Women in London's Economy

Qualitative Research

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The Institute for Employment Studies

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Executive Summary

The qualitative research conducted by the Institute for Employment Studies for the Greater London Authority, aimed to examine influences on women's employment choices, perceptions and experiences; attitudes to training and employment of women in sectors identified as areas of growth by GLA Economics (financial services; legal services; ICT; creative and media; and administration); work and employment practices that form barriers to equality in these sectors; and other specific policies and practice, including best practice.

Influences on career choice

Occupational segregation

The tendency for women to be concentrated in different jobs remains a factor influencing job choice. Technological areas remain strongly segregated, discouraging women from considering them as areas of study and employment. However, in some areas, such as law, the balance is beginning to tip in favour of women.

Some employers now modify their recruitment materials to try to attract more women. But stakeholders such as employers, tutors, lecturers, local LSCs, trade unions, the CBI and TUC all believed that much more needed to be done earlier on to prevent young people developing gender stereotyped views about occupations.

Subject and qualification choice

The low numbers of females in some subject areas is a major obstacle to employers' efforts to recruit more women. Employers want schools to do more to promote subjects that feed into these areas, and to alert young women to the fact that subject choices made early on could restrict opportunities later in life. The paucity of enthusiastic and qualified schoolteachers discourages many young people from studying some of these subjects. Although this affects both young women and young men, over the longer-term the outcomes for women may be more severe than for men because of the areas into which they tend to move at present.

Parental and other influences

Parents exert a strong influence on their children's career choices, but the nature of the advice depends on parents' own employment experiences, knowledge and views of what is an appropriate career for a woman. Another powerful influence on young people's decisions is television programmes, but this only benefits occupations that are temporarily in the spotlight.

Careers advice

Given that young people receive variable amounts of careers information through their family, school or the media, good quality careers advice is extremely important. However, most stakeholders and young women identify severe shortcomings in current careers advice. Advisers appear to do little to encourage young women to consider careers in atypical sectors.

Work experience

Only a minority of young women said that their work experience placements had been useful as learning experiences or sources of information about jobs. The majority of work placements were unplanned, unrelated to the young women's areas of interest, and presented few learning opportunities. Some young women seeking placements in the growth sectors are told that there are no placements available.

Motivation for choosing careers in these sectors

London's growth sectors offer a range of well-paying jobs. Encouraging young women to enter these sectors may contribute towards reducing the gender pay gap in London. However, the research suggested that pay was often not the sole motivator for women. Interest, autonomy, working in a team, and important, high profile work, were all also cited as important factors. To recruit more young women into their sector, employers need to ensure that aspects of the jobs seen as attractive by potential applicants are highlighted in their recruitment literature.

Flexible working

'Flexible working' refers to a range of working patterns and can play an important part in helping people accommodate work and family life. In interviews, women identified flexible working as a key issue for them in the workplace.

Availability of types of flexible working

Women valued employers who understood their need to vary their hours or place of work at short notice to deal with family commitments or emergencies.

The IT and finance sectors were the most likely to have formal flexible working policies. Companies who have such policies often believe they increase staff loyalty and improve retention rates. In some organisations, however, flexible working is informal and dependent on individual negotiations. Approval of requests to work flexible hours was often inconsistent and could depend on a line manager's attitude. Some employers believed flexibility was inappropriate for employees in client-facing roles, since clients expect their contact to be virtually continuously available.

Part-time working

Women believed that part-time workers are not taken seriously by managers for promotion. Lack of access to part-time posts at senior levels was perceived as a significant barrier to career progression for many women. Women who progress to management level part-time positions may have to 'prove themselves' by, for example, working extra hours.

Impact of the long hours culture

In finance, legal services, the creative industries, and ICT, the 'long hours culture' (an expectation that employees will work more than the contracted hours) has become widespread. Such expectations can make it difficult for women to work in these areas, particularly if they have caring responsibilities.

Impact of long hours on progression

Women felt they could not challenge the long hours culture and that inability to work long hours was unacceptable in more senior positions. This channelled women into areas characterised by regular working hours and restricted their career options.

Caring responsibilities

Even if they have a full-time job women are still expected to shoulder the majority of domestic responsibilities. A range of caring responsibilities – 'eldercare' as well as childcare – affected their employment opportunities.

Childcare

Women employees and those in education and training cited lack of childcare in London as a barrier. Some full-time employees were reportedly spending half their income on childcare. Time spent commuting into London significantly adds to the costs of childcare. The unreliability of much public transport in the capital means that any childcare provision has to be flexible. Finding childcare outside of 'core' 9am to 5pm provision was a particular problem.

