently in their lives has not encouraged them to think other wise. This is not to say that the advice given at school or elsewhere is actually biased, but that they perceive it to be so.

Findings

Women's attitudes to mother's roles

To appreciate the women's attitudes to working and caring they were asked what pattern of child rearing they would prefer. Chart 10 gives the results of what they considered to be their preferred option.

The women overwhelmingly preferred options that did not involve them in full-time work, and almost half (49 per cent) preferring the option of being a traditional 'stay at home' mum. This sentiment is echoed in the comments, which frequently espoused the correctness of the traditional approach; that it should be respected and supported, and that mothers should not be pushed into going out to work. Here are two examples:

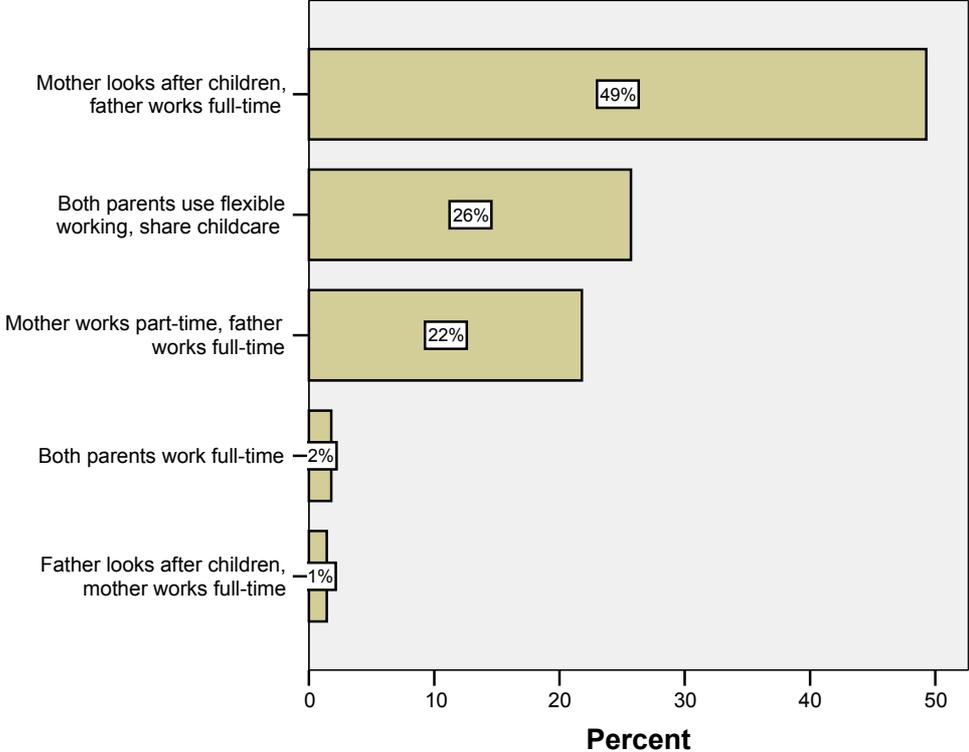
'I'm old fashioned. I think if you have had children it's up to you to bring them up.'

'Too much pressure is upon women to return to work to the detriment of family life. Peer pressure e.g. 'holidays abroad' plays a great role of women returning to work instead of fulfilling responsibilities as a mother, a role which is supremely underrated.'

However 48 per cent would like a situation where they could work part-time. Around a half of these would like a situation where both parents shared the child care and the responsibility for earning a living, and the other half want to work part-time with their partners working full-time.

Chart 10

Percentage of repondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income



Women’s responses to these questions also highlight another issue, namely that they are not necessarily living their lives as they would wish. Of those who are currently working, 43 per cent would prefer it if they could stay at home full-time, and of the women who are currently not working, 42 per cent would like to be able to work part-time.

Chart 11

Percentage of working repondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income

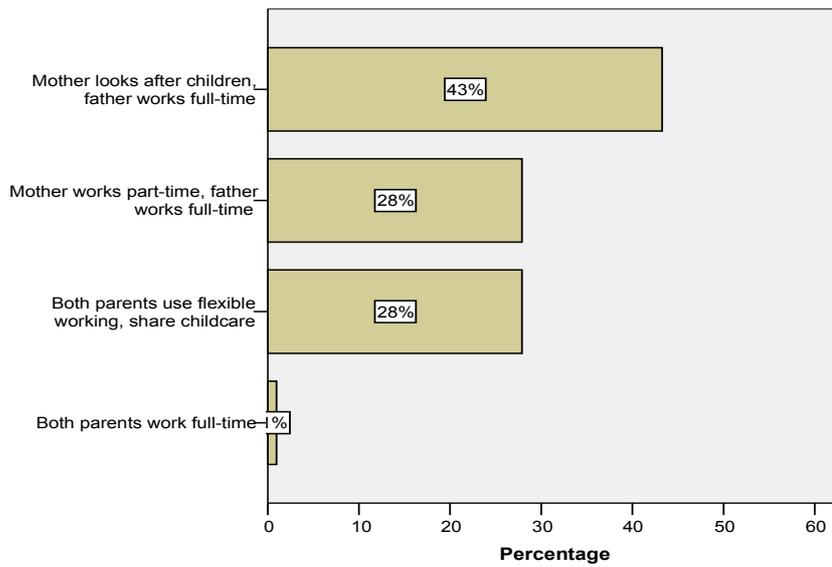
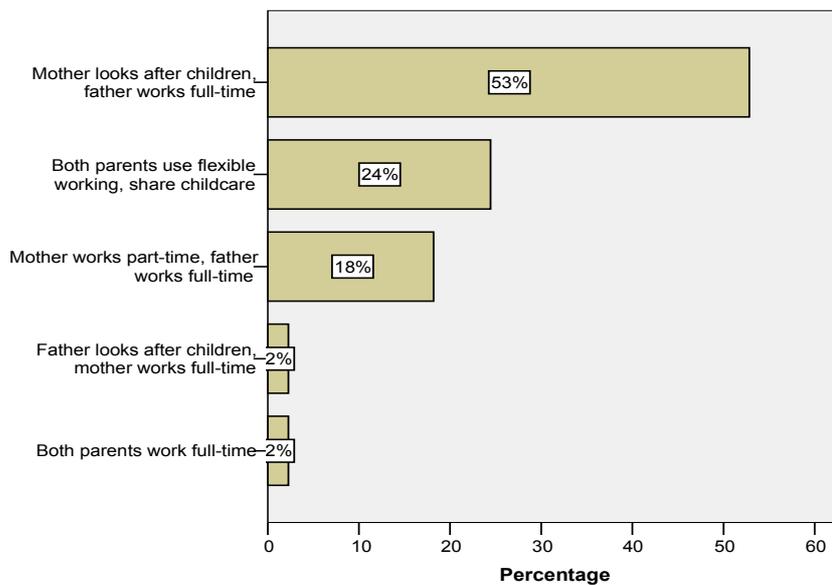


Chart 12

Percentage of non-working repondents who expressed a preference for each of the options below, if all options listed result in same amount of income



Women's attitudes to equal opportunities

To appreciate the women's attitudes to equal opportunities they were asked to indicate their agreement to a set of statements provided by DTI, first reported in Houston and Waumsley, (2003) and subsequently in Houston and Marks, (2005). Our findings for this group of women are very different from the findings in these reports, where there was a strong preference for flexible practices that shared the caring role.

The majority agree with equality of opportunity. The percentage of those who agree with the positive equality of opportunity statements is reflected by the following:

- 98 per cent thought girls should have the same chances as boys to get some training or have a career
- 90 per cent thought men and women should have the same chance to do the same kind of work
- 83 per cent thought men and women should do the same jobs round the house
- 60 per cent thought that there should be more women who are bosses in important jobs in business and industry
- 71 per cent disagreed that it is less important for a woman to go out to work than a man.

However, while women espoused gender equality as a matter of policy at a more practical level, when there is a problem concerning the children, 54 per cent agreed that if a child is ill and both parents are working that it should be the mother who takes time off. As in 93 per cent of cases the women's partner is considered the chief income earner this could be seen as a practical way of protecting the work record of the major wage earner. But of the respondents who consider they themselves are the chief income earner the percentage who think that the mother should take time off if the child is ill increases to 62 per cent, showing a preference for care.

Has advice or experience biased choice of job search?

Interviewees were asked what had made them think that they should look for a traditionally male job and what had made them think about looking for a traditionally female job. Charts 13 and 14 present the percentage of those who responded that that factor had made them look for a male or female job by a 'moderate amount', 'to a great extent' and to a 'very great extent'.

Chart 13

Factors that made respondents think they should look for male jobs

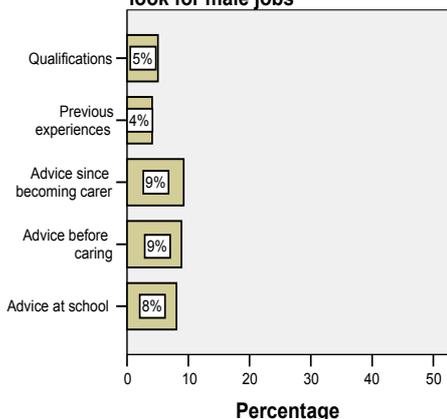
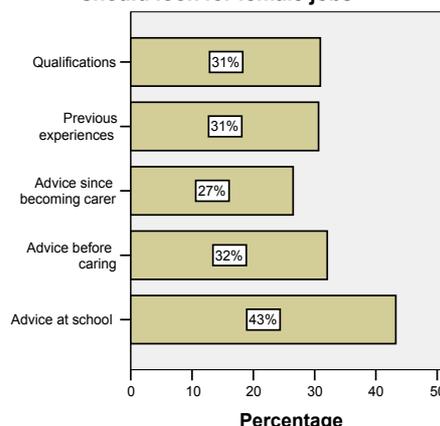


Chart 14

Factors that made respondents think they should look for female jobs



A greater percentage of women are getting effective advice that makes them consider women’s jobs rather than men’s jobs, and that this bias towards women’s jobs starts at school. This is something that employers have also noticed and reported upon when they were interviewed. This apparent bias is then reinforced at later points in women’s lives by advice they are getting, experience gained and as a consequence of qualifications that they hold.

5. ARE THE WOMEN ACHIEVING THEIR POTENTIAL, AND IF NOT, WHY NOT?

Summary

Women want jobs that are intrinsically motivating and socially fulfilling, and need jobs that are flexible and fit in with family care responsibilities. Evidence suggests that they are compromising by taking jobs which do not necessarily fulfil their personal desires in favour of ones that fit in with their family. This leads, for example, to a situation where 28 per cent of the women in the survey are working in sales occupations that are well known for offering part-time and flexible working, and only seven per cent actually want to do so. Also, echoing a point from a previous section, of the women who are currently not working, 42 per cent would like to be able to work part-time.

Findings

This section deals with one of the key issues the study set out to explore, namely whether women are achieving what they want at work. This is done firstly by looking at the factors all the women in the survey search for when they are thinking about returning to work after a caring break. Secondly we compared the working women’s current jobs with the jobs they would ideally like to do, even if this means doing extra training.

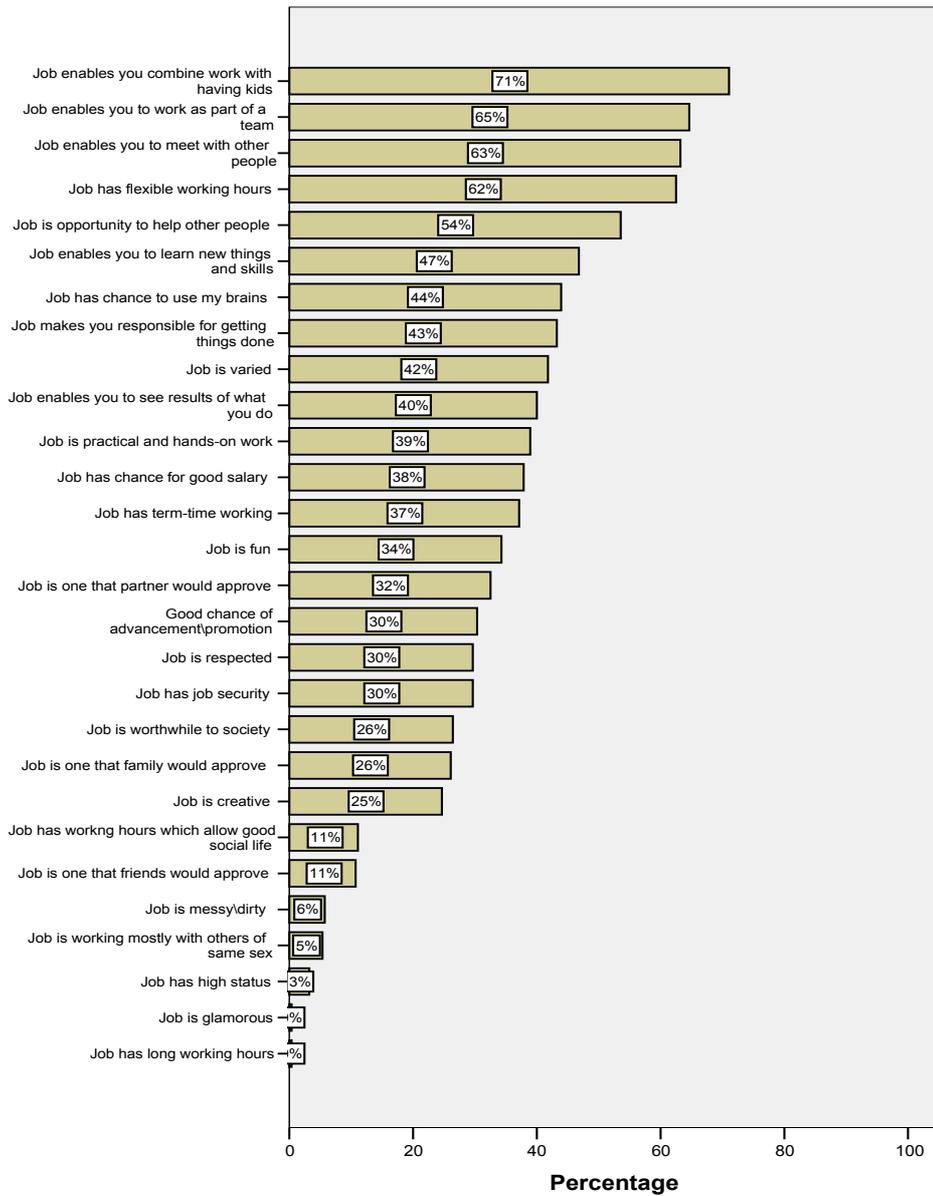
What do women look for in a job when they are considering returning to work after a caring break?

Women were asked to identify which factors were important to them in a job, when they were considering returning to work. Chart 15 gives the list of factors they were given to choose from and the frequency with which each was chosen as important. It has to be born in mind that these responses are being collected retrospectively which means that they may not be an accurate reflection of what they were thinking at the time.

The list of job factors was supplied by DTI from work currently being undertaken by Surrey university and is used in several subsequent questions so that comparisons can be made.

Chart 15

Percentage of all respondents who considered the factors below were important when looking to return to work

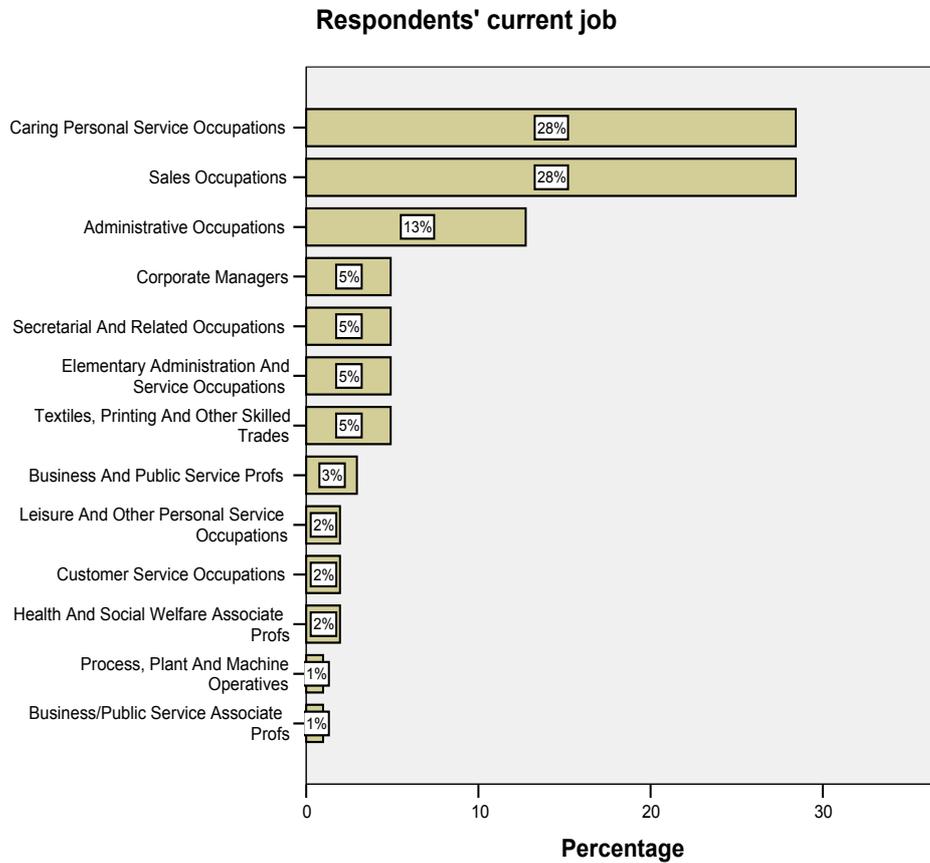


Women are looking for a job that fits in with childcare responsibilities but also provides social and intrinsic satisfaction. When women are thinking of returning to work, fewer are looking for a high salary, promotion prospects or job security, and they are not looking for high status or glamour. As might be expected none are looking for long working hours.

How do the working women's current jobs compare with their ideal job?

Women who were working were asked what job it was they did. They were also asked what their ideal job would be. Their answers were then grouped using SOC coding. Charts 16 and 17 give the results.