Progression barriers for those with caring responsibilities

Women with children felt that some employers viewed them as less committed to their job than employees without caring responsibilities. Caring responsibilities restrict women's working flexibility and ability to move into roles requiring mobility. Short-term contracts and freelance work arrangements present particular problems for females with dependants.

Balancing work and family demands

Difficulties in balancing work and family mean that in some of these sectors women tend to leave once they have children. A return to work after a career break can be difficult in areas of rapid technological developments. Although the women interviewed had successfully returned to work, they frequently mentioned decisions taken by other women who had left the labour market or found alternative employment.

Finding alternative work

While many women who leave these sectors do find employment in other areas, often this is in lower status jobs. However, while some women felt that freelance work was difficult for those with families, a few chose this lifestyle as a way of fitting work around home commitments.

Support networks

Family support networks were critical in enabling women to meet the demands of full-time jobs that demand flexibility and travel outside work hours. Some said they planned to leave London once they had children to be close to family networks.

Good practice initiatives

Many employers in the growth sectors understood the business case for recruiting and retaining women. A number of organisations had introduced initiatives to address the barriers that women face in entering and progressing in work. These included formal flexible working policies for all staff (IBM); tailored training programmes for women to address career progression barriers (Citigroup); higher education initiatives to encourage women into atypical subjects (University College London); and an initiative to support women with parental responsibilities in the creative industries (Skillset).

1 Introduction

The Institute for Employment Studies was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to carry out qualitative research as part of a major programme of research on the position of women in London's economy.

This is the second phase of the research programme which aims to analyse London's pattern of economic growth and consider the opportunities these pose for women; identify the barriers that exist to women benefiting equally from the economic growth trend, including employment, work and social barriers, as well as attitudes; and identify what steps are required to ensure that women can benefit equally from London's future economic development.

The broad aims of the qualitative research were to explore:

- women's employment choices, perceptions and experiences
- attitudes to training and employment of women in some of London's growth sectors
- work and employment practices that may form barriers to equality in these sectors
- other specific policies and practice, including best practice.

Within these broad aims, three areas were identified for detailed investigation:

- Women's motivations in choosing training, jobs and careers.
- Employers' and other key stakeholders' attitudes to the employment of women, both in growth sectors and in sectors, jobs and grades where women are currently under-represented.
- Employer attitudes towards part-time and flexible employment, and the impact on business productivity of organisational policies and practices to promote or restrict forms of flexible working.

1.1 Methodology

The methodology for this research comprised three main elements:

- A series of focus group discussions with young women in education and training, and women employees in growth sectors. The composition of the focus groups and the methodology for recruiting them is set out in Appendix 1.
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders. These included employers in London's growth sectors, the London Learning and Skills Councils, representatives of higher education institutions and training providers, and the CBI, TUC and trades unions.
- Interviews with a small number of individual women working in organisations in the growth sector, including some women working in senior roles.

Separate discussion guides were produced for the different elements of the research.

- In the focus groups, the core issues covered included: the notion of job or career choice, and what were the key influences on their decisions about jobs or career; what skills or qualifications they considered they needed to gain employment in their preferred occupation and any barriers to obtaining them; any other barriers to achieving the jobs they would like; factors that affected women's opportunities to progress to senior roles in the workplace; perceptions of London's growth sectors; and the importance of part-time or other flexible working arrangements to them.
- For the stakeholders, the issues covered were to some extent determined by the role of the stakeholder and the organisation they represented. Core issues included: views on any barriers facing women entering or progressing at work, particularly in the growth sectors and in jobs in which women are traditionally under-represented; and experience of undertaking any initiatives to encourage women into the sectors they represented. Other areas included their views on the availability of flexible working in their sector and whether they saw any relationship between business productivity and women's participation in the workforce.
- The interviews with individual women focused on their personal experience of working in growth sector organisations, and any barriers they had encountered to progression to senior jobs. They were also asked about any employer policies that they thought could assist other women to enter and progress in those industries.

2 Women's Employment in the Growth Sectors

Research by GLA Economics has identified a number of growth sectors in London's economy. These are sectors in which employment is projected to increase and in which there are highly paid professional jobs available. If women are to benefit equally with men from London's economic development, access to employment in these sectors is crucial.

For this research, five growth areas were identified as the key focus: legal services, financial services, media and creative industries, ICT, and administration.

2.1 Gender profile of the sectors

The latest data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS, Spring 2005) was analysed to compare the gender profile of these sectors in London with that in the rest of the UK.

Table 2.1: Gender profile of employees in growth sectors: London and UK

	Rest of UK			London			Total		
	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both	Male	Female	Both
	%	%	N	%	%	N	%	%	N
Creative and media	67	33	610,915	64	36	560,907	66	34	845,414
ICT	79	21	280,376	83	17	269,435	80	20	336,315
Legal	35	65	216,140	38	62	98,917	36	64	276,599
Financial	54	46	3,212,842	59	41	2,217,221	55	45	4,007,559
Administrative	18	82	3,076,407	25	75	677,033	19	81	3,536,943

Source: LFS, Spring 2005

Three of the five sectors are male-dominated – *ie* the majority of workers in the sector in London are male. The lowest proportion of women is in ICT, where 17 per cent are female, compared to 36 per cent in the creative and media industries and 41 per cent

in the finance sector. By contrast, the legal sector and the administrative occupations are female-dominated in London – 62 per cent of employees are female in the legal sector and 75 per cent in administration.

The same data also show that the proportion of women in ICT, finance, legal activities and administrative occupations is lower in London than in the rest of the UK. Only in the creative and media industries in London is there a higher proportion of women than in the UK as a whole.

2.1.1 Vertical segregation

Occupational gender segregation refers to the tendency for men and women to be concentrated in different jobs. Vertical segregation describes a situation where females may be concentrated in lower level jobs while males predominate in higher level, managerial or professional roles.

Although the legal sector is female dominated, a closer examination of the legal profession reveals that just over half of women (52 per cent) are concentrated in administrative and secretarial occupations, while most men are in professional occupations (73 per cent). Therefore, as a profession, it is highly vertically segregated, with the majority of women being at the 'bottom end' of the occupational hierarchy.

Similar patterns are to be found in all five industries and jobs examined – *ie* most men are clustered in the most senior occupational categories and more women are seen in the lower level administrative occupations.

In the finance sector, AMICUS has been working with the Equal Opportunities Commission and major financial services companies to tackle the large gender pay gap in the sector – 43 per cent for full-time workers in 2004, compared with 18.4 per cent across the whole workforce. One of the major factors accounting for the pay gap is believed to be the pattern of occupational segregation. Women are concentrated in occupations such as front of office branch staff, whereas, men tend to be concentrated in higher paid roles such as IT, senior management and corporate banking.

2.1.2 Horizontal segregation

In addition to vertical segregation, these sectors are also characterised by horizontal gender segregation, which means that men and women tend to be concentrated in different types of occupation. Typically, women are under-represented in more technical jobs, while men are under-represented in administrative posts.

Skillset, the sector skills council for the audio-visual industries, conducts regular censuses of the workforce. The 2004 census highlighted horizontal gender segregation in that sector too.[i] Based on an employer survey, the report found that some occupations were heavily skewed to one or other gender, with women making up the vast majority of those working in make-up and hairdressing, costume and wardrobe,

programme distribution, and cinema cleaning. In contrast, women had a very low representation in the technical occupations, including broadcast engineering, camera, lighting, sound, cinema projection, and processing labs.

Skillset has also conducted a study of the film production workforce, 58 per cent of which is now based in London.[ii] The survey found that there were almost no women working in camera, sound, electrical and construction departments. Women working in the film production sector were less likely than men to be married or living as a couple, and only 21 per cent had dependent children compared with 39 per cent of men. The survey also highlighted the under-representation of ethnic minorities. Only one in 20 in the workforce was from an ethnic minority, whereas, ethnic minorities make up 24 per cent of the working population in London.

3 Career Choice

A key focus for the work commissioned by the GLA was to consider the reasons why occupations and organisations remain stubbornly segregated despite sex discrimination legislation being enacted some 30 years ago. In this chapter we focus on one of the earliest stages leading to career choice, the career decision-making process itself and the influences on this. Following a brief review of the factors known to affect career choice, we consider the extent to which these factors significantly impacted on the career decisions of girls and young women currently studying and working in London. We also report the views of a range of stakeholders on the factors that lead the five sectors of interest to remain strongly segregated, and the actions they have taken, or that could be taken in future, to address this situation.