Chart 16

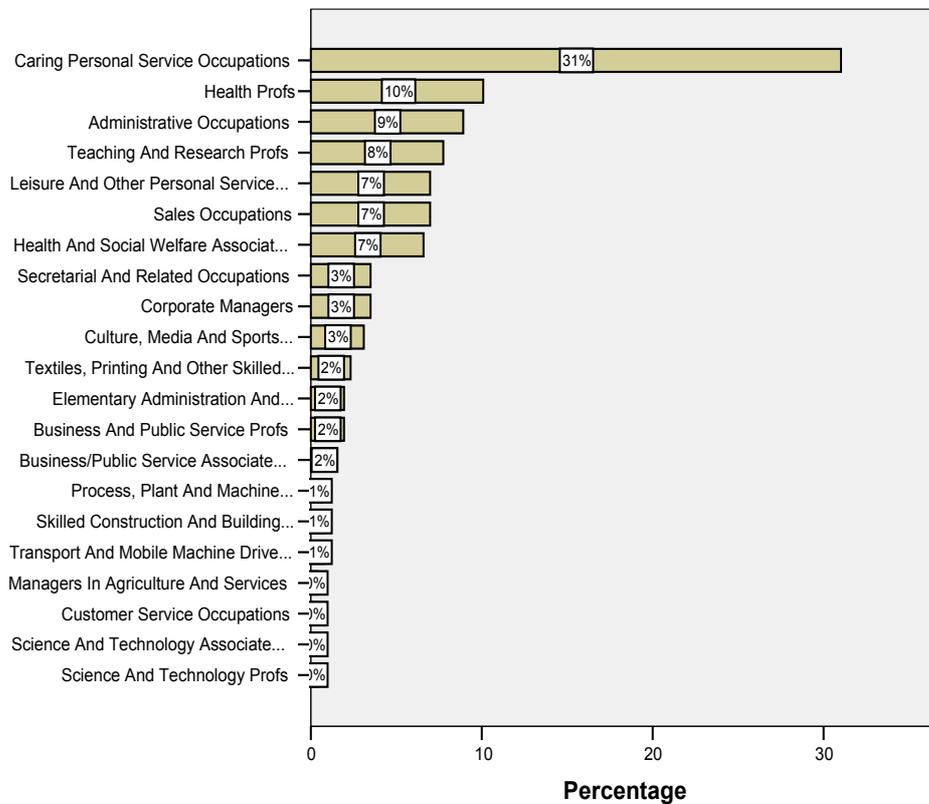


Women are mainly engaged in sales, caring and administration. Except for corporate managers few are engaged in what might be considered traditionally male jobs and none in construction or science.

Teaching / research professionals or health jobs do not arise in Chart 16 because the survey sample only women who currently have no qualifications or qualifications below NVQ level 4 and equivalent.

Chart 17

Respondents' ideal job (one they could realistically do, possibly with re-training)



Few women, if any, consider traditionally male jobs as their ideal. If the results in Charts 16 and 17 are compared it can be seen that...

- The highest percentage (31 per cent) of women want to do caring jobs, and that is what the highest percentage (26 per cent) are doing. In addition 10 per cent want to be health professionals and 8 per cent want to be teachers, for these they would need to increase their current level of qualifications
- More women want to be involved in the leisure industry, health and social welfare and culture media and sport than there are currently
- Sales occupations are only considered ideal by 7 per cent of the women but 28 per cent are currently working in sales
- Fewer want to work in customer service than there are currently
- Forty per cent of women currently working in sales want to work in caring personal services.

Findings suggest that a number of women would ideally seek to work in different occupations, some clearly requiring higher level training, such as teaching and health professionals. In short they may not be achieving their potential.

Are women getting what they want out of the jobs they do?

In order to look at the issue in more detail, the employed women were asked about what they considered was important in their current job (see Chart 18) and what factors they considered were important in their ideal job (see Chart 19). In

this way it is possible to compare the factors of current and ideal job to find out if working women's jobs are really meeting their aspirations, or if they are just settling for what is practical for them to do.

Chart 18

Percentage of working respondents who considered the factors below were important in their current job

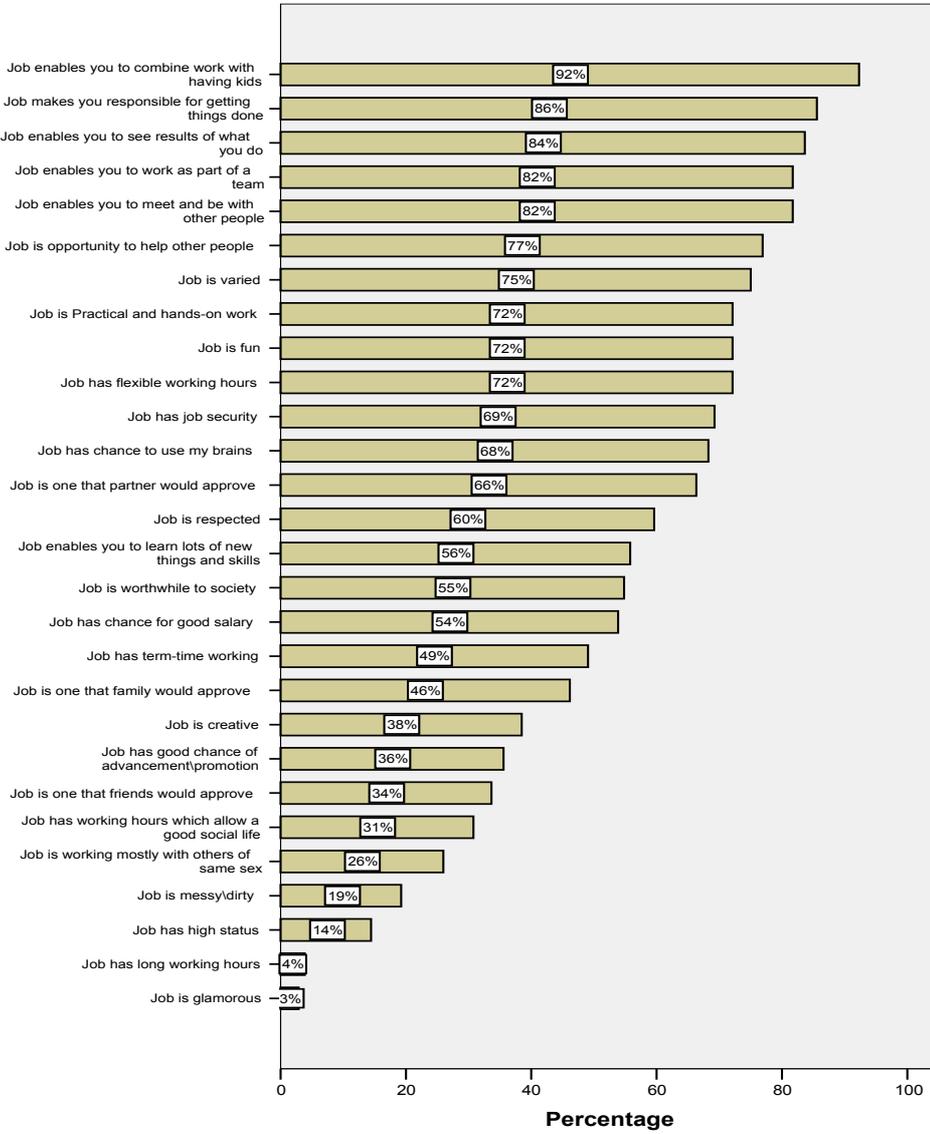
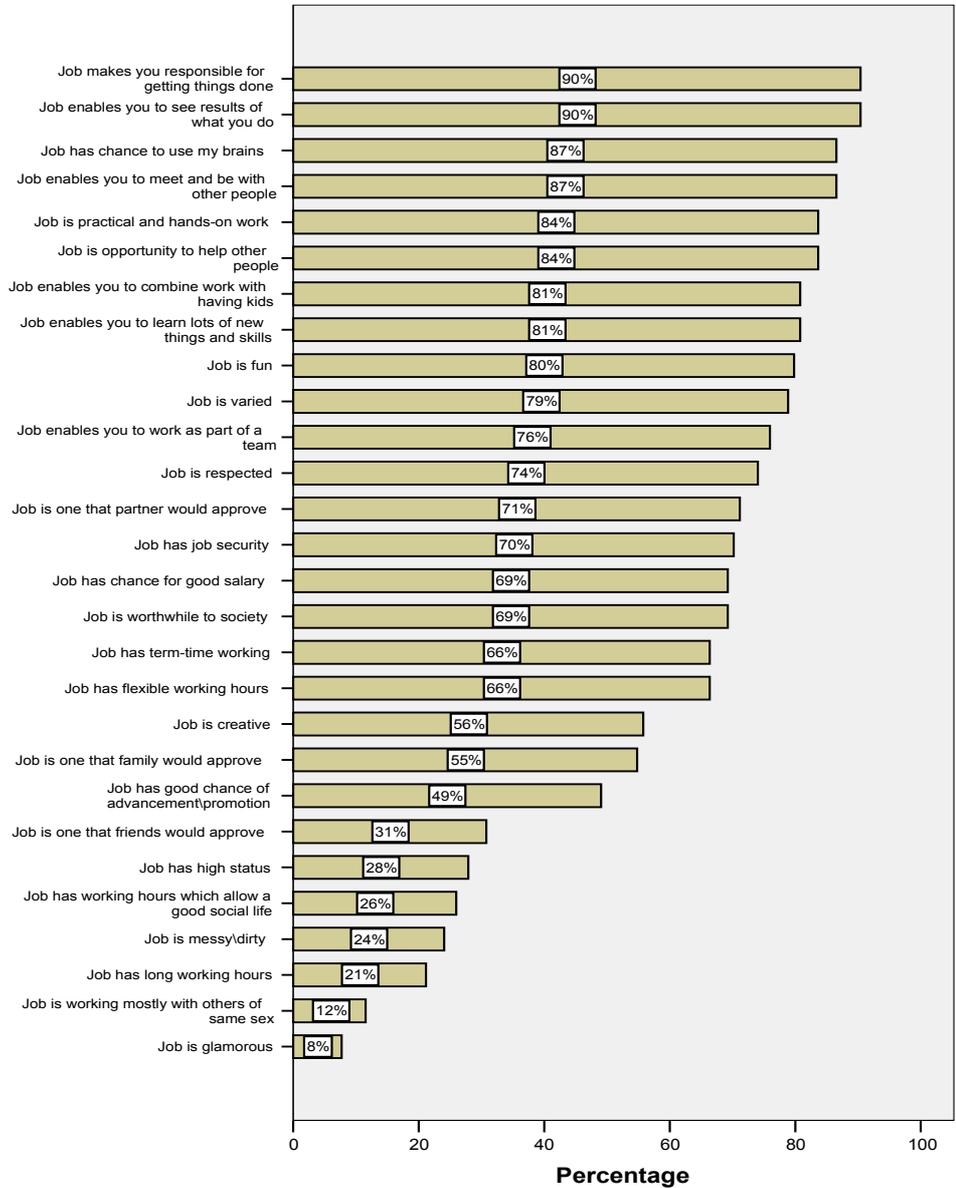


Chart 19

Percentage of working respondents who considered the factors below were important in their ideal job



Findings suggest that combining work with having kids is at the top of the list of important factors in the women's current jobs (i.e., it is chosen as an important factor by the highest percentage of respondents). When considering their ideal job, the intrinsic and social factors are chosen as important by a greater percentage of the women than being able to combine the job with having kids. Term-time and flexible working hours, promotion prospects, a social life and high status and even glamour, are considered to be important by a greater percentage of women in their ideal job than

in their current job. Interestingly, around a quarter of the women think that it is important that their ideal job has long working hours when only 4 per cent consider it important in their current job. So it seems that to some extent they are compromising on what they would ideally like to do in favour of what is practical in the current employment climate when they have primary care responsibilities.

6. THE FUTURE

Summary

The majority of women in the survey want to increase their participation in work outside the home, even if this increase is not expected to take place for 12 months or more. Those already in work appear to have slightly higher aspirations in terms of pay and status than those who are not currently working.

Findings

This section describes the aspirations of the women in the survey with regard to working outside the home in the future.

Do the women in the survey want to increase their participation in work outside the home?

Of those women who responded, 81 per cent want to increase their participation in work at some time in the future and of those women, 57 per cent believe that it will be more than 12 months before this increase occurs.

Of those who are currently working:

- 67 per cent want to increase their participation in work.
- 96 per cent wanted to do this by increasing their hours
- 67 per cent are looking to increase their pay
- 53 per cent want a similar status job, 44 per cent want a higher status job and only 3 per cent would accept a lower status job
- 12 per cent would consider self employment.

Of those not currently working 90 per cent want to increase their participation in work. Of this group:

- 46 per cent want a job with similar pay to the job they were doing before they took their break, but 43 per cent want higher pay than before. However, 11 per cent are prepared to take a lower paid job than they previously had before their caring break.
- Only 29 per cent want a higher status job, 57 per cent want a job of similar status and 14 per cent would accept a lower status job.
- 31 per cent would consider self employment.

Findings suggest for those already in work this experience has given them slightly higher aspirations than those who are not. They now realise what they can achieve.

Fifty eight per cent of all those who want to increase their participation in work outside the home are looking for an employer who will provide them with job training and 25 per cent want training that leads to nationally recognised qualifications. Seventeen per cent would like full-time education or training that would increase their chances of obtaining work.

7. WHAT INFLUENCES WOMEN WHEN THEY ARE LOOKING FOR WORK?

Summary

As well as the financial incentive, intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and companionship also drive the decision to return to work.

Findings

This section looks at the nature of the views that women returners hold that influence when they look for work.

Of the women in this study, 37 per cent are currently working and 67 per cent of this group want to increase their participation in work. Of those currently not working 90 per cent want to return to work in some form and at some time.

In order to discover what drives the decision to increase participation in work outside the home the women were asked how important certain factors were in influencing their decision to return to work. The questions were provided by DTI from work by Doorewaard (2004) and Rose et al (1982). The factors that are judged important are:

- Having the opportunity to gain satisfaction from doing a job they enjoy (88 per cent)
- Companionship (76 per cent)
- Financial independence (62 per cent)
- Money for extras like holidays (63 per cent)
- To provide day-to-day necessities (48 per cent).

Whilst the financial aspects play an important role for the majority of the women in taking the decision to return to work, the survey findings suggests intrinsic aspects such as companionship and job satisfaction are important to the women.

8. WHAT MIGHT ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO SEEK WORK IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE JOB?

Summary

The factors that would 'sell' the idea of doing a male job to the women in the study are the opportunity to see an end product of what they do, and to develop skills and learn new things. Plumbing and building in particular are considered by the majority of the women to have factors that most of the women want in their ideal job, i.e., enabling you to see that results of what you do, and making you responsible for getting things done. Although more of the women thought that the traditionally female jobs were better for meeting people. Generally male jobs are considered to be messy and dirty and involve long working hours, factors that few of the women want in their ideal job. So anything which can be done to dispel these images would also help to 'sell' the idea of traditionally male jobs to women.

There is evidence suggesting that women who currently have NVQ level 3, or equivalent, and those who reside in the South and Midlands, might be more easily persuaded to take on male jobs. Also those who expect a male job to be interesting are more likely to be persuaded to look for work and training in a male job.

Women's expectations in a traditionally male job were generally more positive than negative. However those with no qualifications or qualifications lower than below level NVQ level 2, or equivalent have higher negative expectations concerning social isolation.

Women are not concerned about their basic literacy or level of confidence to learn new things, but of being put in a pressure position where they are unprepared and trained.

Almost half the women said that they had previously enjoyed learning new skills, gaining experience in a new job role and working toward educational qualifications. Around a third enjoyed training courses and working for vocational qualifications. This indicates a level of enthusiasm that could be built upon.

As the top concern for respondents is that they would not get adequate training if they were to train for a new job, it is not surprising that the top four initiatives that they think would be important if women returners are to be assisted to go into traditionally male jobs are related to the provision of training opportunities. It can also be seen that employer-provided transport and employers being paid to employ them do not appeal to the same extent.

Findings

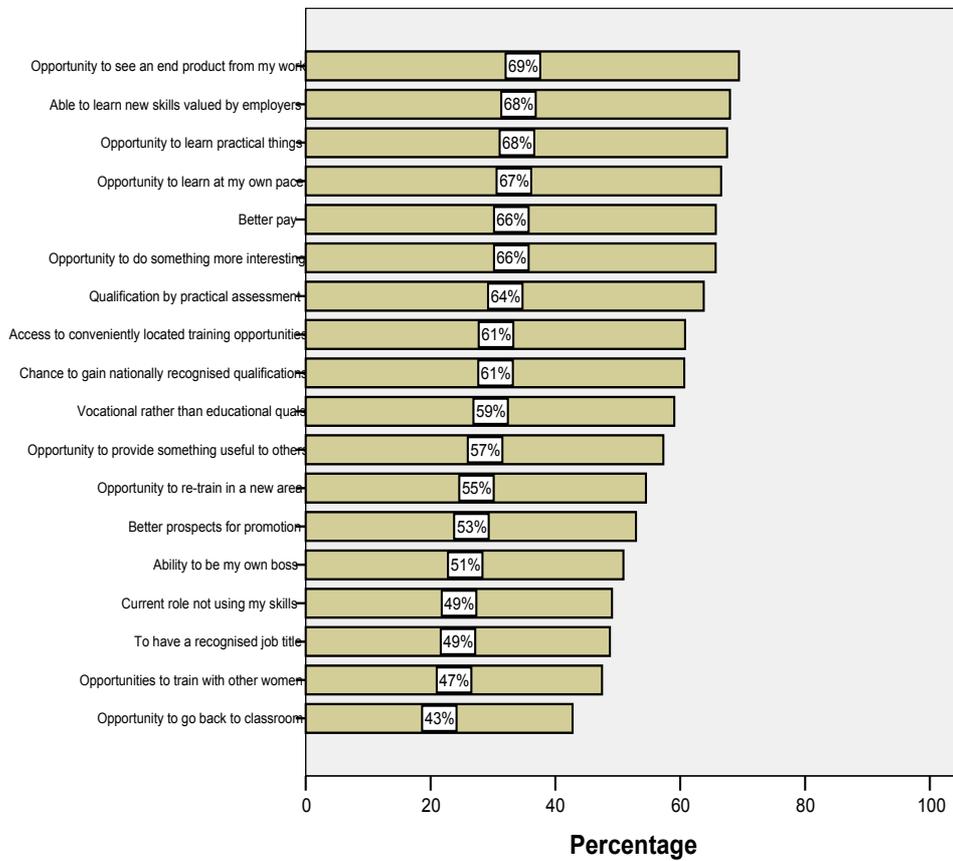
This section considers the question of what might encourage women to seek work in traditionally male jobs. It approaches the subject from four points of view. Firstly, it looks at what factors might persuade women to seek work or training in a traditionally male job and what factors might make some women more easily persuaded than others. Secondly, it looks at women's expectations if they were to do a traditionally male job and what factors are related to those positive and negative expectations. Thirdly, it looks at women's concerns if they were to train for a new job. Finally it looks at what women think that employers and government should do to facilitate women returners' entry into traditionally male jobs.

What factors might persuade women?

Women in the survey were asked what factors would persuade them to seek work and training in a traditionally male job. Chart 20 gives the frequency with which they responded in each characteristic with, 'to some extent', 'to a great extent' and 'to a very great extent'.

Chart 20

Factors that would persuade respondents to seek work and training in a traditionally male job



Women primarily want to develop their skills and learn new things. Less than half the respondents were persuaded by the opportunity to go back to the classroom or to train with other women.

What might make some women more easily persuaded than others?

Factor analysis demonstrated that the responses to all these factors had one underlying construct such that it could be viewed single scale which was found to be internally statistically reliable. This provided each respondent with a 'persuadability' score indicating how persuadable each respondent was, given all the factors in the list, to seek 'men's work'. Using these it was possible to look for significant differences between groups, and relationships between the answers given here and answers to other questions/batteries of questions in the survey.