3.1 What factors influence career choice?

The very fact that an occupation or sector is segregated is itself a strong influence on career choice. Recent work by the Equal Opportunities Commission has demonstrated that the majority of both women and men believe that children who are about to enter the workforce should be able to make job choices without worrying about traditional stereotypes of women's and men's roles (EOC, 2004). The problem is that such global attitudes to women's employment translate into personal choices in only a fraction of cases, with the result that just small numbers of women enter some areas of work, despite such changes in attitudes. Why is that?

Here, we review the recent literature on factors influencing career choice, and then consider the extent to which the research findings indicate that these continue to be issues for young women in London today.

3.1.1 Occupational segregation

The very fact that occupations are segregated exerts a strong influence on career choice. This goes some way towards explaining why the link between attitudes and

choice is weakening, but with little resultant impact on the numbers of women entering strongly-segregated areas of work.

Although the work of the EOC (EOC, 2004) and others (Miller and Budd, 1999; Miller and Hayward, forthcoming) has shown that women believe they should be able to do any job they are capable of undertaking, few actually make the move into atypical areas. Fricko and Beehr (1992) reported that jobs have to be strongly attractive to young people to persuade them to enter workplaces in which they will find themselves in a minority. More recently, Miller and Hayward (forthcoming) have reported that the extent to which an occupation is gender segregated exerts more influence on the extent to which an occupation is seen as attractive than do beliefs about the stereotyping of the occupation (with occupations where the majority of the workforce is the same sex as the young person being seen as more attractive). In other words, the extent to which a young person sees a workforce as actually being segregated has more influence on their thinking about a job than does their belief about whether women or men should be able to do that work.

Research findings

Most of the five sectors considered in the research were strongly segregated. Largely, it was ICT, finance and some parts of the media that remained dominated by males; administration remains a female stronghold. In addition, employers confirmed that many of the sectors are vertically segregated as well: that is, while women may have made inroads into the lower levels of the occupation, they had made less progress upwards through the organisational hierarchy:

> *'The lower the job grade the more women there are. In the scientific areas women are also under-represented at all levels'.* (Technology employer)

> *'…some jobs still have a certain profile (in terms of gender segregation) and that is still a factor....it is possible to identify a male-female divide in these activities'.* (Trade union representative)

> *'The perception of an investment bank is that it is a male environment.'* (Financial institution representative)

The under-representation of women was largely believed to arise from stereotypes of these jobs and peer group pressure amongst young people to conform to conventional job roles:

> *'Anecdotally, there are fewer female students going into those areas. It is to do with peer pressure expectations, stereotypes.'* (Local LSC)

However, some of the sectors were seeing quite radical changes in recruitment leading to consequent changes to their profile, at least at lower levels of the organisations. Law is one of these areas:

'As far as trainees are concerned, two years ago we had seven males to 23 females and we struggled to maintain a 50:50 balance. There are far more strong female trainees coming through than males. It's been noticeable, it started to swing three years ago. Before that it was very much male-dominated. I think it's down to academic results. Far more women seem to be getting top grades which you need now to get a training contract in a firm like this.' (Law employer)

It is to be presumed that these changes will feed through into the perceptions that young people form of the sector. The important factor in changing perceptions of an occupational area is to achieve some 'critical mass' of visible females in a sector:

'The notion of critical mass which is applied to atypical jobs – for example, for women to stay in jobs like construction, there need to be a few women who can give support – can also be applied to 'A' Levels as well.' (National body)

Employers too were concerned about the low numbers of women coming into some areas, primarily ICT and finance. They can see that they are potentially losing out on talent. However, employers feel the problem starts earlier in the skills supply pipeline, and they feel there is little they can do given the current low numbers of females entering science and technology subjects at university:

'There is a barrier to recruiting women for technical jobs. The "talent pipeline" is less than representative of the population from when pupils start to select their subjects. Fewer girls take science and maths and this starts at about 16 and then filters through to university and then to the number of applicants.' (Technology employer)

'The company has done some research and found that only 20 per cent of students on IT courses are female. Females are simply not there to be recruited.' (IT employer)

'Another barrier is that we look for graduates in maths, economics and engineering and women don't focus as much as men on those disciplines.' (Financial institution)

Although employers were frustrated that few women were graduating in the disciplines from which they preferred to recruit, they were nonetheless taking action to ensure that they did recruit as many women as possible from those available. In the section that follows, we outline the actions they were taking to maximise the numbers of recruits to the sector, but also indicate the difficulties they were facing with this task.

Actions to change segregated patterns of employment

Ensuring that advertising material is attractive to the groups they are seeking to recruit is one of the most obvious – and probably the least expensive - actions that companies can take to encourage individuals from under- represented groups to apply to them. In addition to this, some companies were aiming to ensure that the individuals they field in recruitment rounds are representative of the profile of the company:

'We also aim for a balance of people in our advertising – both photos and case-studies. When we attend universities they also make sure that the team is diverse in terms of ethnicity and male/female. Generally I have found that females in the sector are always willing to accompany me to recruitment fairs as they want to promote [the fact] that it is a good sector for women.' (IT employer)

Employers were cautious regarding the extent to which efforts over and above such actions could be justified in cost-benefit terms. There were accounts of companies taking quite expensive actions with little result to show.

'In 2001/2 the company ran a series of women in IT events. These were aimed at females at university who were just starting to think abut their career options. There were three events which cost £80,000 between them. The events attracted 300 females. This generated a small blip in female applications…it is difficult to justify the cost as the company may only get a few extra applicants for a good deal of money.' (IT employer)

One possible way around this difficulty is for companies to link together to share the cost of such campaigns. This may have the added benefit of leading to a wider impact as potential applicants see that it is not a lone company, but a group of employers in a sector, that is interested in recruiting them.

'As a member of the Association of Graduate Recruiters we have been discussing sharing the cost with other large IT companies in order to spread the message and encourage female applicants.' (IT employer)

There is a link between the numbers of young women entering the pool of potential recruits and their earlier decisions regarding choice of subject and qualifications in schools and at college. We move on next to consider what the research said about this.

3.1.2 Subject and qualification choice

In general, as they grow older, young women tend to see a wider range of jobs as potentially attractive (Miller and Hayward, forthcoming). A continuing concern, however, is that by the time women's attitudes to jobs change, key decisions have already been made regarding the subjects they will study at 'A' level or GNVQ.

Subject choices made at the age of 16 may have strong repercussions in terms of the limiting of young women's future career options. However, young people may not fully realise the potential implications of their decision at the point when they make such choices. Schoon and Parsons (2002) have demonstrated that the qualifications chosen by young people largely predict their later adult occupational attainment.

Entries to degree programmes in areas such as science, engineering and technology show similar patterns of segregation to those seen in the workforce in those areas. The majority of entrants are male. More extreme patterns of segregation are seen for vocational programmes, such as apprenticeships (Miller *et al.* 2004).

There is evidence that young women who enter atypical degree programmes such as information technology and engineering may do so for the pragmatic reason that these subjects will be viewed favourably by potential employers (Miller and Petrie, 2002). However, whether young women are able to enter such degree programmes depends on the subject choices they made at age 16. For this reason, there is much concern at present regarding the subject and qualification choices made by young women and the advice available to them to support their choices.

Research findings

As the earlier research shows, the gender segregation of sectors and of subject choice are intrinsically linked. Perceptions of the profile of a sector influence the jobs that young people see as being potentially available to them; they then make their subject choices accordingly. Once subject choices are made, this closes off certain areas of work upon qualification, leading to the perpetuation of segregation in employment.

> *'The problem is down to schools and who goes into the Arts and Science routes.'* (Trade union)

> *'The company feels that targeting university students is too late and that promotion of IT to girls needs to happen earlier in schools, before the girls make their 'A' level or degree choices'.* (IT employer)

> *'[I know a] teacher who [teaches] mathematics at a mixed school. In the classes for 'A' levels there are hardly any girls. Last year she had two out of 12. This year was similar.'* (Admissions Tutor, university)

Current statistics show that women remain a minority of entrants to 'A' levels and degrees in many of the subject areas that employers in the five focal sectors seek. While there is some evidence that the proportions of women graduates in these areas are increasing slightly, there are concerns that actions being taken by universities to assist them to identify the best candidates may place further barriers in the path of women considering taking maths. One interviewee felt that the move to introduce the Six Term Examination Paper (STEP) for maths might disadvantage women:

> *'STEP might be a barrier, if people are not confident, as women might be, they might decide against doing it. We do not have anything to do with this [additional exam] for reasons of widening participation.'* (Admissions tutor, university)

There are other issues as well as confidence that influence schoolchildren's and students' choice of subject. The Roberts Review (2002) identified poor teaching as one key factor, and the young women who participated in the GLA research, as well as university staff who were interviewed, confirmed that poor teaching was another issue influencing choice:

> *'A lot of schools are using staff who are not physicists to teach physics, and where that happens there is not the same enthusiasm about the subject… [while special initiatives can]*

go some ways towards inspiring students, it is more about having more maths and physics teachers in schools who are enthusiastic, and more women in that role.' (Head of department, university)