Those with A, or AS level qualifications (or their vocational equivalent), are significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to be persuaded by the factors listed in the survey to seek traditionally 'men's work' compared with those whose highest qualifications are below AS level.

There also appears to be a North-South divide. Respondents from the North are significantly ($p < .05$) less persuadable than those from the South and Midlands to consider that the factors stated in the survey would persuade them to seek 'men's work'.

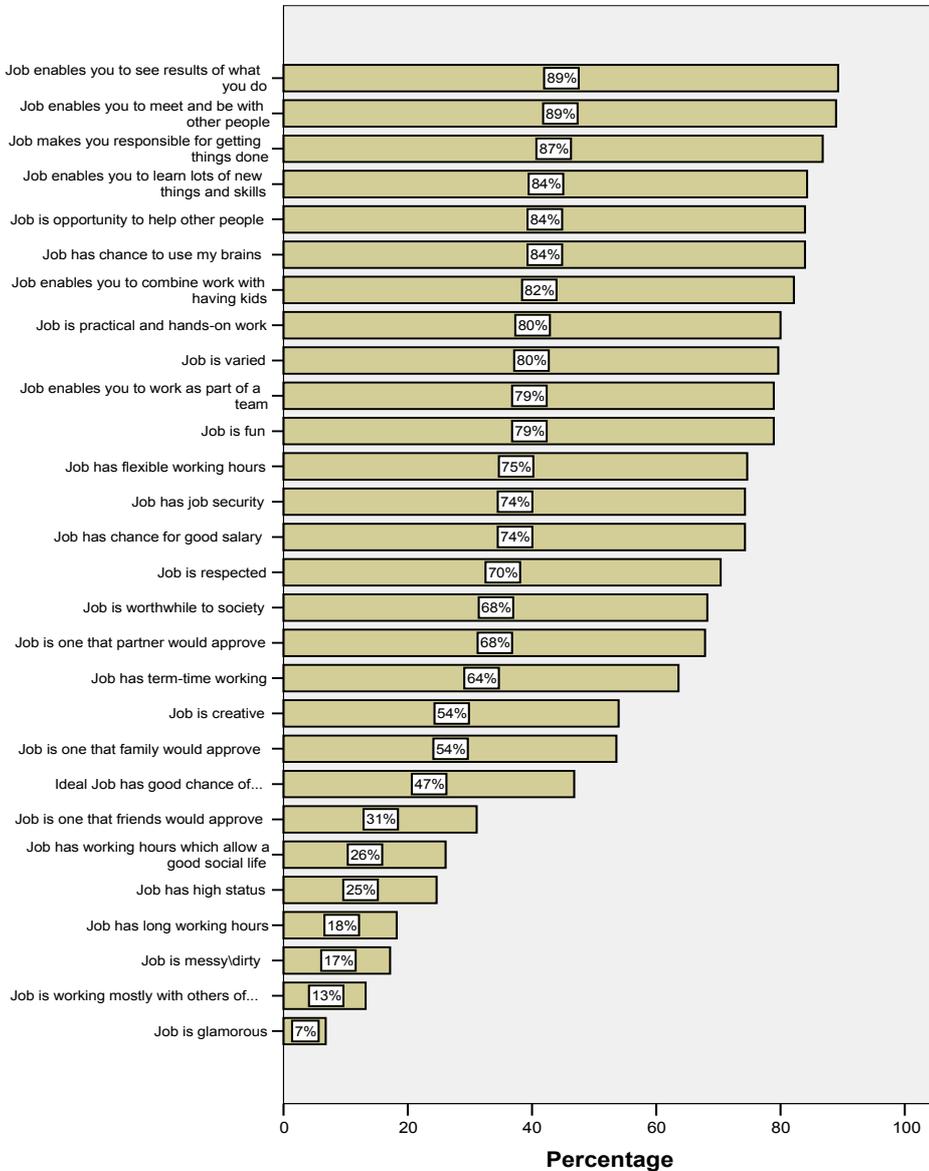
Neither socio-economic group nor current employment status makes any significant difference to the extent to which the women can be persuaded by the factors listed in the survey to seek traditionally men's work. There is no significant difference between those who have had experience of returning to work after caring breaks, compared with those who have not, in the extent to which they can be persuaded.

How do women view male and female jobs?

To discover how women judge jobs, the women in the survey were asked if certain factors applied to certain jobs, some of which could be classed as traditionally female, some traditionally male and some that could be judged as either. So that a comparison could be made, the same factors were used in the question about their ideal job and the question about what they looked for in a job when returning to work after a break. Chart 21 gives the factors that all the women in the survey look for in an ideal job.

Chart 21

Percentage of respondents who considered the characteristics below important in their ideal job



In order to compare we took the four most popular and the four least popular factors and added together the responses of 'apply' or 'definitely apply' for each factor in each job. These findings are presented in Table 1 (popular) and Table 2 (less popular).

Table 1

Taking the most popular factors that women considered important in their ideal job and comparing with the percentage who considered these factors to 'apply' or 'definitely apply', to the jobs below:								
The factors that the greatest percentage of all respondents think are important in their ideal job	Being a Plumber	Being a Builder / bricklayer	Being a Lorry Driver	Being a Machine operator	Being an IT worker	Being a Travel agent	Being a Hairdresser	Being a Nursery worker
Enables you to meet and be with other people	47%	47%	26%	34%	37%	74%	80%	61%
Enables you to see results of what you do	69%	72%	18%	40%	40%	29%	70%	53%
Makes you responsible for getting things done	66%	52%	54%	46%	57%	44%	42%	42%
Enables you to learn lots of new things and skills	44%	38%	10%	32%	65%	29%	52%	45%

Table 2

Taking the least popular factors that women considered important in their ideal job and comparing with the percentage who considered these factors to 'apply' or 'definitely apply', to the jobs below:								
The factors that the smallest percentage of all respondents think are important in their ideal job	Being a Plumber	Being a Builder / bricklayer	Being a Lorry Driver	Being a Machine operator	Being an IT Support worker	Being a Travel agent	Being a Hairdresser	Being a Nursery worker
Has long working hours	77%	57%	84%	49%	34%	13%	34%	26%
Is messy/dirty	69%	70%	26%	46%	0%	1%	18%	45%
Is working mostly with others of same sex	46%	54%	44%	34%	7%	28%	47%	48%
Is glamorous	0%	0%	1%	0%	3%	29%	56%	2%

The majority of women considered that plumbers and bricklayers to have factors that most of the women want in their ideal job; enabling you to see that results of what you do, and making you responsible for getting things done. However, more women thought that the traditionally female jobs were better for meeting people. IT support worker was the most frequently cited as one that enables you to learn lots of new things and skills. Areas of IT support, although a fairly new 'line of work' are also currently dominated by men.

Many women considered traditionally male jobs to have long working hours in contrast to the more traditionally female jobs. Long hours is a job characteristic that few of the women want in their ideal job, nor one they look for when returning to work after a caring break.

Plumbing and building are considered by the majority to be messy and dirty, another characteristic not favoured by many in their ideal job nor looked for when returning to work after a caring break. However, nearly half of the women thought that nursery work, a traditionally female job was also messy and dirty. From comments made by employers it could be that the women are considering dirt in a different way depending on how easy it is to remove. There is dirt one can wash off e.g., mess from food and changing nappies, and the one that is difficult to wash off and stays with you after work, e.g., dirt that becomes ingrained from constant hard manual work in dirty conditions. The former might be considered acceptable for women and the latter be unacceptable.

It is interesting that IT work is not considered messy or dirty by any of the women; it is also seen as the job with the least gender specific environment.

Roughly half of the women consider the traditionally male jobs and nursery and hairdressing not to be a gender specific working environments. This may be because they are considering the gender of clients as well as co-workers. Nursery workers look after boys as well as girls. Hairdressers cut men's as well as women's hair. Builders and plumbers work with female home owners. Lorry drivers deliver to female retail workers.

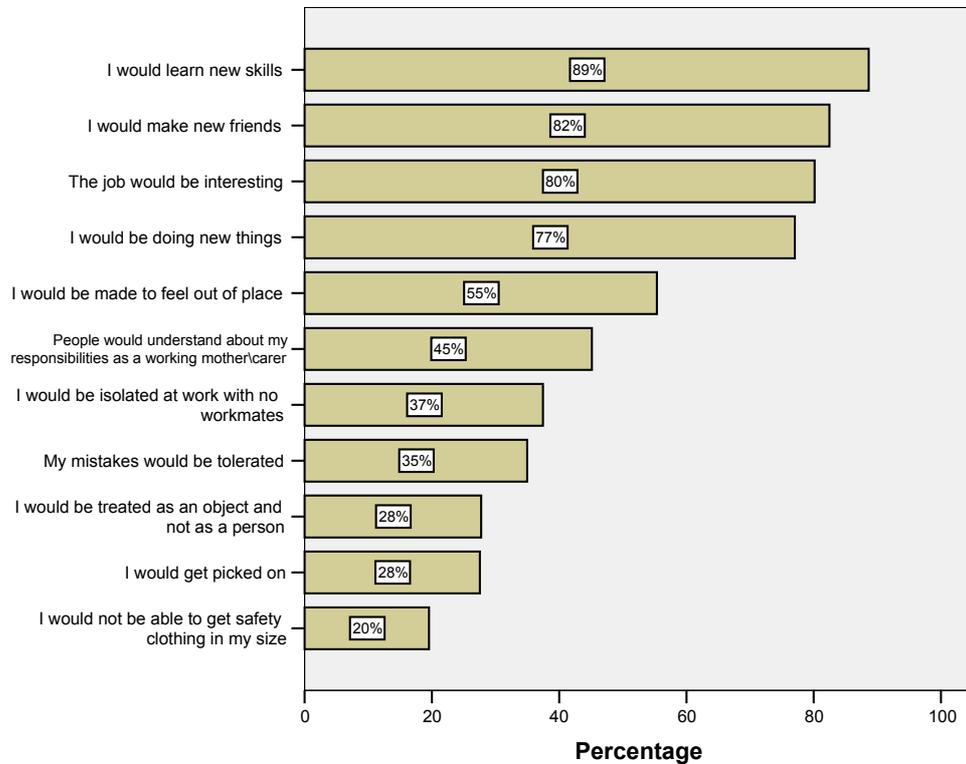
Generally, traditionally male jobs are judged to have some aspects which the women find important in their ideal job; the intrinsic motivational aspects. But male jobs are also considered to have more of the aspects that few, if any, of them like such as long hours and dirt. So anything that can be done to improve the image of traditionally male jobs as being dirty and involving long hours would help to encourage women to consider them. This idea is backed up by the views of the employers. Male jobs could also be 'sold' to women by describing them in terms of the factors that they look for in their ideal jobs.

What are women's expectations of 'men's work'?

Women in the survey were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to statements regarding their expectations if they were to do a traditionally male job. Chart 22 gives the frequency with which they responded, 'to some extent', 'to a great extent' or 'to a very great extent'.

Chart 22

Expectations if respondents were to do a traditionally male job



From this can be seen that on balance respondents' expectations are more positive than they are negative.

What factors relate to positive and negative expectations?

Factor analysis demonstrated that the responses to these questions were generated by two underlying constructs that were found to be internally statistically reliable. For each respondent two scores were calculated, relating to their expectations of doing a male job; a positive one, 'job interest', relating to their expectation of interest in the job, and negative one, 'social isolation', relating to their expectations that their doing a traditionally male job would cause them to experience social isolation and being out of place. Using these it was possible to look for significant differences between groups, and relationships between the answers given here and answers to other questions/batteries of questions in the survey.

This implies that those who expect that a male job to be interesting are more likely to be persuaded by the given factors to seek a male job. ($r=0.3$, $p<.001$ between 'persuadability' and 'job interest'.)

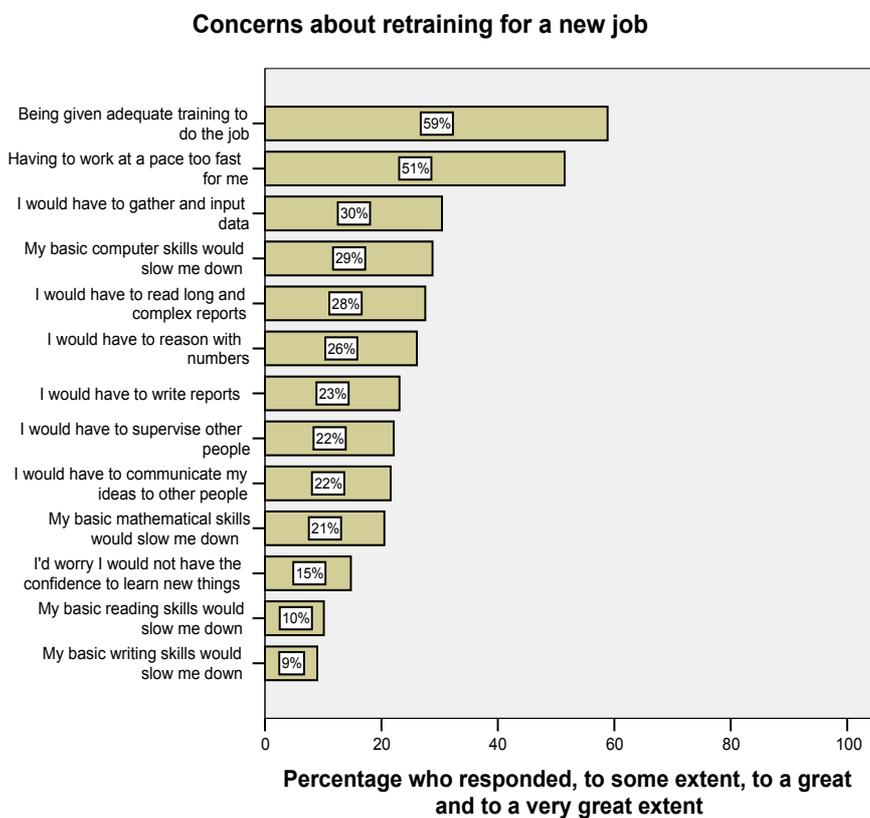
Those with no qualifications or where their highest qualification is Level 2 (equivalent to 5 GCSEs grade A-C) have significantly higher negative expectations concerning social isolation were they to do a traditionally male job.

No significant regional or socio-economic group differences are found in their expectations of doing a 'man's job', neither is there any significant relationship between age and expectations.

Expectations of training for a new job

The women in the survey were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to statements regarding their concerns if they were to retrain for a new job. Chart 23 gives the frequency with which they responded, to some extent, to a great extent or to 'a very great extent'.

Chart 23



As can be seen, respondents' concerns are not about their basic literacy or level of confidence to learn new things, but of being put in a pressure position where they are unprepared.

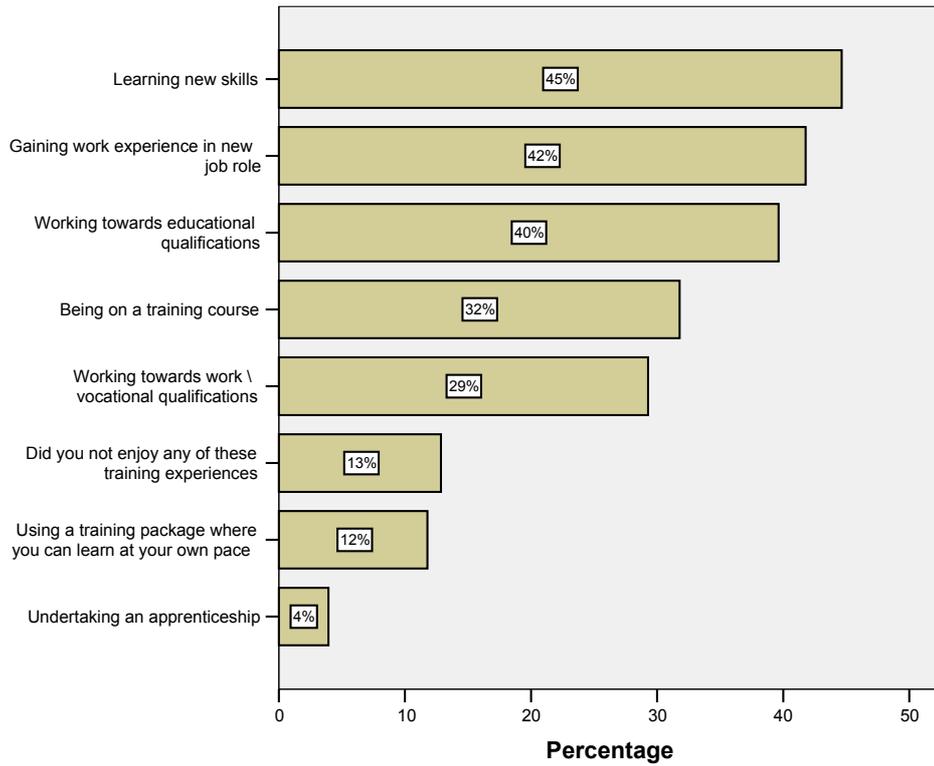
Numeracy is a requirement for most traditionally male skilled or semi-skilled jobs. As basic numeracy and reasoning with numbers are a concern for around a quarter of respondents, a lack of confidence in this area could be a barrier to considering such jobs. A lack of confidence in basic computer skills and data input is a concern of around a quarter of respondents, and could prove a barrier to entry into traditionally male jobs.

The items of most and least concern remain the same for all whatever their highest level of qualification.

Almost half the women (see Chart 24) said that they had previously enjoyed learning new skills, gaining experience in a new job role and working toward educational qualifications, and around a third enjoyed training courses and working for vocational qualifications. They could only comment if they had experience of these situations, but it indicates a level of enthusiasm that could be built upon.

Chart 24

Percentage of respondents who enjoyed the following training and learning experiences

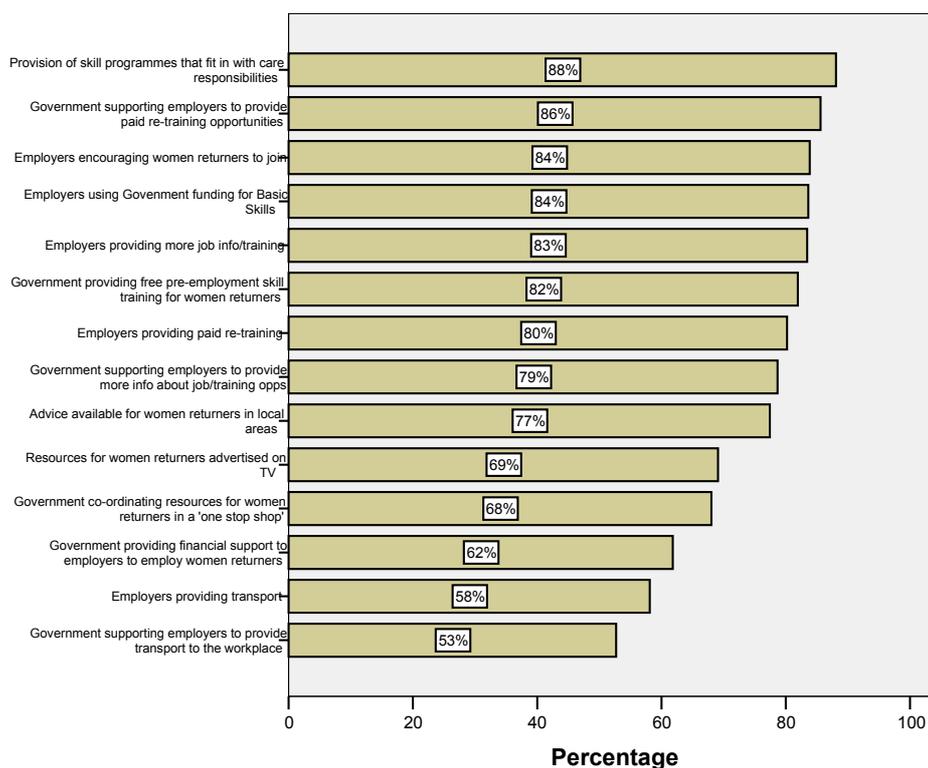


What the women think could be done to encourage more women returners into traditionally male jobs?

The women in the survey were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement to statements regarding what they thought would assist women returners into traditionally male jobs. Chart 25 gives the frequency with which they responded, 'to some extent', 'to a great extent' or 'to a very great extent'.

Chart 25

Respondents' opinions on what would assist women returners into traditionally male jobs



As the top concern for respondents is that they would not get adequate training if they were to train for a new job, it is not surprising that the top four initiatives that they think would be important if women returners are to be assisted to go into traditionally male jobs are related to the provision of training opportunities. Employer-provided transport and employers being paid to employ them do not appeal to the same extent.

What factors relate to opinions on what would assist women returners into traditionally male jobs?

Factor analysis demonstrated that the responses to these questions were generated by three underlying constructs which were found to be internally statistically reliable. For each respondent three scores were calculated, relating to their opinions about what should be done to assist women returners into traditionally male jobs. These three scores were importance of 'government encouragement', 'employer encouragement' and 'transport initiatives'. Using these it was possible to look for significant differences between groups, and relationships between the answers given here and answers to other questions/batteries of questions in the survey.

The easier it is to persuade women to seek 'men's jobs' the more likely it is that they consider it important that government and employers come up with initiatives and that transport initiatives should be set up that encourage women to seek 'men's jobs'. (There are a significant positive correlation, between 'persuadability' and each of the following; 'government encouragement', ($r=.4$) 'employer encouragement' ($r=.4$) and 'transport initiative' ($r=.3$).

The more women expect that a 'man's job' would be interesting the more they are likely to think that it is important that government and employers come up with initiatives that encourage women to seek 'men's jobs' (There are significant positive correlations between 'government encouragement' ($r=.3$, and 'job interest', and between 'employer encouragement' and 'job interest' ($r=.2$).

This suggests that government, employer and transport initiatives to encourage women to seek traditionally male jobs, are important to women's opinions at more than one level. They would appear to be looking for looking for official encouragement. This is also borne out in the qualitative responses from some of the women in the study and from some employers. Those who are keen on more women in traditionally male work look for official backing to help them win their case.

9. EMPLOYERS VIEWS

Summary

Employers are introducing family friendly policies, though not necessarily in a formal way, whether or not they employ women.

Recruitment practices could still be being a barrier to female employment, though this is probably due to a lack of imagination on the part of employers rather than a conscious policy to exclude them.

It is still considered by some of the employers that there are factors in certain jobs that make them unsuitable for women, particularly those with primary care responsibilities.

Employers who already employ women in traditionally male roles are pleased with the positive effect it has on their business and half of these consider that there are no extra costs involved. The extra costs mentioned by most concern maternity leave.

Lack of qualifications and lack of desire on the part of women to work in those jobs were the most frequently cited reasons for not employing any, or many, women in male jobs. Employers consider that the root of both these issues start at school. Some look to the government to help remedy this situation.

Skill shortage is seen as a complicated issue without a simple answer. The types of skills required in male industries are undergoing change.

Employers, particularly smaller employers want help to change.

Findings

This section represents the opinions of employers, and employer and employee representative groups when they were asked to comment on the facilitators and barriers to the employment of women and, in particular, women returners in traditionally male jobs.

Family friendly policies

One of the facilitators for the employment of women returners is the adoption of family friendly policies. Of employers interviewed, 35 per cent did not currently operate part-time or flexible working, but some did allow reasonable time off for family crises. With the occasional exception these organizations did not employ any women on the manual or operational side of their businesses.

Part-time working and flexible working were offered by 65 per cent but very few offered job share. Generally, the larger the company the more family friendly they were and the more formal the provision. The smaller companies tended to offer help to keep previously good workers, both men and women, as their personal circumstance changed on a case by case basis. Many but not all did employ women in the operational side of their businesses. The introduction of family friendly policies was not seen solely as a response to acquiring or requiring a female workforce. For example, a large, traditional heavy engineering company with an almost completely male workforce had recently changed its operational hours so that all employees could leave at 4pm, enabling them to spend time with children and grandchildren when they came home from school.

Recruitment practices

The recruitment process can either be a facilitator or a barrier to the employment of women returners, depending on the approach taken by employers. Generally the larger the employer the more formal the engagement process and the more methods used to recruit candidates. As many employers only offer family friendly hours and other provisions for valued existing staff if they ask, these do not usually form part of the job advert. Here are two examples:

'We accommodate women returners but we don't actively recruit them.'

'But we will have to change, if we want to keep people. The culture is driven by top people who expect long hours and long service employees. We are not good at going out to recruit into a flexible role, but for employees already working here we will fit round their care responsibilities. But because of the nature of the work we would favour someone who can work three shifts.'

However, organizations that become well known in an area as a good employer for women need never bother with the cost of advertising certain posts. Here is an example:

'We have a waiting list for part-time workers so we don't advertise these posts'.

One of the main barriers during the recruitment process appears to be lack of imagination. Targeting women returners for recruitment, and tailoring the recruitment drive, hours and conditions of service to attract them when a job becomes vacant, appears scarcely ever to be considered. This remains true even when they feel a vacancy might be better filled by someone with smaller fingers who is already proficient in dexterous handicrafts. Simple strategies like recruiting along bus routes convenient to their place of employment; in post offices, shops nurseries and at school gates are not being applied.

Another related barrier to women is the reliance by employers on informal networking and traditional recruitment methods to fill jobs. Advertising in Job Centres, newspapers and word-of-mouth are the most often mentioned by employers as methods of recruitment. Word-of-mouth is mentioned as a recruitment method slightly more often by employers who do not employ women in the operational side of their business than those that do. This method favours recruitment of employees who are similar to the employees they already have; if these are all men then an all male situation gets perpetuated. Word-of-mouth is a method most mentioned by construction employers. Large construction and civil engineering firms do not generally employ their own construction workers. They sub-contract the work to others who may in turn sub-contract and so on until those who actually do the skilled work are self employed or a team of friends in a very small company who are personally known to those who are taking them on. This networking approach of gaining employment is difficult for women to break into even if they have the skills. Recruitment through local colleges might seem fairer but this currently favours the younger worker.

There were, however, some examples of more innovative approaches to recruitment that improve the chances of recruiting women. One larger automotive component firm not only actively recruited women, they poached staff from the bus stop outside a nearby food factory by selling the women the idea of working in engineering by explaining that putting a pizza together was little different to putting together a clutch. The only differences being that they would be in a warm place, earning more than twice as much money, with training and prospects of an even better job.

Another employer had heard that:

'Some companies who want to recruit women advertise for canteen staff and when they turn up they sell them the idea of working on the shop floor.'

An employer at a research institute who says they have no problems attracting women to work in their labs:

'We look at reasons why people join us and use these to advertise. We sell our family friendly policies.'

And a painter and decorator's view:

'I employed my daughter so it encouraged other women to join.'

Physical environment

The physical environment where the job is carried out was considered a barrier to the employment of women by some organizations. These jobs involved physically heavy or dangerous work and they employed very few if any women on the operational side. Those they did employ, were employed in technical and managerial functions. Here is an example of one comment:

'A woman could do the job but it is physical and they don't look at doing this sort of work, exposed and dangerous'

New, clean, safe, well ordered and ventilated environments like the previously mentioned clutch factory, or laboratories have a lot less difficulties in recruiting women. As with this electronics employer, when asked why they had no problem recruiting women:

'Nice employer to work for, good physical environment, canteens, free parking, well located for access, we have offices where there is little other employment around. Good career opportunities for women.'

Nature of the work involved

In the opinion of many employers and others interviewed, it is the nature of certain jobs that make it difficult for a woman to do them. In the view of an employer representative group:

'Work patterns in engineering are geared to the needs of men. In the interviewee's experience employers do want to change but are not sure how to do it. Small companies do not usually have the personnel expertise as part of their management teams to manage the change easily. Supply chain partners will probably be one of the main driving forces. Even so employers will need a lot of help.'

And in the view of women working in engineering:

'In ancillary roles within the metals industry, flexible working is a growing trend. Team working would give some flexibility to fit around the needs of women carers. But practical issues will not go away. Employers need to have people who will turn up regularly and not have to rush off to 'see to' the kids.'

Unpredictable work pattern or location

Certain types of jobs are thought to be less suitable for those whose life outside work depends on them finishing at a certain regular time at a certain location e.g., women with children to pick up. These are jobs where the holder has to be on-call, or where the hours are completely dictated by clients or where it involves lot of travel and staying away from home. This quote from a technology company:

'Clients have service level agreements so the site engineer would have to fulfil these before they could go home. A woman with children would find this very difficult.'

And one from a construction company:

'The weather is a big factor in a construction workers hours. The flexibility could be there but it may be a problem if there was a deadline to meet. It would take more managing to offer flexible hours but it could be done. There might be a problem with transport. The whole team is taken to a remote site together in a van and it would be difficult for one individual to come and go at other times.'

Pivotal roles

There are also certain higher levels of job within an organization where continuity is essential, where a job cannot be taken over by someone else at short notice without damaging the business or safety of employees that are thought of as unsuitable for women with primary care responsibilities. So although some organizations employ women in limited skill jobs such as assembly work they are less likely to be developed to take over pivotal roles if their attendance

record has previously been compromised by their primary care responsibilities. Here is an example of one employer in the printing and packaging industry that does employ women on the shop floor and develops and promotes from within.

Employing women in ...'critical positions would be difficult if time was taken off for a sick child. Those having a lot of time off would not be promoted to the next level so they would not get into critical jobs. This would apply to both men and women.'

And here is a quote from a skills agency:

'Women in high pressure roles with a long-hours culture tend to give up work altogether when children are small, no matter what business they are in. Society needs to change so that women are not automatically seen as major carers.'

Shift working

Given the right level of demand, 24 hour shift working patterns are considered essential to get an adequate return on investment for large pieces of capital equipment to keep UK companies competitive. This is thought by some employers to make their jobs unsuitable for women, particularly those with primary care responsibilities. These quotes are an example:

'The long-hours culture and shift system, three shifts would make it difficult for those with primary care responsibility.'

'Machines are worked 24 hours a day so we need people who can work shifts.'

'There are some jobs that lend themselves to part-time work; engineering is not one of these. The nature of the business is getting the product out on time. Small companies work overtime while bigger companies have shifts. Although twilight shifts are good for women, set hour opportunities are few and far between.'

However, the NHS also runs a 24 hour operation with a predominantly female workforce so shifts in themselves cannot be seen as a barrier.

Strength

Women's lesser physical capability was also given as a reason for some jobs to be unsuitable for them. Here are two examples:

'No, you can't have equality in everything where you have a physical disadvantage'

'There is no light assembly work suitable for women in this factory'

While it was acknowledged that some women might be stronger than some men, the HSE lays down guidelines for the maximum weight that should be lifted by women at knee, waist and head height, which is less than the safe maximum for men. Mechanisation of lifting can help but this not always feasible. In one steel mill, modern requirements for a multi-skilled workforce have caused fewer women to be employed than previously. Women used to be employed in skilled and semi-skilled jobs as crane, machinery and fork lift truck operators with unskilled men doing the strength requiring tasks related to these functions. Now both jobs are combined operators need both strength and skill.

Costs and benefits of employing more women

Extra costs of employing women might be seen as a barrier to their employment but this has to be viewed in the light of the experiences of those who already employ them in traditionally male jobs and consider them a benefit. Roughly half of those interviewed could not see that there would be any extra costs involved.

'We acquire many companies and employees under TUPE so it makes sense to have flexible benefits, so what we provide that helps women is cost neutral, but there is a heavy load on IT systems but that costs very little.'

Some thought it might save, or already had saved money; here are five quotes as examples:

'There have been no extra costs because we have benefited from not losing specialist skills.'

'No direct cost, if you change hours to suit their needs it makes them more productive and less likely to leave.'

'No, we need to offer a good package to both men and women as we compete for staff with two universities who offer a good package with long holidays.'

'We could look at those who are further into their career so we could take on more women returners. Older women would be less likely to take maternity leave. They will also have sorted out how they look after the children.'

'There would be more advantages it would give more flexibility'

When asked about the cost of employing women, or more women, costs related to maternity leave provision come high on the list of concerns employers have about employing women during their child bearing years. Women returners are more likely to have completed their families and therefore should theoretically be more appealing to employers, as illustrated in the comments below:

'Maternity causes problems but not women returners who have completed their families.'

'It will cost no more to train and employ a woman, if her family is complete'

Further to this enhanced paternity provision should also make for a more 'level playing field' for women with men of a similar child bearing age group.'

Other costs that were mentioned were:

- Extra management costs related to doing the same amount of work with more people working less hours, and the cost of administration of policies and educating managers and workforce about these policies to ensure they become reality for the workforce
- If job share were to be implemented there would be extra overheads to pay for as well as payment for the handover period between the sharers

'Employer costs are higher with job share and it is more difficult to manage'

- Costs to improve the facilities. Extra toilet and changing facilities would be needed if women were to be employed in areas where currently only men are employed
- Extra machinery and extra space would be needed to provide employment that did not require shift working
- Extra training costs might make them uncompetitive. For example:

'We only recruit for a particular customer and they are a cost to that customer, bringing in more trainees into the situation, the client may well refuse to pay them.'

According to one engineering employers' representative group:

'The biggest cost implication for employers is related to training. But they will need to spend more than double that which they do currently. It is estimated (using the respondent's own sources) that companies need to spend 4 per cent of their wages bill on training. In the local area (South Yorkshire); their spend is currently more in the order of 1.8 per cent. They will need to spend the 4 per cent whoever they recruit.'

According to a contractor in a large construction firm the costs of training would be the same:

'The gender of the candidate is immaterial; women do not need any different training to men.'

Views on the extent of, and the reasons for current skill shortage in their sector

Skill shortage appears to be a complicated issue according to those interviewed. Generally construction is short of skilled staff, particularly electricians and plumbers. Even engineering companies who need these skills find them in short supply. One employee representative considered that industry is generally:

'very short of electricians and plumbers. Corus are bringing Polish electricians over.'

There are regional variations particularly where there are a concentration of one type of employer all requiring similar skills. For example interviewees told of a shortage of technology skills along the M4 corridor and a shortage of HGV drivers around Manchester. A large construction contractor considered that:

'There is a general problem of skills shortages, there are also regional disparities. The South West and Wales are particularly bad. The Olympics will make things worse.'

Certain regions can become swamped with certain types of crafts people if a large employer, such as a car company, ceases trading. At present this is the case in the West Midlands. The Engineering Employers Federation (EEF) West Midlands do all of the apprenticeship recruitment in the area. At the moment there is more demand for apprenticeships than there are firms willing to take them on.

Some of the skill shortages are very specific to one employer or a very small number of employers, so many of those interviewed developed staff internally.

Not all of those interviewed experienced difficulties with skill shortages even those in construction. The reasons given for their lack of difficulty was usually low labour turnover in skilled areas. An employer representative considered that the problem experienced by certain employers could be of their own making.

'In SME's skill shortages are craft based e.g. CNG programmes, machinists, and tool makers. Labour shortages are often caused by employers who offer a poor rate of pay for the job.'

Larger companies protect their key craft workers by doing a deal with unions to take on temps that can be laid off to protect core workers.

In the view of two employer representative groups and a skills organization, the nature of craft jobs is changing. Employees now need trade skills plus business improvement techniques, to get more out of their machines. Skill requirements are very different from those required in the past. The strength jobs are not needed so much now; the workforce is more technological and lean; production is still high but needs less people. In order for businesses to become more agile to respond to a broader range of customers with a broader range of demands, decision making will need to be pushed down the organization. Manual trades-people will need to be able to use IT, manage projects, communicate with the customer both internal and external, order materials, understand financial implications, maximise utilisation of capital equipment, as well as the softer skills of good communication and team working skills. Companies will be more organic and less hierarchical, and the sector needs people who can cope with uncertainty

and lack of fixed boundaries of responsibility. Women may be more capable of coping with these extra skill requirements particularly if they have had experience of running a home and family.

Attractiveness

It was seen that a barrier to the employment of women in traditionally male jobs is that women do not want to do them. The most frequently given reason for employers having no women working in the operational side of their business is that they don't apply. As with these examples:

'We make our adverts non-sexist but no women apply.'

'If we can get them to work here they are exceptional workers'

Jobs where dirt gets ingrained in the skin and smell can-not be washed off before returning home, or where there is a likelihood of weathering, maiming or scares that would harm their looks, are thought not to appeal to women.

As with this example from a company that installs printing machines:

'No, it's physically impossible for women to install or move the machines. Women don't want to develop muscles or do dirty jobs. They don't want hands ingrained with dirt and broken fingernails. Leave the dirty jobs to the men.'

Neither were they considered to like working in hard physical jobs surrounded by men with a rough sense of humour. Some employers in currently male dominated industries said that they were uncomfortable with the idea of putting a woman into a situation of risk where they would not like to put their wife or daughters. Here is an example from an engineering subcontractor:

'I would not like to put a woman on her own on our shop floor.'

However not all male dominated industries carry these sort of physical risks now. Increases in health and safety regulations make occupational hazards less of a threat for all. It was acknowledged by employers and others interviewed that jobs in male dominated industries are not presented to girls and women in a way that would appeal to them, that this should change and the change should come about right back at school. Here are some examples:

'We already proactively recruit women; I have given lectures to schools in the area to try to dispel misconceptions.'

'Girls don't realise what sort of money they can earn in construction.'

'Increasing training to give women development and career opportunities would make engineering more attractive.'

'Engineering jobs are changing, requiring extra skills and aptitudes that women have traditionally had as strengths. They need to see engineering as doing 'good' in the world. Understand that it is not all dirty and physically demanding. It is also not very attractive to disabled and certain ethnic groups, probably for the similar reasons.'

'Colleges and universities need to open women's eyes to the possibilities. Schools abroad do far more.'

'Image of the metals industries is bad. From a very young age children get the impression that they are dirty. Women particularly do not like the image, of the industry; it is not glamorous; not an aspirational image. There is no desire, there are no role models. IT has a good image but most of the jobs are boring. Engineering has a bad image but there are some very interesting jobs. No one is telling people about these jobs; the careers service does not seem to be doing it. Women want to be creative and are good at multitasking; they don't see that this can be used in engineering.'

One aspect that a few employers and others interviewed saw might attract women and girls to traditionally male jobs might be to explain how the job helps others. Here is an example of the views of one employer who ran a cancer research laboratory.

'We have no difficulties. The charitable nature of the business attracts women; they like to think they are doing something for others.'

And here are the views of women who work in an engineering skills agency.

'Technology courses mixed with biology, music or media will attract more students of both sexes than a straight technology or engineering course. Most aspects of the economy employ engineers, retail, food production, transport and medical, not just SET and construction. Nurses have the same quality, training time and hours of work (3 shifts) as engineering – so what is the difference? It is cultural and social stereotyping.'

Training

One of the biggest barriers for women returners to enter traditionally male jobs is their lack of qualifications. If they have not got the skills and qualifications before their career break employers are not interested in them. Here is an example of a comment from a technology company.

'Yes we would be very happy to have them. You get more for your money with women returners but they would have to be pre-trained.'

And this quote from a skills agency:

'As things stand, in order for women returners to be qualified sufficiently for a job in the metals industry they would have to have built up qualifications and experience while they were young, before they took their career break.'

Current training for skilled trades takes around four years. This makes it difficult for older workers, men or women, to gain the necessary qualifications even if adult apprenticeships were commonly available, which they are not. Older workers generally have greater financial responsibilities than school leavers. Women returners may also have the added burden of childcare costs. During training, especially during the early years they would not have much to offer that an employer would be prepared to pay for.

'They know nothing to begin with; they cannot be given an adult wage.'

So there is a big financial hurdle to surmount as well as the difficulties of finding an employer who would provide the opportunity to fulfil the practical aspect of the training. College qualifications alone are not enough to gain full qualifications such as NVQs.

'There are night classes for our trade but you need employment to get a full NVQ'

This is how an engineering employers' representative considered that skill training may alter in the future in a way that would help older men and women.

'Skill training will need to be much broader and traditional routes to skill acquisition e.g. time served apprenticeships, and qualification need to be updated to equate with what employers really need and be shorter, and more cost effective. Training needs to be innovatively repackaged to meet needs quickly. Training will need to be continuous as skills will become obsolete more quickly in the future.'

However, in order to take advantage of increased training opportunities women need the basic educational qualifications. This is seen as the first obstacle that needs to be overcome.

'They need the right O' levels & A' levels and be very good at maths and science. Generally women lack the qualifications necessary for acceptance onto a training course even if there were adult courses available.'

Views of existing workforce and management

Views were mixed concerning how the recruitment of women might be seen by the existing workforce. Many of those who employ women said that they had had no problems incorporating them into the workforce. As with these examples:

'Yes we are getting good people back in better jobs than when they left. Everybody that leaves to have a baby comes back; they are more ambitious and more committed after than before.'

'Everyone has changed now; you would not get the trouble you used to have.'

They also saw benefits of having a more balanced workforce and the resulting positive effect on the culture of the company.

'It is better to have a mixture to get the best perspective on problems.'

'Women perceive things differently, more intuitive, effected a culture change for the better in male dominated areas.'

Women bring a ...'wider range of skills in checking paint techniques and marbling sponging. They are more acceptable to vulnerable clients'

However, all were not as positive, as these examples illustrate.

'Management needs to undergo cultural change so that they look to see if it is feasible before saying no, if employees want to make changes to fit in with their family responsibilities.' (A large automotive company)

'The general workforce can't understand why a woman would want to do such a job. It's a macho world here.' (A large steel works)

'It is a cultural thing, until we break the mould there will be difficulties. Integration is up to the individual.' (A large construction group)

'If we make beneficial arrangements for one, it would upset the rest.' (A biomedical engineering company)

'When interviewing women I find it difficult to be objective about an applicant with young children. A lot of companies in biotech are small like us and less able to accommodate family crisis. Those with no children are left holding the fort. They are assumed not to have a personal life and wind up doing huge amounts of overtime.' (A biomedical company)

'If women are to move into craft jobs that are seen to have been deskilled by technology, it will have to be carefully handled.' (An engineering employers' representative group).

'Managers may have problems with facilities and clothing. There would have to be an education programme to help them be accepted. They [managers] worry about them lifting heavy weights so they may use it as a way of forcing down wages.' (An employees' representative.)

Legislation

Legislation was viewed as both as a potential facilitator and a barrier. The employers and others interviewed were not in favour of more legislation.

'Changes in government legislation will have very little impact. What changes could they make to a complex situation? It is all risk and expenses. Firstly to get women interested. Secondly to train them for 3 years, pay them an adult wage. And thirdly to retain them in these positions. Is the government going to pay for this risk? No, so the strategy is not likely to work and it is not cost effective.'

It was thought that current legislation giving women greater employment rights may actually work against their employment. Maternity provision was seen by some to put employers in a situation that is impossible to manage. There needs to be ...

'financial support to help with maternity breaks.'

'Twelve months maternity leave does not help to make women attractive to employers.'

Employers need help to change

Employers are looking for help to facilitate change to improve women's chances of becoming employed in traditionally male jobs. Employers were seen to need help with change as they do not necessarily have the personnel infrastructure to cope with it. Support is needed to get women into the engineering sector, but effort will have to go wider than just targeting women; it needs a more holistic approach. Any thing that can be done to recruit and develop women can also be done to encourage other under represented groups as well. One construction employer sees that he is being encouraged to consider women as employees:

'CITB already push the idea of employing women to cover expected labour shortages in 5-10 years time.'

Start with better training in schools

Employers are looking to the school system for help to facilitate change to improve women's chances of becoming employed in traditionally male jobs. These are some of the ideas and views that were put forward.

'It starts at school, getting girls interested in engineering'

'Schools do not do enough to get girls motivated and capable of getting good precursor academic qualifications.'

'Schools channelled girls into secretarial and boys into science and craft and design. Also peer group pressure keeps gender segregation going in spite of their interest and aptitudes.'

'Employers do not want unskilled labourers, applicants need to be bright and capable. They need the right O' levels & A' levels and be very good at maths and science. There is fierce competition to get the best people to embark on apprenticeships.'

'Better schooling is needed; the ones who are failing in school need a different way of being taught; in a more practical way. Give them work based education; leaving [school] sooner and give them older mentors.'

'Try to get parents to seeing metals industries as suitable for their daughters'

Improve affordable childcare provision

A few of those interviewed are looking for improved child care provision to facilitate change to improve women's chances of becoming employed in traditionally male jobs. Child care provision was not mentioned very often, these are a few of the comments:

'The cost [of child care] is so high that it not viable to come to work. We don't pay much at the lowest entry level. Child care cost would almost wipe out their wage. Not worth their while.'

'Not taxing crèche provision'...would help.

Improve training opportunities

Many mentioned training as a facilitator, and lack of available training as a barrier to the employment of women returners. There do seem to be a few pilot projects currently underway providing opportunities for training when older, and occasionally employers are keen to train as with this construction employer with the help of his Training Board:

'We take on older people to train up so we could train women. There is no help with grants for older people or from colleges, only training with CITB to get qualifications/NVQs if it's paid for by the employer. Sometimes it's difficult for CITB to get round all the adult trainees to assess them but generally they are good.'

Most of the comments related to training were concerned with how there should be more training available, particularly for older people, and that it should be grant assisted.

'We need to have adult apprenticeships. Need to sell the industry to women. How well paid it is and how they could fit it in with family life.'

'There would need to have no age limit on modern apprenticeships'

'The industry [construction] as a whole is struggling to get enough workers. No changes are needed for women, all need to be trained the same.'

'To recruit and train older women, a grant would help employers to take on unemployed women.'

'The industry will not do anything that is not funded'

The government... 'could offer a grant to take women on but it would undermine the women involved. A grant towards the training of them would be better.'

It would need...'pre-employment skill training or incentives for employers to train them.'

'DTI needs to look at supporting what the industry wants, alleviating the cost of the first year of training engineering technicians, when they are in their off job training phase and not contributing to the business. This would increase numbers of employers willing to take on apprentices.'

Some employers and others interviewed thought the training initiative should be driven by industry not the government.

'There is a gap between government and its help agencies and industry. They set up initiatives that are not used. It is like setting up a shop window display then putting double yellow lines in front of the shop so that no one can come in to buy. They need to find out what industry wants, concentrate on 'enabling' employers to own the initiatives. That is employers can design what they want and the training suppliers provide it.'

'Industry needs to get itself together. Needs a coherent training strategy, driven by the industry, not government.'

Training prior to employment was seen as a way of giving women credibility with employers. As with these two examples:

'It would help if they already have licenses or qualifications before employment, it would help women's credibility'

'Make women aware that the opportunities were open to them and subsidise training prior to employment. If a lady 'does the ticket' (CPCS) they would have no credibility problem, and they are needed. They would need pre-training because normally a man would do all the manual jobs first, then when an employer knew he was reliable and was stopping with him, he would pay to have him trained and get the CPCS. A woman would not be able to do this.'

It was felt that there should be a fully integrated package to support women in training that could be publicised in a way that would attract them in the same way as was provided for the nursing profession.

'There is not the fully employed training package there for them to go into as there is with nursing.'

Advertising and promotion

Some thought that national advertising might help increase the number of women in men's jobs. These are some of the ideas:

'A national campaign to interest women in engineering is needed. It would help businesses change their practices if it was well known that that is what the government wanted. It would be more readily accepted by workforce and managers if the government threw their weight behind the push to have more women in Science Engineering and Technology (SET), rather than it being seen as a quirk of an individual company.'

'Improve the image of our industry [construction at heights] to be in line with reality. Not Fred Dibner any more, a man up a chimney with a cold chisel. More expert knowledge is needed, not so much brawn.'

'We already get funding for taking on long-term unemployed on a 12 week trial. They could widen this to include women returners.'

Suggestions for employers based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- Employers should be encouraged to consider implementing family friendly policies, part-time and flexible working whether or not they currently employ women. Child care is not a female-only issue and it can help stabilise the workforce, keep valuable skilled talent and make it easier for employees to commute outside rush hour. The policies need to be formal so that they can be referred to in job adverts and apply equally to every one. Women are attracted to jobs that they know will fit in with family life from the outset
- When a job becomes vacant employers should be encouraged to consider how it could be redesigned to be done more cost effectively and productively by one or two part-time employees; maybe using flexible working; maybe using home working
- Employers need to look at jobs that they feel would be impossible for a woman to do, or improbable that a woman would want to do, and consider if the problematic aspects of those jobs are really unchangeable
- Employers need to be more innovative in advertising jobs and the locations in which job adverts are placed so that recruitment practices are not indirectly discriminating against women or other underrepresented groups. For example, as well as their usual methods they could try looking at main transport links and advertise along these routes in places where women returners are likely to see them. Job adverts need to include reference to family friendly policies and use descriptions of the job and its requirements that appeal to women as well as men; stating that they actively encourage applications from both men and women of all ages

- Employers should not just consider teenagers and young persons for training positions. Older women who have completed their families have a lot to offer and decades of working life still to live. They have built up life skills which are useful to the employer
- In order to ensure future skill requirements it is necessary for training to take place. Employers need to be made aware that in the experience of other employers it costs no more to train women than men
- Employers can improve cleanliness, order, heating, ventilation and lighting to attract women employees. Generally employers with pleasant working environments seemed to have the least trouble in attracting women employees
- Employers need to be reassured it is worth the trouble; those contacted during this study that employ women in traditionally male roles have found it beneficial to their business to have a more balanced workforce. For example, female apprentices do well.

Suggestions for government based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- One of the main barriers to employing women in traditionally male skilled jobs is lack of qualifications. Employers are looking for an improvement in training opportunities for older people as well as young and would like these to be in some part funded by government, particularly in the early years when the trainee is much less useful to the employer. They also want that training to be geared to their needs, with some pre-employment training. The new National Employer Training Programme as stated in the DfES white paper 'Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work' (March 2005) would appear to go a long way to addressing these requirements. It provides for a 'package of free training in the workplace in basic skill and Level 2, designed for employers and delivered to suit their operational needs'. Also that new Skills Academies will 'prepare young people and adults for successful employment in each major sector of the economy.' As this will also help women returners it needs to be publicised more widely to employers and the public
- Employers are also looking for the school system to provide them with leavers who have the basic qualifications in English, Maths, Physics, and Chemistry so that they can take advantage of the training on offer. These subjects need to be taught in a way that appeals to young people especially girls if occupational segregation is not to continue; and the male dominated industries need to be sold to girls at school in a way that appeals to them. SET and construction should not continue to be considered as the last resort for boys who cannot do anything else
- Employers are concerned that implementation of changes in work practices takes up more managerial time than they can afford. Employers, especially those too small to have a dedicated personnel professional need help to manage the change that must take place if occupational segregation is to become a thing of the past. Anything government can do to ensure that such help is available would be welcomed
- Employers want the benefits and rewards their industry affords to employees to be publicised; to dispel the myths that put people, especially women, off the idea of working in those industries. Government sponsorship of the advertising would be welcomed.
- Provision of quality, reliable and affordable childcare is also something that employers want so that they can employ women with primary care responsibilities without worry that their business will suffer from frequent unscheduled absences. Low or no-cost child care is particularly important if women are to embark on training with a trainee's wage. Government help with meeting this need would be welcomed.

10. CONCLUSIONS

This research sought to establish the extent to which women, returning to the job market after taking a break for caring reason(s), can be encouraged to seek work in areas of skill shortage in traditionally male industries. This section pulls together the findings from all parts of the study: the literature review; the review of current advice; guidance and support to help women return to work; the survey of women returners and the employer's consultation. It uses evidence from the findings to answer the research questions and make recommendations to inform government policy and future research.

It should be remembered that this research focuses on partnered women, who hold qualifications at NVQ level 3 and equivalent or below, have taken one or more break(s) from work for caring reasons in the last 10 years and are currently either not working or working part-time hours. The women are between the ages of 25 and 55.

Women returners in the labour market

The majority of women in the study are not currently working (63 per cent), however, the vast majority clearly intend to work in the future. Of those currently working part time, again the vast majority intend to increase the hours they work. However, for the majority of women in both groups this increase is planned for the near future in at least a years time. The majority of women are not ready for major change and are seeking work of a similar status, either to current work or work they did before the break. Women currently working are particularly interested in increasing their pay. Interestingly, over 40 per cent of women who are currently working, would, if income was not an issue, prefer to be a full time mother, supported by their partner.

Castells, (2000) suggests that people working under what she calls 'feminized' conditions, have jobs that are characterised by low levels of security and low wages. The findings from this study suggest that almost all of the women who participated in this survey have sought, or will seek work that is traditionally female. This suggests that women are not likely to be achieving their earning potential nor are they likely to be in jobs that provide the best terms and conditions of employment.

The findings of this study also suggest that even within traditionally female occupational areas, women are not working in their preferred occupation. Their jobs are often the ones that support both their practical needs, such as flexible working to support childcare, and to some extent their social needs. This is supported by the fact that women are seeking work that allows them to have some influence over the hours they work and when they work these hours. Women that work manage childcare using a combination of approaches such as partners, wider families and paid childcare. Not surprisingly, women in the top two socio-economic groups tend to make more use of formal paid childcare.

This study tells us that women want work that is intrinsically interesting and motivating and for many it is these characteristics that are not being met. For example, around 28 per cent of all the women in this study currently work in sales occupations, however only 7 per cent want to work in this occupational, seeing it as a pragmatic rather than preferred choice. Therefore we conclude that our findings support the view of previous research that women returners are not achieving their potential.

These findings raise a number of questions that we have sought to answer from the study as a whole.

- Why do women seek traditionally female jobs?
- Do womens perceptions and experience about traditionally male occupations reflect reality?
- Would women consider jobs traditionally done by men?
- What resources are available to support these women and help them explore alternatives?
- What can be done to encourage women to work in traditionally male jobs?

Why do women seek traditionally female jobs?

Our research suggests that generally, both the advice and guidance women have received throughout their lives and their experience within the work place have tended to reinforce occupational segregation. This supports research by Houston & Marks (2002) and others.

For the majority at least, little has been done to explicitly and actively encourage women to seek traditionally male jobs. Given many women tend to prefer less formal methods of jobs search, and given the minimum age of this group is 25 (average age 35), it is likely many of them have not accessed advice and guidance since school. Given the views of Smithson, (2000), that many young people form traditional gender specific plans and expectation about their working lives between the ages of 18 and 30 it is likely that many of the women in our sample may have relatively entrenched views about occupational roles that have not been challenged in any way.

Current research suggests those who do seek traditionally male jobs find hurdles in place. Interestingly, just under 15 per cent of women in this study worked in occupational areas that can be classed as traditionally male before taking their break but only about five per cent of these women saw their ideal job in these same occupational areas. This is not surprising given that our findings suggest that women do not perceive traditionally male jobs enable them to combine work with having kids. This is despite the fact that women perceive that some traditionally male jobs have other characteristics which they consider important in their ideal job, such as: the opportunity to see an end product from their work; the ability to learn new skills valued by their employer and the opportunity to learn practical things.

Do womens perceptions and experience about traditionally male occupations reflect reality?

Our evidence suggests that less consideration has been given to the needs of women who actively, by desire or by need, want to combine work with having children, particularly at a skilled trades level. As a result, there is limited evidence that these employers and professional bodies in these occupational areas are actively encouraging the employment or training of these women apart from in areas such as production work.

Many employers have not actively recruited women returners. Whilst a minority of employers explicitly said they do not believe that their work environment or practices are appropriate for women with caring responsibilities, the majority have probably got to this, through a lack of imagination rather than by actively excluding them. Some perceive that women rarely have the relevant qualifications and women returners would be no different, some also perceive that women do not want to work in their industries. They consider the root of the problem starts in schools. As a result of this passive rather than active approach many employers have not seriously considered how to develop and manage flexible working patterns to encourage women returners. A number of employers have developed family friendly policies for current employees, not necessarily in a formal way, in some cases this is seen as a 'loyalty bonus' for all employees. Many had not considered citing these policies as part of their recruitment and had not considered actively recruiting women returners.

Our findings suggest that to some extent womens perceptions and experience about traditionally male occupations do reflect reality. Some of the larger employers and professional bodies are seeking to increase the number of women working in these occupational areas and some are doing a lot to encourage women as a whole and support them through training and employment. Quite a lot of this activity has been at a professional level.

Where employers in traditionally male jobs do employ women they are pleased with the positive effect women have within the workplace, but the small employers particularly were concerned about the costs associated with how to support maternity leave.

Would women consider jobs traditionally done by men?

This report concludes that to some extent women could be encouraged to seek employment in traditionally male jobs. Our findings suggest that women returners seek jobs with characteristics that meet both their practical needs, for example flexible working practices, and provide work that is intrinsically satisfying and motivating in order that they are able to combine work with having kids. Jobs within traditionally male occupational areas may well provide work that is intrinsically satisfying and motivating, but more often than not do not provided the required levels of flexibility.

These findings suggests more women would be more likely to consider traditionally male jobs if employers were amenable to flexible working patterns, if they clearly demonstrate that women with caring responsibilities were welcome in their industry and if the jobs were marketed in such a way as to highlight the characteristics that appeal to women.

Our findings suggest that women with higher level qualifications would be more persuadable to seek traditionally male jobs.

What resources are available to support these women and help them explore alternatives?

It is clear from the review of current information, advice and guidance provision that there is general advice and support for lone parents to help them return to work, but very limited support targeted at partnered women returners who fall outside the state benefit systems. There is virtually no advice provision that specifically targets this group of women to encourage them to consider traditionally male jobs. Further, the sources of advice available can be difficult to source without internet access and are often uncoordinated and subject to fluctuations in funding.

What can be done to encourage women to work in traditionally male jobs?

Women clearly feel that employers themselves need to do more to actively encourage women returners to apply for vacancies within their recruitment and information practices.

Women suggest that in order to encourage them to consider new areas of work, advice and guidance needs to be co-ordinated and accessible. Given that women in this study tend to use the more informal approaches to job search and information, this poses a challenge for government, guidance agencies and professional bodies. Some women are more likely to respond to a more active approach from advice provision and employers and accept the challenge of working in a traditionally male environment, however, others, with more entrenched views may be more resistant to attempts to change their attitudes.

That said, the majority of women report actively engaging in the process of returning to work rather than, as previous research has suggested, taking a more passive role whereby work is found by chance. This is encouraging because it suggests that if providers of provision clearly understand the processes that women use they can be in a much better position to direct that provision effectively.

Given the finding that women with higher qualifications are more likely to be persuaded to seek traditionally male jobs, this suggests that it may be prudent to direct provision to this group of women first.

Employers also consider that more needs to be done in schools and through subsequent advice and guidance to encourage less gender segregation. They also comment that skill shortage is a complicated issue and that the types of skills required in their industries are undergoing change.

Our findings suggest that training is important to these women. Many have enjoyed training and skills development in past and current jobs and for many this is an important characteristic for current and future jobs. This suggests that women would be prepared to train for the required skills as long as they were interested in the skill itself and particularly if the skills learnt led to producing a practical end product.

Women agree with employers associations, trade unions and some employers that more can be done by the Government and other relevant organisations to encourage employers to see the value of employing women returners, particularly those who have caring responsibilities. For example this may be provision to give advice on how to

redesign jobs to help manage flexible working patterns, how to change recruitment practices to encourage women returners or how to manage these changes within the organisation.

Women, also agree with employers associations, trade unions and employers that there needs to be government supported programmes to provide retraining opportunities for women returners, that are themselves flexible and provide child care support.

11. Recommendations

In order to take these findings forward and achieve an increase in the employment of women returners on areas of skill shortage in traditionally male industries, the report concludes by presenting a series of recommendations.

Recommendations from the survey and review of current provision

What can be done to encourage women returners to explore a wider range of employment options, particularly work that is traditionally male in order to manage skill shortages and increase equality of opportunity for women? There needs to be:

- Easily accessible and funded, information advice and guidance provision which focuses on supporting women with caring responsibilities who wish to return to work or train for new areas of work.
- Impartial advice, guidance and counselling, ensuring that women understand all the options open to them, avoiding a focus on traditional female roles
- Information provision that understands informal job seeking patterns and actively targets women through local social networks
- Support to employers in areas of skill shortage, encouraging them to think 'outside the box' in terms of developing flexible working practices and developing jobs that women would find interesting, such as jobs that see an end product from their work, to encourage the recruitment of women returners
- Specific initiatives funded through a partnership between government and employers where skill shortages are particularly prevalent. Initiatives such as: marketing designed to publicise how working in this job / occupation will meet the needs of women returners; funded, flexible re-employment training courses, that can be accessed alongside childcare
- Make jobs more interesting to women by focusing on the factors of the job that appeal to them, such as making them responsible for getting things done or being able to produce a practical end product
- These "Women returners" need to have the opportunity to understand their potential and how that can be practically achieved to enable them to make informed choices about their return to employment.

Recommendations for employers based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- Employers should be encouraged to consider implementing family friendly policies for all employees, part-time and flexible working whether or not they currently employ women
- The policies need to be formal and family friendly policies should be referred to in job adverts to attract women returners

- Employers should be encouraged to redesign vacant jobs, particularly hard to fill vacancies, to establish how they could appear more interesting to women and be done more cost effectively and productively by one or two part-time employees; using, for example, flexible working or even home working
- Employers need to reconsider jobs they feel would be impossible for a woman to do, or improbable that a woman would want to do them, to establish whether this is really the case
- Recruitment practices need to be more innovative in the locations where they are placed and the words used in order to actively encourage women applicants
- Employers should consider women returners for training positions. They have a lot to offer, many having built up life skills which are useful to the employer
- As far as possible employers need to improve cleanliness, order, heating, ventilation and lighting. Generally employers with pleasant working environments seemed to have the least trouble in attracting women employees.

Recommendations for government based on employers' views

From the comments made by employers the following recommendations suggest themselves as ways of attracting more women and women returners to industrial sectors where they are currently under represented:

- Employers look to government to fund the training of adults who want a career change
- Employers look to the school system to provide them with leavers who have the basic qualifications in English, Maths, Physics and Chemistry so that they can take advantage of the training on offer. These subjects need to be taught in a way that appeals to girls if occupational segregation is not to continue. Also the male dominated industries need to be sold to girls at school in a way that appeals to them
- Employers, especially those too small to have a dedicated personnel professional, need help to manage the change that must take place if occupational segregation is to become a thing of the past
- Employers want the benefits and rewards their industry affords to employees to be publicised; to dispel the myths that put people, especially women, off the idea of working in those industries. Government sponsorship of the advertising would be welcomed
- Provision of quality, reliable and affordable childcare is also something that employers want so that they can employ women with primary care responsibilities without worry that their business will suffer from frequent unscheduled absences.

Government and key agencies that support employers, such as Sector Skills Councils, can play a key role in championing the issues that can help women return from a break to care for children to employment that uses their current or potential skills.

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Appendix 1: Employer/employee representative questions

These questions are intended to canvas the views of employer's groups on the steps that might need to be taken if occupational segregation is to be reduced and women returning to the labour force are to be useful to the economy by plugging skills gaps in traditionally male industries.

1. What skill shortages exist in your sector of the job market?
2. In terms of the following 5 factors, how feasible do you think it would be for these shortfalls in skilled and semi-skilled labour to be made up by women who have returned to the workforce after caring for their families?
 - Attraction of women returners to your sector of the job market
 - Training
 - Adaptation of working practices and personnel policies
 - Views of the existing workforce and management
 - Cost implications
3. What support could, or does, your organisation provide to facilitate the employment of women returners to fill vacancies in skill shortage areas?
4. What support, in the form of interventions, would be needed from government to facilitate the employment of women returners to fill vacancies in skill shortage areas?

Appendix 2: Employers' questions

These questions are intended to canvas the views of employers on the steps that might need to be taken if occupational segregation is to be reduced and women returning to the labour force are to be useful to the economy by plugging skills gaps in traditionally male industries.

1. Do you currently offer part-time or flexible working or job-share?
2. Do you currently have any other family friendly policies in place for men or women?
 - i. *If yes* - What are they?
3. How do you go about recruiting skilled or semi-skilled staff for traditionally male jobs below graduate level?
4. Do you currently employ women in skilled or semi-skilled, traditionally male jobs below graduate level? (If 'no' ask why?) (*If yes ask percentage split if known, then go onto the supplemental questions and use the words after the forward slash in the following questions*)
 - i. What changes, if any, did you make to your working practices and HR policies to facilitate their employment?
 - ii. What problems, if any, did you encounter when incorporating women returners into your workforce?
 - iii. What, if any, were the benefits?

(*If a high proportion of women are employed in traditionally male skilled or semi skilled jobs i.e.>20% ask next supplemental question*)

 - iv. What is it that is different about your organisation and your recruitment policies that attract women.
5. What difficulties, if any, do you currently experience when trying to recruit and, or, retain skilled labour?
6. Would it be feasible for you to actively recruit women/more women who are returning to the job market after caring for their family if this strategy addressed your need to recruit and, or, retain skilled labour?

If yes - What ideas do you have as to how this might best be achieved?
7. Would it be feasible to adapt/ further adapt your working practices in order to attract women with primary care responsibilities?
 - i. *If so* - In what way?
8. What problems, if any, do you envisage you might have if you were to adapt/ further adapt your working practices or HR policies in order to attract women with primary care responsibilities?
9. What costs do you consider would be incurred in order to make those adaptations?
10. What type of training and recruitment processes would your company/ industry need to adopt to facilitate the employment of women returners/ more women returners to fill vacancies in skill shortage areas?
11. What support in the form of interventions would employers need from the government to enable them to implement such approaches?

Appendix 3: Literature review

Who is this research about?

Although all women returners have similar issues and difficulties, they cannot be treated or viewed as a homogenous group (Bird, 1999).

Overall, women returners make up over a quarter of the women in the labour force in the UK (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Women tend to mainly work in the public and private customer services, often part-time. Although part-time work is characterised by lower pay and less security, women with caring responsibilities need the flexible hours and practices (Rosenblatt & Rake, 2003). Women returning to full-time work after becoming mothers tend to be clustered in different occupations, such as teaching and management (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Employment rates remain the highest among women who do not have children (Bower, 2000).

Sixty three per cent of women who work before having a baby return to work within 12 weeks after giving birth, and over half of these return to full-time work (Gregg & Waldfogel, 2005).

Women in SET occupations (science, engineering, technology) tend to have children when they are older (or not at all) compared to other occupations (Bebbington, 2002). Women occupy only two per cent or less of professional posts in many of the SET sub-disciplines (Bebbington, 2001).

What are the patterns of women's working lives?

Women's career patterns, their commitment and experiences are in general very different compared to those of men (Shaw et al., 2000). The pattern of women's work and the extent of state support that working mothers receive varies enormously across Europe (Chisholm, 1997; in Shepherd & Saxby-Smith, 2001).

There is a substantial gap between men's and women's wages and this may be in part due to the difficulty experienced by women when combining work and motherhood (Marks & Houston, 2002). As the caring role (for children or an elderly), remains largely unpaid a woman's caring responsibility has a major impact on her economic status (Rosenblatt & Rake, 2003).

Women who have GCSE or A-level qualifications are far more likely to be in paid employment than non-qualified women (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

Women's labour market participation is often characterised by downward mobility on re-entry. However, this seems to be changing for younger women (Shaw et al., 2000). An increasing number of women now only have short periods out of work or remain attached to work during family formation, in which case they often return to work after maternity leave with the same terms and conditions as before they left (Shaw et al., 2000).

Morris and Little (2004) found that around a third of women (both working and non-working) are involved in community or voluntary work, however, in general this was on the incline.

Women tend to be the highest group of the hidden unemployment because the benefits system has not granted them official benefits and they are thus underrepresented on official registers².

In 2005, mothers who returned to work part-time tended to be in one of four occupations: elementary administration, sales and customer service, caring personal services, and administration. These occupations are in general female-dominated and have lower wages than male-dominated occupations (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

² 'An Overview of Unemployment and Disadvantage in West Belfast'

The gender discrimination in the division of labour is not only a fundamental feature of industrial societies, it is also an issue of inequality (Brush, 1999). 'Making things and making things happen is masculine; caring for people, especially reproducing the next generation, is feminine.' This apparent distinction between production and reproduction means that not just are women and men separate, but they are also unequal.

The gender wage gap is lower for female graduates, even when controlling for the influence of greater experience (Adnett & Coates, 2000). The gender pay gap is especially evident for women with children. Waldfogel (1998) notes that mothers at the age of 33 were earning 64 per cent of men's hourly pay, non-mothers were earning 84 per cent. The current gender pay gap of full-time hourly wages between women and men is 19 per cent (Rosenblatt & Rake, 2003). The personal income of 'partnered' women with children is only 34 per cent of that of the equivalent men's income (Rosenblatt & Rake, 2003).

In the UK more than any other EU country, women are significantly over-represented in the low-skilled group of employees (Murray & Steedman, 1998).

Each year at home (during family formation) reduces a mother's wage by 1-1/2 per cent (Wright & Ermish, 1991).

What has influenced their lives so far?

Smithsons (1999) found that many young people between the ages of 18 and 30 in Britain form traditional gender-specific plans and expectations about their future lives (Marks & Houston, 2002). There is a lack of career information and guidance, both at school and as an adult, for example, through Jobcentre Plus (Dale et al., 2005), which inhibits consideration of non-traditional jobs for women.

The EOC report (2005) states that there is currently no strategic agenda for schools to encourage and develop young people's interest and enthusiasm or to help them to try out their ideas. In general, the careers advice they receive appears to reinforce traditional choices and young people are not given sufficient information on the pay advantages of non-traditional routes.

Research has found that girls have been actively discouraged from considering non-traditional jobs. The women that are currently in male-dominated professions generally agreed that had they been encouraged earlier to pursue a non-traditional job, their career progression would have been easier (Dale et al., 2005).

The decisions individuals make contribute to the continuation of occupational segregation, however, perceived occupational segregation in turn influences individuals' choices. (Miller et al., 2004)

There are several factors that can influence young women's career plans (Marks & Houston, 2002) and these include attitudes (Whitelaw et al., 2000), perceived social pressure (Roger & Duffield, 2000), and their mothers as role models (Tuck et al., 1994).

Marks and Houston (2002) found that quite early on in young women's academic careers, plans are influenced by their perceptions of their potential future role as a mother. Plans that they make show that young women are aware of the potential tension that arises when trying to combine career success with motherhood.

Women whose own mother worked when they were a child are more likely to combine work and motherhood themselves, suggesting that their mothers acted as a positive role model and demonstrated that this combination is possible (Marks & Houston, 2002).

Even when women are working full-time as well as their partners or husbands, they are still expected to do the majority of the domestic work at home (Dale et al., 2005).

Are they achieving their potential, if not why not?

'Women are the UK's single, most undervalued, and consequently under used human resource' (p.57, HMSO, 1993).

Many women returners are downwardly mobile, with the jobs to which they return at a lower level than those which they had left (Bird, 1999). Typically, qualified women returners do not gain employment in which they could use their previous education and training or their potential (Bird, 1999). Gender segregation profoundly affects earnings. Women returners tend to waste their past training – e.g. scientific and technical training – by taking less skilled jobs for which they are overqualified.

Several studies have shown that motherhood incurs a 'wage penalty' (e.g. Avellar & Smock, 2003). That is, once returned to work, mothers earn significantly less compared to women with no children.

Although there are many factors involved, the actual reasons as to why high-achieving women often develop a 'poor occupational biography' remain unclear (Abele, 2000; in Marks & Houston, 2002).

The Draft National Plan for Ireland (2003) includes recommendations concerning women and training, however it does not yet secure women's access to training. This is especially detrimental, as access to training is one of the main determinants of women's subsequent economic status.

A study in 2000 found that the majority of women returned to work after taking part in a European funded updating course. However, they did not resume their work necessarily at the level of their qualifications and experience, nor in their original profession. Interestingly however, the respondents did not necessarily see this as a negative outcome (Shaw, Taylor, Harris, 2000).

As many of the women entered non-traditional training when older, they had not been eligible to take part in Modern Apprenticeships. Funding to employers for training is focused upon Modern Apprenticeships; therefore the options for women were limited by gender and age.

Women returners gain from each qualification they have and data indicates that recent returners (i.e. those who have been looking after their children in the past three years) currently have more qualifications and higher wages compared to other part-time working mothers (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

Women in the UK still lag behind men with regards to their skills and qualifications. In spite of this, there is no explicit strategy to address these skill needs of women (Miller et al., 2004).

Miller and Little (2004) found that although the majority of women had at least one qualification, the over-qualification of women in paid work was significant. Just over half of the working women had received some form of training from their current employer. They also found that although some of the women had relatively high salaries, the majority of the women were still earning less than the national average. There is a marked under use of qualifications in women's present employment and this issue seems to be related to the matching of skills to labour market opportunities.

There is continued concern regarding women's difficulties in achieving successful careers as academic scientists, despite numerous initiatives in the last decade to address this (Bebbington, 2002). Data has shown that women only make up two per cent or less of professional posts in the SET disciplines. Explanations for this barrier are now being explored with regards to the scientific culture itself. It has been reported that women in SET occupations face difficulties in combining the professional demands with family responsibilities (Bebbington, 2002).

Women perceive fields such as physics and engineering as 'woman-unfriendly' or not easily combined with family responsibilities. However, in contrast, medicine is a profession although also characterised by long hours that is now being equally pursued by men and women (Bebbington, 2002).

The future

Research found that women who had not been in paid employment did not remain inactive but kept up to date by reading journals or keeping in touch with their former employer and over a quarter were involved in voluntary or unpaid work (Bird, 1999).

Data from the Netherlands reveals that women re-entering the labour market are less active compared to all other women looking for employment (Lucassen, 2005).

Employer attitudes

There is some evidence that employers are increasingly recognising the benefits and added value to the businesses of employing more women. This is partly due to the fact that women need to be more highly skilled than men to succeed, therefore, they tend to be highly skilled and committed employees (Dale et al., 2005).

Many organisations are more considerate, with a recent study (2005) finding that over a third of survey respondents (36 per cent) make special arrangements for employees with caring responsibilities³. A third of organisations in the survey also provide childcare. Eldercare provision, however, is only offered by a fraction of employers (4 per cent).

Furthermore, some employers in the ICT industry have demonstrated flexibility, with regard to working hours, in support of women trainees (e.g. early finish time and providing broadband at home) (Dale et al., 2005).

However, there is still a lot of evidence of employers' negative attitudes toward women in the male-dominated professions and even in employment in general. Women in training, as well as in employment face both overt and covert discrimination from employers. In some cases employers actually refuse to train or employ women (Dale et al., 2005).

Employers often hold traditional views about the suitability of men or women for certain jobs and are sometimes unable or unwilling to consider flexible working and childcare issues. Some employers in the construction industry still believe that women should not work in construction and are not competent to do so (Dale et al., 2005). Jobs in the construction and plumbing sector often lack the flexibility required for combining work and caring responsibilities. A further problem is that some companies lack the facilities for women (e.g. female toilets) (Dale et al., 2005).

There is also evidence of cases of sexual harassment, occurring when women are isolated in male-dominated training courses and workplaces (EOC, 2004⁴).

Women found that the male-dominated industry did not understand or cater for the requirements of flexibility around older children's needs (Dale et al., 2005).

Although it was by no means the norm, there was evidence that, in some situations, 'women were laughed at, bullied, faced antagonism, were given the worst jobs to do and were expected to make the tea' (Dale et al., 2005).

Gender segregation is also observed in apprenticeships and it has been stated that the current system only maintains the segregation, or even makes it worse (EOC May, 2005⁵).

Women found it significantly more difficult to secure work experience placements with employers in order to complete their NVQ qualifications than their male counterparts (Dale et al., 2005). In mainstream training women often experience isolation if they are the only woman, with no female lecturers, inflexible hours and little support.

There is a growing division between 'masculinized' labour which entails workers with high-level skills and the prospect of a career and low-skilled labour which entails workers without credentials of both sexes working under 'feminized' conditions which are characterised by low levels of security and low wages (Castells, 2000).

Any efforts made by employers to increase the number of women in non-traditional jobs are usually not sufficiently integrated and sustained (EOC, 2004).

³ 'Flexible working' CIPD Survey Report 2005

⁴ 'Plugging Britain's skills gaps. EOC Report 2004

⁵ 'Free to choose' EOC Report 2005

What influences women when they are looking for work?

A complex and varied set of incentives influence women's decisions to return to paid work including financial and economic necessity, self-esteem, gaining status and the opportunity to meet other people. However, the decision to return to work is not only determined by the woman's choice and motivations, but also of course by the constraints of the individual situation. Overall, people tend to choose to work for money-related reasons (Dooreward et al., 2004). The need for multiple wage-earners in a household is increasingly apparent and for many working-class families, more than one wage is essential in order to achieve even an average standard of living.

Morris and Little (2004) found that a third of women stated that children had influenced their decision about paid employment.

Women returners that are older tend to be more job and people orientated than younger women returners. Furthermore, women returners who have a lower level of education and financial problems are more money orientated, whereas higher educated women returners who are in a better financial situation tend to be more job orientated (Dooreward et al., 2004). Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, having young children does not significantly influence the work orientation of women returners (Dooreward et al., 2004).

Apart from the option of returning to work after family formation, some women also choose to remain in employment. The type of employee that chooses to remain in continuous employment (not leaving work and thus not returning) tends to be clustered at either end of the social scale, that is both highly qualified women and unskilled, unqualified women (e.g. Dale & Egerton, 1997; in Bird, 1999).

Even when women are in employment the domestic division of labour is not equally split, but the majority of women stated that they did at least 75 per cent of the housework (Morris & Little, 2004). A relatively limited input into childcare by husbands and partners was evident, and this is likely to affect women's decisions regarding employment.

Morris and Little (2004) found that the following factors influenced women's decision making regarding employment: availability and quality of local jobs, the importance of paid work to a sense of identity, influence of children (and other household needs), confidence, isolation, traditional attitudes and transport. The most significant difficulties faced by women in accessing employment are: on-going problems of childcare (although it was recognised that improvements have occurred in recent years), poor public transport, low wages (especially when set against the cost of childcare), lack of confidence and an upholding of traditional attitudes (Morris & Little, 2004).

Overall, women do not take advantage of advice in starting-up in self-employment to a great extent. The apparent independence and autonomy of self-employed women raises the issue that it would be beneficial to encourage women to attend networking and advice seminars designed for their needs (Morris & Little, 2004).

In Ireland, it is difficult for women to remain in paid work due to the lack of family friendly policies. This makes it difficult for them to have real choices' regarding work options, or to improve their position in the labour market, in terms of pay and promotional opportunities⁶. To assist their re-entry into the labour market, their specific re-orientation needs must be addressed. Women returners are faced with particular obstacles to integration into the labour market, including reduced confidence and skills (NWC Ireland, 2000). They also may feel much older compared to other women entering the labour market, or they lack the experience of computers and office software applications⁷.

Schemes such as 'Keeping in touch' (KIT) which encourage mothers to keep in touch with their workplace and employer during their absence are often aimed at those women who had high market value to companies and not those in lower-level posts who are more dispensable (Bird, 1999).

⁶ 'Giving women a fair share' NWC Ireland, 2000

⁷ 'An Overview of Unemployment and Disadvantaged in West Belfast'

The availability and affordability of childcare is the most salient obstacle to returning to work followed by professional knowledge being out of date and then employers' attitudes. Access to free or affordable training at HE level immensely helps such women (Bird, 1999).

What might encourage women to seek work in traditionally male professions?

Long and irregular hours of male-dominated professions with early starts and late finishes remain a barrier to women with children or caring responsibilities (Dale et al., 2005).

A study of investment banking in London in the 1990s (McDowell, 1997) revealed that women are rarely rewarded for masculinized performances in the workplace but are often subjected to ridicule (McDowell, 2004). In order to succeed in a traditional male work climate women have to become particularly resilient and determined as they have to 'prove' themselves.

However, women experience considerable benefits from training and working in a non-traditional skills sector whereby the construction industry, for instance, offers scope for self-employment. Some women move into male-dominated sectors for the better pay they receive for doing traditionally male jobs (Dale et al., 2005).

Many women are interested in non-traditional jobs when younger, but are discouraged, not supported, or not given the appropriate advice and guidance by teachers and careers advisers when at school or in further education. They are often not given the information on subject choices for non-traditional career routes (Dale et al., 2005).

Furthermore, some women encounter resistance from their husbands or partners to embark on non-traditional skills training. Their success in a male domain, in addition to the possibility of earning more money than their partner can trigger resentment (Dale et al., 2005). Thus, it is not just the employers whose attitudes need to be addressed, but also those of men in general, in order to encourage women to seek work in traditionally male professions.

Women need support and active encouragement to pursue a career in a non-traditional skills area. This can take the form of so-called 'Women-only positive action training', which has inspired many women to start training (Dale et al., 2005). These courses involve training with peers in numbers, flexible delivery of training, and childcare provision.

The array of factors that lead to poor-quality, low wage jobs being dominated by women needs to be changed in order to increase the potential earnings of women returners and to maximise their contribution to the workplace. This could be achieved by re-designing jobs, reducing gender-stereotyping and gender-segregation in certain jobs, improving the training provision for potential women returners and improving the welcome received by women in scientific, engineering, construction and technical occupations (Tomlinson, et al., 2005). Women should also be supported and encouraged to go forward for leadership roles (NWC, 2003).

Dale et al. (2005) found the key determinant that made women work in non-traditional jobs to be an interest and passion for the work. Many had always wanted to work in such a particular occupation but had been faced with obstacles earlier on in life. The women in this study spoke especially passionately about woodwork, carpentry and joinery.

There are various factors that can help women into non-traditional jobs; these include receiving support from family and friends, role models, and training provisions that welcome women (Dale et al., 2005). Women-only courses allow women the freedom to be themselves and not have to compete with men. Training with other women also offers strength and support. Moreover, some women actually require women-only training courses for religious or cultural issues (Dale et al., 2005). Advantages of these kinds of training courses also include flexible hours (a later start for example) and onsite crèche facilities or childminders.

For women with childcare and caring responsibilities, the anti-social and inflexible hours of the industries are hugely difficult (Dale et al., 2005). Evidence from experts indicates that the factors which inhibit women to remain in SET occupations (science, engineering, technology) are awkward hours (and often a 'long hours' culture) and work locations (Tomlinson et al., 2005).

The pay in male-dominated occupations is consistently higher, even after considering issues such as productivity-related qualifications, experience and skills-shortages (Tomlinson et al., 2005). Thus, although there is a clear financial incentive for women to choose training and work in the sectors where men predominate (as pay tends to be higher) these incentives do not work because they often lack the information on pay across different sectors and are thus not aware of this potential benefit (EOC, 2004).

Initiatives such as 'Positive Action Training', which emphasises leadership for women, aim to encourage women to take advantage of opportunities to work in a sector where women are under represented. These single-sex training initiatives are designed for several purposes, including for women returning to work after a period at home looking after children or other dependants (Dale et al., 2005).

The Cabinet Office (2000) states that in order to counteract occupational gender segregation and to help young women achieve their full potential, careers advice should be given 'which does not make outdated assumptions'.

In West Belfast, Women Centres such as the *Footprints Women's Centre*, play an important part in providing women with local access points and a progression route to help them to re-enter education, training and ultimately the labour market. These centres provide a supportive and non-threatening environment for women to undertake learning and employment related pathways⁸.

The Atena Project (launched in 1999) was established to improve the retention and advancement of women scientists (Bebbington, 2002).

⁸ 'An Overview of Unemployment and Disadvantaged in West Belfast'

Appendix 4: Current provision

Summary

There is little or no help for 'partnered' women to get back to work and none found that helps them specifically to enter male dominated skilled occupations. There are, however, some facilities that are targeted for others, or for general use, that they could access given sufficient time and resources to find them. Generally, with a few exceptions, the help facilities are uncoordinated and subject to fluctuations in funding. It is also a matter of luck and timing to find the right website or person who is willing to inform and is capable of giving full and accurate information. These help facilities can be divided into direct help to find work and training and help from pressure groups who work to improve circumstances that would facilitate an increase in working mothers or more women in traditional male occupations.

Finding the help

While there appears to be little or no specifically targeted help for partnered women wishing to return to the job market after a career break and certainly none found that is designed to help them enter traditionally male trades, there are, some facilities intended for general use that they can access if they have the time and resources to find them and recognise what is on offer as relating to their own circumstances. With all the resources of an office in an academic department and the peace and time to devote to it, the hunt for help is time consuming and frustrating. A busy mother, even with a phone and internet access at home, would probably find it even harder.

Some help that appeared to exist at the beginning of the project has now ceased. For example, the Women's Training Network had been delivering support, and training programmes developing women's skills in non-traditional skills represented for the last 20 years. It provided a forum for the exchange of information and good practice. WTN programmes offered community based training in SET, Construction and entrepreneurship to fit women's needs: recognise their existing skills and was run in school hours in term time. We were informed in November 2005 that WTN no longer existed because it had run out of funding, although some of the training centres still exist, some are incorporated into local colleges.

Certain pilot schemes and pockets of sporadic help were identified in local areas. But as you would have to be in the right place at the right time asking the right questions in order to be one of the very lucky few, the results concentrate on that help which is available to most women. The following facilities that were identified are grouped into those that provide direct help and information and those that indirectly work to facilitate an increase in working mothers or more women in traditional male occupations.

Direct help into jobs and training

DWP

As was highlighted in the recent Tomlinson report,¹ recent training initiatives have not focused upon the need of partnered women who wish to return to the labour force. This is because as partnered women they are not in receipt of benefit and are not acknowledged as a group of individuals with specific training requirements. Tomlinson concluded that there was a serious gap in training provision for women returners and such training as there was, was not tailored to their specific needs and aspirations.

The department of Works and Pensions offers training and job search facilities via Job Centre Plus. Some towns and cities also have adult careers advice available. Their website www.dwp.gov.uk appears to be very much geared to those on benefit searching for work. Generally speaking there is no specific help for partnered women returners to the job market, they can use the job search facilities of the Job Centre on a self help basis.

The exception to this in the past has been the rare occasion where both the women and their partner are unemployed and it is the couple's choice that the women should be the sole or joint benefit claimant. In this case they get the same help as any other claiming benefit. Recently there has been an enlargement in the scope of help offered under the New

Deal for Partners scheme to include unemployed partners of unemployed men claiming benefit if they want to participate. This provides them with a personal advisor who supports them through the process of searching for work, applying for jobs and finding childcare and training. Help with childcare costs and fares is given for them to attend meetings with their personal advisor. Partners of men who have been claiming benefit for more than 26 weeks have to attend a Work Focused Interview for Partners to encourage them to consider working, or increasing their part-time hours and finding support to help them get work. Non-attendance may affect their family's benefit. One of the support facilities they can opt for is volunteering for New Deal for Partners.

Learn Direct

The Learn direct service offers careers and training advice and courses at their learning centres and home study courses in IT, business and languages. Their services can be accessed via the web www.learndirect.co.uk or by the TV advertised telephone number.

The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology

In setting up The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology a serious attempt has been made by the government to provide a 'one-stop -shop' of helpful information for women returners. This is aimed primarily for women who already have Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) qualifications and experience. They have a very informative website, www.setwomenresource.org.uk which can also be of some benefit to women without degrees.

Comment [JB1]: This web link did not work

Excellence in Cities

One of the key elements of the Excellence in Cities (EiC) programme is the establishment of a network of school-based City Learning Centres (CLCs). There are over 100 CLCs operating in EiC areas across the country. Predominantly in deprived areas, these provide state-of-the art ICT-based learning opportunities for school children and for the wider community.

e-lip

e-lip website www.elip.info promotes itself as the 'one-stop' source of information and learning opportunities for the Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies community in the UK. It is funded by a partnership led by the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies (SEMTA) and Learn Direct. It provides a wealth of information on careers and training and a search facility for courses in your area, matching subject, location, level and timing of course. It does include information on equal opportunities but is not specifically designed for women especially not those with continuing primary care responsibilities. For example, the search facility does not appear to include a search parameter for courses that can be done in school hours.

Colleges and training providers

Colleges and training providers throughout England Scotland and Wales run courses in engineering, construction, technology and science, HGV, PSV etc. These can be accessed by women willing and able to pay the tuition fees, maintain themselves and pay for child care while they were training. However, due to the practical assessment element of many of the courses, in particular NVQs, unless they can demonstrate their acquired expertise and competence at work they would not be able to complete their full qualification. So generally they need a job as well as the training. Even if qualifications can be achieved without employment, those with paper qualifications without experience are not as valuable on the job market as those who have both and those without relevant experience can find themselves at a distinct disadvantage.

Women into the Built Environment (WITBE)

WITBE has worked with a range of learners including lone parents, older learners, and women from minority ethnic communities. Course provision is delivered in Sheffield Hallam University and through a partner organisation, the Women's Construction Training Centre in Burngreave, Sheffield. They publicise the opportunities through advice centres, libraries, housing offices, local press and through voluntary and community organisations to find women who are interested in working in the construction trade.

Sheffield Hallam University also runs the Building for Success course which is specifically aimed at women returners and enables participants to achieve 10 credits at level 4 (1st year degree). The women undertake a survey of a real property and a redesign feasibility study; they develop IT, report writing and presentation skills, and produce reflective learning journals. They can recruit trainees who have few previous formal qualifications, and it gives them the opportunity to study further at Higher Education level.

Daphne Jackson Trust

Offers help to women who are already qualified and experienced engineers and scientists to return to work after a career break. The Trust's website is www.daphnejackson.org.uk

Women returners' network

The WRN www.women-returners.co.uk website provides on-line access to their forum for women to post messages asking for help on returning to work and offering practical advice and information on small local initiatives, and private and voluntary programs specifically for women e.g. life coaching, careers advice and employment opportunities. They have links to Business Link, Avon (cosmetics), BBC learning and the Bank of Scotland's Women in Business Programme.

Their website includes a wealth of useful advice, job opportunities, careers ideas, support and funding available and how to update skills. They also have online leaflets and work books on CVs, interviews, flexible work options, choosing child care etc.

Handbag and Workthing.com

For women with access to the internet there is a free online fashion and lifestyle magazine handbag.com for women funded by advertising. It carries a major section on women's employment and self employment throughout the year with good links including links to one of the major online job search websites workthing.com. Workthing.com allows for a tailored job search and gives advice on careers, C.V. preparation, job hunt skills and interview preparation. They also help to cut down the time spent in making applications. Workthing is only one example of the many job search sites available.

Working Families

This is a charity, on its bright and engaging website www.workingfamilies.org.uk it describes the practical help it offers to both mother and fathers to balance work and home, assisting them to realise their potential as a parent and employee. As well as running more light hearted schemes such as 'The best boss competition', they offer practical help in terms of:

- Informing parents about choices in childcare
- Giving support on employment rights
- Campaigning for changes in the law
- Trying to persuade employers to adopt practices which work for both them and their employees
- Publishing topical, relevant and free information on a range of useful topics that can be accessed via the web or obtained by telephoning **020 7253 7243**.
- Offering a dedicated free helpline **0800 013 0313** for low income or otherwise disadvantaged families, providing free legal advice, help with negotiating with employers and with in-work benefits.

They also have a network supporting parents who are trying to combine paid work with caring for a disabled child.

Equalitec

Equalitec is a Portia project with a website www.equalitec.org.uk It recognises the need to recruit and retain more women in Information Technology, Electronics and Communications areas. The Equalitec project aims to help women returners access these opportunities through career information and advice. This service will be developed during July 2005 – June 2007. It will include:

- Career development and management
- Preparing for and managing a career break
- Planning a return to work
- Job application advice
- Demand for ITEC skills and skills gaps
- Job opportunities in ITEC
- Training opportunities for ITEC skills
- Career and Training Guides

Currently the organisation runs 8 work packages in total, these are:

1. A job-based training scheme (led by Daphne Jackson Trust) - work placements for women after a career break
2. Training information and opportunities (led by the British Computer Society BCS) - raise awareness of the value of ITEC skills for career advancement and access to training opportunities for professional development
3. Mentoring circles (led by WiTEC) - for personal development
4. Diversity Forum (Led by the Royal Academy of Engineering) - for mainstreaming to all key players to help change cultures
5. Innovation Award (led by **Global Women Inventors & Innovators Network GWIIN**) - to raise profile of the innovative capabilities and potential contributions by women
6. Career Portal & Information (led by Portia) - to help women before, during and after a career break to make the right career-related choices and decisions
7. Research (led by Portia) - to understand career prospects after career breaks, emerging employment opportunities, barriers and incentives to returning, etc.
8. Evaluation (led by the University of Bath) - to learn the most from the experience of the women and the organisations involved.

They have 16 partners at present, with some new ones joining soon, to cover all aspects on the issues surrounding women and their careers, from training, to recruitment and retention, to career break and retraining and returning. The project is seen as a way to transfer into the private sector the most successful national programme for women returners managed by the Daphne Jackson Trust. However it is only targeted to ensure the return of 30 women to the workforce or self employment.

A future initiative that are designed to be of direct help in obtaining necessary training and qualifications

A white paper published by the DfES in March 2005 'Getting on in business getting on in work' states that from 2006/7 there will be a national entitlement to free tuition for first full level 2 qualifications and extensive support for level 3. Adults will be helped to make decisions about their career and training by a new 'one-stop' telephone and online advice service. This will be useful for women returners who have never previously achieved level 2, but may prove problematic for those who have level 2 or 3 related to a traditionally female career and want to retrain in traditionally male skilled job with prospects for higher pay.

Direct help with becoming self employed

One of the ways that someone with primary care responsibilities can combine work and child care is to become self employed. Some sectors e.g. construction rely heavily on self employed artisans. Lots of small network groups have been set up to support self employed women in niche sectors e.g. Women in Rural Enterprise, www.wireuk.org, and Mumpreneurs, a global support forum for mothers who run their own businesses Mumpreneurs.com, and others

described later in more detail. There are also help sites and facilities funded wholly or in part by the major banks as a way of selling their financial services. But there are two main help facilities funded by government to help both men and women set up and maintain self employment and the employment of others. There is also a European funded community that is specifically to help women setup in business. These are as follows.

HM Revenue and Customs

HMR&C provide help for anyone thinking about becoming self employed or running their own business. Information and advice is available at local offices, on their web page www.hmrc.gov.uk (search there for 'starting up a business') and in the form of free leaflets that can be obtained or down loaded from the web. The main titles are, 'The Beginners Guide to Working for Myself/Setting up a Business', and 'Thinking of Working for Yourself?'. Their aim is to help the enquirer understand some of the many things they need to think about when running a business, especially the main tax and National Insurance issues. They also point to some other important areas of the law which aren't the Inland Revenue's responsibility, and suggest where to go for more detailed information.

There is also a helpline for the newly self-employed: 08459 15 45 15. Open from 8am to 8pm, Monday to Friday and 8am to 4pm Saturday and Sunday to call for advice on tax and National Insurance. By ringing this same number they can arrange a free appointment with someone from the HM Revenue & Customs Business Support teams who will give practical advice on the tax matters that will affect you: record-keeping, filling in and filing your tax return - and what to do if they employ someone. They also run local workshops specifically for people starting self-employment. These services are all free of charge. They can even book an appointment online and if they are Welsh speakers they can call an alternative number 08457 66 08 30 to speak to someone in Welsh.

Business Link

Business Link provides local help with all aspects of setting up and maintaining self employment or a small business. As well as a very informative website businesslink.gov.uk, they organise events, networks and consultations to provide both practical advice and social support. Some local Business Links direct resources particularly to help women who wish to become self employed.

Business4 Women

Business4 Women is a funded community that aims to support women with business ideas or those already running a business. They impose no membership conditions other than being a woman and aged 16+. They offer free workshops of business skills, like financial management, marketing, customer management, and product / market development, business planning, networking opportunities and mentoring. The community also offers incubation facilities; as well as providing ongoing, free business support and consultancy on a one-to-one basis for young or already established female business owners and managers. They offer their services free, citing 'Europe' as the source of their funding. Their website is www.business4women.com.

Help of a more indirect nature

The Equal Opportunities Commission

The EOC has launched a campaign, Works4 Me which encourages women and girls to consider a career in construction and the skilled trades. They have a help line 01274 436485 and a website www.knowyourplace.org.uk The website offers role models in the form of case studies and information on wages once qualified, answers to basic questions and links to the major sites in SET and construction and relevant women's organisations for more in-depth information.

CITB-ConstructionSkills

CITB-ConstructionSkills' primary aim is to aid the construction industry and construction industry employers, not necessarily to address diversity issues. However they see benefits for the industry in widening the employee base to include more women and ethnic minorities. They have a five year plan for a modest increase in the participation of women, and recruits from ethnic minority groups in the construction industry year on year. They intend to use a range of products and services to use as leverage to support and steer employers' recruitment and selection practices and

to improve the recruitment and retention of atypical candidates. These are some of the strategies they are currently undertaking or intend to adopt in the near future.

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- CITB-ConstructionSkills have 12 regional offices with staff to help and advise employers.
-
- They have a helpful website www.bconstructive.co.uk. It offers careers advice with a special section for females called 'Girls Allowed' to persuade them to consider a career in building. It has links to work experience, courses and professional bodies relevant to the building industry. They also have a main website www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk with information on women and construction.
-
- They run a yearly campaign, Positive Image, which promotes construction as a career choice for women and ethnic minorities.
-
- They use 'Construction Ambassadors' – often graduates or high level NVQ students who take the time to promote the construction industry in schools.
-
- They run the National Construction College which offers courses at various sites across the UK.
-
- They promote the benefits of employing female and ethnic minorities with all employers with whom they are in contact. CITB-ConstructionSkills views this as a huge pool of skills that is relatively untapped by much of the industry.
-
- They form project partnerships with clients who are about to embark on major civil engineering works and who have a vested interest in benefiting the wider community. The client then encourages a drive to attract and recruit more atypical construction workers among contractors through the pressures of the procurement process. One way in which this can be done is to introduce clauses into tenders for prospective contractors that formalise client expectations for the employment of atypical workers on the project. CITB-ConstructionSkills reciprocates by then helping with training related to the project.
-
- They also encourage the employment of atypical candidates through the STEP into construction project. This provides a subsidy for construction employers to provide six week work trials for atypical candidates who are 'job ready' but not necessarily fully qualified. STEP can also support associated costs such as short-term childcare. At the end of the trial the employer guarantees the candidate an interview but recruits on merit alone. Recruitment for this is normally achieved through local colleges and community organisations.
-
-
- CITB-ConstructionSkills actively promote adult apprenticeships and have received funding for piloting them throughout the UK. Two are now at the development stage with more to follow soon. Their target is to have women and ethnic minority recruits taking up 30% of places on these schemes.
-
- They also want to encourage organisations to fund scholarships.

Comment [P2]: We also have our main website www.citb-constructionskills.co.uk – this has loads of info on women and construction.

JIVE

JIVE is an organisation that is working with learning providers, careers advisers and employers to achieve cultural change and to improve access and retention of women working and studying in engineering, construction and information technology. The work in support of the previously mentioned UK Resource Centre for Women in SET

Womens Engineering Society

The WES promotes the education, training and practice of engineering among women and increases public awareness of the contribution women can make to engineering. It also raises the profile and effectiveness of women engineers by forming links and networking with other women's organisations and facilitates the return to work of women engineers on career break by keeping them informed of progress within the profession.

Women and Manual Trades

This is a national organisation for tradeswomen and women training in the trades. Their aim is to increase the number of tradeswomen working in industries where they are underrepresented and to help them improve their prospects and economic capacity. It works in partnership with training bodies, employers, public sector organisations and tradeswomen to address the issues that prevent women entering, or continuing to work in, the trades. They have a website www.wamt.org from where a training guide can be downloaded. Women can become members of WAMT and take advantage of conferences and a resource library. If they are self employed and live in London they can be put on the Directory of Tradeswomen.

They run projects e.g. Women Building Links Into Employment (WBLIE), a project set up to assist trainee Tradeswomen and unemployed Tradeswomen into work.

Portia

Portia is advertised on their website www.portiaweb.org as a gateway into Science Engineering and Technology for all women. This is a none-profit organisation working towards better representation and involvement of women in science, engineering and technology (SET). It works with and through its many partner organisations and is well placed for effective two-way communication with women working within these sectors.

Comment [JB3]: Should this be a hyperlink?

The WISE Campaign

WISE aims to attract more girls and women into SET and construction, to support other organisations that enable girls and women to advance their careers and to support other organisations that ensure girls and women stay in the SET and construction sectors. It does this through brochures, posters, websites, awards, a video, hands-on courses and presentations. Their website www.wisecampaign.org.uk also has useful links for women returners and information for employers.

Appendix 5: Method

This section details the approach to the research and the specific methods employed to address the research questions.

There were five strands or work packages to the research, falling in three phases:

Phase one: Background/desk research on women returners –

1. Literature review
2. Review of current provision

Phase two: empirical research with women returners –

3. Pre-survey exercise involving interviews and focus groups
4. Survey of partnered women

Phase three: Consultation with employers, employers and employee representatives

5. Interviews both face to face, by e-mail and by telephone

Each of these work packages is described in turn below:

Phase one

Literature review

Much has been published in recent years on factors influencing a woman's return to work or otherwise, following the birth of a child/children. Equally, the area of skills and training has produced a wealth of potentially relevant literature. Both areas were considered in order to determine the profiles of women returners, particularly in relation to skills.

The literature review included searches of:

- Literature published in academic journals
- Articles in practitioners journals
- The internet, including media and training websites
- The grey literature including trade union magazines and websites
- Related company magazines and websites e.g. LSC, regional skill partnerships *etc.*

Methods used for searching the literature included: data bases such as PsycINFO, BIOS, Ingenta, and Medline; a Web search for relevant national and international information; a search for literature and advice published by advisory bodies and training providers.

This generated a large number of articles which were systematically sifted for articles with relevance to the specific research questions. A list of key criteria was drawn up with which to sift the articles for their relevance. This ensured that whilst the search is broad, resource is focused on the most relevant evidence available.

Results were written up thematically to match the main sections of the survey so that evidence from the literature could be directly related to the empirical findings.

Review of current provision

Research into the help that is currently provided to facilitate mothers returning to the workforce was carried out using desk research methods e.g. using Internet search engines and contacting by telephone bodies such as:

- Local authorities.
- EOC.
- Charitable groups.
- Skills councils.
- Chambers of commerce.
- Training agencies.
- Small business service.
- Charities.
- This identified different options available to women returners including:
 - Direct advice and guidance services.
- Direct job help services.
- Groups that facilitate the employment of women in traditionally male jobs.

The research not only looked at what was provided but also how and where it was publicised. It included help that was provided for others that could be of use to women returners

The reporting concentrated on what help can be easily accessed by most women returners, in particular help with entry into areas of skill shortage, but will include good examples of help that is available but not currently widely accessible, or widely known.

Phase two

Empirical work

The DTI identified a tightly specified group as the focus of this study. Specifically, the research was required to focus on partnered women who:

- Have had a break from work of more than a year within the last ten years, for caring reasons.
- Are economically inactive or working part time.
- Are aged 25 – 55.
- Are representative in terms of high medium and low skill profiles.
- Are below graduate level.

Care was also taken to ensure that the sample was not biased with regard to area, region, socio-economic grouping *etc.*

Identifying the survey sample

To identify women in the research target group a contract market research company, TNS, was used. TNS conducts nationwide omnibus surveys on a regular basis. This is a continuous population survey where questionnaire blocks are purchased by various clients. TNS also has experience of in-home interviews which are conducted with 2,000 adults weekly. The omnibus survey represents GB population by age, sex and class. Because the interviewing was conducted

by CAPI it was possible to obtain tabulated results quickly following fieldwork so that advance information could be fed to the client ahead of the main survey analysis and reporting.

TNS had extensive experience in the use of CAPI. This has the advantage of consistency of interview process. The omnibus survey used random locale sampling to generate a representative sample of adults of whom a series of additional questions could then be asked of women in their own homes at a later date.

5766 women were interviewed in high streets nationwide by the TNS survey team, using a short series of screening questions, TNS also gained their agreement to take part in a follow up survey. From these 315 partnered women aged 25 – 55 with children aged up to 25 who met the criteria for the research were chosen.

The main survey

Of the pool of 315 women 280 were subsequently interviewed later in their own homes using the main survey questions. The CAPI system was again used to deliver the questions and record the results.

The content of the survey was informed by the literature review, discussion with the DTI project manager and a short pre-survey exercise. It collected mostly quantitative data but provision was also made for one qualitative comments box for interviewees to record their own comments

The aim of the pre-survey exercise was to gain an understanding of the relevant issues for women who meet the survey criteria. It involved face to face semi-structured interviews with a small number of women in the Sheffield, Chesterfield and rural Derbyshire areas. Care was taken to ensure that the views are collected from women with different academic and skill levels and from different economic situations.

Once the survey had been designed, it was then piloted by TNS using the CAPI system with a similar population. The pilot consisted of 15 interviews to manage to ensure quality standards. IWP staff were involved as observers in the pilot, and interviewees were asked specifically about the content and understanding of the questions posed.

The survey was designed to take no more than 45 minutes to provide relevant research information covering:

- employment, education,
- skills,
- attitudes to return to work (e.g. non financial employment commitment, work perceptions)
- attitudes to training,
- an understanding of sources of support
- an understanding of their views about seeking work / working in areas of occupational segregation.

The analysis

The quantitative data was analysed in three ways.

- Firstly a straightforward examination of the frequency of responses given to each of the questions was made.
- Secondly, where appropriate, answers were ranked according to the frequency respondents answered yes or alternatively by the mean of multiple response questions so that the most and the least 'popular' answers could be identified. (Summations of percentages were also calculated and reported for multiple response questions to give an idea of how many respondents had given the most positive responses to these most and least 'popular' answers.

- Secondly, where possible, the potential relationships between responses to single items or groups of questions were tested, to give a richer and more insightful picture.

In order to summarise some aspects of the data more concisely, factor analysis was carried out to discover if there were any underlying constructs within the answers given to a particular battery of multiple response questions. If an underlying construct was found, an average of the scores across that battery of questions was calculated to produce a scale score for each respondent to represent their attitudes to that construct. This was after having first ensured that items were sufficiently related to one another to make the resulting 'mean scale scores' statistically reliable and valid.

Relationships or differences between groups have not been referred to as significant unless they are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. Statistical significance of $p < 0.05$ indicates that there is a less than 5 per cent probability that the relationship, or difference found between groups, occurred by chance. Significance of $p < 0.01$ indicates that there is less than a 1% probability that the relationship, or difference occurred by chance.

Phase three

Consultation with employers

The focus of the employer consultation exercise is employers from areas of occupational sector that are traditionally male and are currently experiencing skills shortages.

The aim of the employers' consultation is to identify how available work may be adapted to meet the needs of women returners who are seeking flexible working patterns, how employers can encourage women returners into their sector, and what interventions government can offer to support this initiative.

The views of 40 employers were collected using a semi-structured interview either face to face or by telephone. These questions were intended to canvas the views of employers on the steps that might need to be taken if occupational segregation is to be reduced and women returning to the labour force are to be useful to the economy by plugging skills gaps in traditionally male industries. Those involved in the consultations were chosen from industries where women are not traditionally employed, and hold relevant senior positions. They were asked to give their views in relation to their industry as a whole and also their views in relation to their own organisations.

The sample included a spread of size of organisation and covered the following range of employers:

Construction	10 employers
Engineering	12 employers
Printing	2 employers
Science	9 employers
Technology	7 employers

Further to this to provide overview and balance two employee representative bodies, three relevant training bodies, and two unions were also interviewed using a framework of four items (Appendix 2) as a basis for the discussion.

The qualitative data collected was analysed using a matrix approach and the main themes and ideas were reported upon and used in the general narrative of the main report.

The issues raised during these consultations were:

- Their views on their industry's attractiveness to women returners seeking flexible working practices
- Their views on their own organisation's attractiveness to women returners seeking flexible working practices
- The extent to which they currently offer family friendly policies such as flexible or part time working into their organisation

- Their views on the feasibility of, and barriers to, introducing (additional) family friendly policies into their organisation to encourage women returners into their hard to fill vacancies
- Their views on any organisational impact resulting from redesigning jobs to accommodate those with primary care commitments and how any negative affects can be minimised
- Their views on the attitude on their existing workforce to the introductions if they were to introduce or extend such policies and how these can be managed
- What type of training and recruitment process would their industry and their organisation need for women returners to help them fill currents vacancies in skill shortage areas
- Their willingness to recruit women returners if it addressed their problems in recruiting and retaining skilled labour
- What support in the form of interventions would employers need from the government to enable them to implement such approaches
- Their views on the potential for reducing skill shortages in this manner likelihood that occupational segregation would continue to persist within their industry

Appendix 6: Interviewees' comments

Summary

The main themes in the comments made by the women in the survey are, the correctness of 'stay at home' motherhood, the difficulties of working motherhood, and what they consider should be done to help them, like the provision of good quality affordable child care and jobs with child friendly hours.

Findings

This appendix gives a summary of the views expressed in the general comments box provided for the women in the survey to add any extra information they wanted to convey to the survey team. The number in brackets reflects the number who made comments relating to each theme.

Mothers should stay at home

The most frequent comments (27) revolved around the opinion that mothers should be at home; they should be respected, supported, and in fact, given incentives to stay at home, not pressurised to go to work. These were sometimes backed up by their expressed intention not to go back to work while their children were young or considered that they were lucky that they did not have to go out to work.

'No I don't think so. I'm old fashioned. I think if you have had children it's up to you to bring them up.'

'Too much pressure is upon women to return to work to detriment of family life. Peer pressure e.g. 'holidays abroad' plays a great role of women returning to work instead of fulfilling responsibilities as a mother, a role which is supremely underrated.'

'All women are different and have different needs and goals. Some have to work, some want to achieve high status. My children are the most important to me and I'm lucky enough to be able to stay at home.'

'Pay us for staying at home.'

'I think that mothers should not in any way be forced to work. There should be the choice if they wish to but they should also be able to stay home and do the 'mother' thing. They should not be pressurised into it or made to feel pressurised.'

Working motherhood is fraught with difficulty

There were comments (10) surrounding the difficulty of juggling the practicalities of family care and work, how it can lead to poor quality of life with no proper work-life balance.

'It's an uphill struggle trying to juggle childcare and work commitments.'

'Full-time working mothers must be very brave juggling work and children - quite a lot is expected of them and not all employers would make allowance for their caring responsibilities. There aren't many suitable jobs out there. Working in a school is about the only one.'

There is a problem with employers that makes working difficult

Comments were made (9) about unfairness in the workplace, that wages for work that takes account of family care are too low, that there is still unequal pay for men and women, and women suffer discrimination in the promotion process, in case they have time off, so they get stuck in a dead end job with no prospects. Also, 'part-timers' don't feel part of the company.

'I have been unable to keep my higher level and status at work due to working part time and fitting around child care. It has taken me 12 years to reach this position at work but I have needed to drop down to a lower position.'

'Women are discriminated against in promotion prospects because they worry they will leave to take maternity.'

'Just that it is very difficult to find a job that fits in with children and generally the ones that are available are very low paid.'

Some (4) saw employers as unsympathetic when there is a family crisis.

'Only thing I found difficult is when my child was in hospital - employer would not let me have time off. Something should be done to allow mums to have time off if necessary without the worry.'

Opinions on tax and NI

There was concern expressed that working would lead to a loss of benefit or tax credit (2).

'Many friends of mine won't go out to work because they'll lose their benefits.'

It is difficult to return to work after a career break

Some (13) commented on the difficulty they saw in getting back into work after a career break; they felt they needed help with gaining confidence, practical help to find a job and re-training. Some of these understood that if your partner is working you do not get help with retraining costs. Three specifically asked for help with retraining.

'Going back to work can be daunting after a long break. Any help with re-training and encouragement must be a good thing.'

'It had been difficult to find any employer willing to employ me after a long break - even though I have the qualifications. They will take on younger people from school/college or people without having had a short break. I was told to try voluntary work!'

'If your partner is working you don't get any help financially with re-training costs.'

Things are alright as they are

Some thought that things are fine as they are (9). This was expressed in a number of ways like, opportunities are better than they were or, things are working well for me at the moment.

'Its worked very well for me with the job I'm in.'

'Things are more equal now than they have been.'

Requests for child friendly working hours

There were requests for more child friendly working hours. The most frequent (12) was for flexible hours to fit in with family care. The next most frequent was for more school hour's jobs (6). Only one mentioned job share and one wanted more home working.

'I just don't think there are enough school-friendly jobs. The government want single parents back at work but it's hard because you can't find work that fits in with school hours.'

'With your children it's hard to find work that fits in with school work - school needs - without compromising the children.'

'The government's policies to help women returning to work are not always adhered to by employers. Not encouraging enough for women returners by being flexible enough with number of hours and choice of days / shifts.'

'Hours should be more flexible for women; there should be more support for working mothers - more understanding about the need for flexible hours.'

Requests for good, affordable childcare

The second most common comments (24) related to the expense of child care, that would wipe out any wage they could earn, the difficulty of obtaining childcare and that good, affordable child care should be available that fits in with the needs of low paid working parents. Others (4) wanted employers to provide crèche facilities.

'Before and after school clubs at primary level should be in place at every primary school.'

'Employers should be prepared to be more flexible with their hours also crèches should be available.'

'If you are returning to work you have to pay all childcare costs up to the age of 3. Then you only get 15 hours free childcare. What should happen is that employers (depending on type of business) should provide childcare albeit at a minimal cost - government subsidy.'