'If you really want to know how something works and they haven't studied it, their knowledge isn't wide enough, it can be frustrating. One of my teachers was like that. He'd show you stuff from the text book but wouldn't know the proofs or logic behind it.' (Female undergraduate)

'In schools, the teachers who were teaching science often weren't teaching a subject they'd done a degree in and so they felt uncomfortable teaching you'. (Female postgraduate)

Teaching emerges as a factor clearly impacting on the choices made by young women about qualifications and jobs. This can have a substantial impact on the opportunities available to young women, in some cases even leading to women having to reconsider their career options at a later date. The importance of good quality information about the career options open to young people was emphasised by both employers and students, in particular, the fact that certain types of degree programmes open up, rather than shut down, opportunities:

'There is a lack of knowledge of career options – and this is across the board – at GCSE. Science is not seen as a priority for many girls and many girls do not know they are closing potential career options when they select alternative subjects.' (Technology employer)

'I just thought "The opportunities…I'll have more options with this degree [maths] than I would in another degree". [Keeping my options open] was important to me because I had no idea what I wanted to do [after graduating].' (Female undergraduate)

Taken together, these comments suggest that this is an important factor to stress in promotional material for some of the degree programmes that feed into the five sectors of interest to the GLA.

3.1.3 Parental and other influences

Parents remain a major influence on young people's choice of subject area and type of work. In the UK, Payne (1998) has reported that parental attitude is a key factor influencing young people's decisions regarding whether to stay in education or training, or to leave. Outside the UK, Farmer and her colleagues (Farmer et al. 1995; 1999) have demonstrated that, for those who choose to stay in school or college, parental support is a key factor influencing subject choice.

Schoon and Parsons (2002) have demonstrated that high parental aspirations are strongly correlated both with high aspirations in their children and with good academic achievement. In terms of encouraging young women to make decisions to take 'atypical' subjects such as mathematics and science (*ie* subjects in which females are in a minority in higher education and employment), the attitude of their mother is a key influence (Miller, Lietz and Kotte, 2002).

There is increasing awareness of the importance of female role models in atypical areas of work to inspire young women to consider their own career options. For this reason, several organisations have sought to identify female role models to encourage more young women into the area: examples include the CITB (construction), the GERI project (mainly ICT) and the DTI (women in science).

Probably the most visible types of role model in today's society are those in the media, and in particular, television. Francis (2002) has noted that TV programmes may have a particular impact on the impression young people form of various jobs. The importance of television programmes as ways of conveying ideas about jobs, and importantly, for challenging stereotypes, has been recognised by the introduction of the EuroPAWS (European Awareness of Women in Science) MIDAS awards for television programmes giving the best representation of women in scientific roles.

Research findings

The research confirmed that parents still remain a strong influence on young people's decisions.

> *'Early perceptions of jobs, in the family as well as in school, are very important'.* (National body)

Inevitably, the nature of the advice received from parents varied widely and largely depended on the parents' own employment experiences and knowledge. Some children gain far more experience of, and enthusiasm for, a subject because of their family background:

> *'My mum did a degree in chemistry and my dad one in biochemistry. I had a lot of presents like microscopes, chemistry and an electronics set.'* (Female postgraduate)

> *'My dad was a chemist and when I was a kid it seemed like he could explain anything, because of his science background.'* (Female undergraduate)

Inevitably, though, while some parents encourage their children to aspire to well-paid jobs, others are not fully acquainted with the opportunities that potentially are available to their daughters. Some may even discourage them from taking up opportunities that are available, as the following extract from a focus group with senior administrators shows:

> ***Focus group participant:*** *'My mother wanted me to be a secretary.'*
>
> ***Facilitator:*** *'Had she been one herself?'*
>
> ***Focus group participant:*** *'She'd been a receptionist and secretary and when I went for more interesting jobs, I was offered when I was a secretary and I grabbed them, my parents seemed to think it wasn't done. I was somehow stepping outside the magic circle and they still don't understand what I do.'*

We noted that research is increasingly focusing on the impact of role models. Several of the women in further education, undergraduates and schoolgirls mentioned the influence of role models in the media. Forensic science was mentioned as an interest by several in school and in FE and mentioned that their interest had been aroused by programmes such as CSI[1]. Others said they had become aware of different areas of work because of various TV programmes and some felt that there should be programmes featuring their own areas of study. The comments reveal that television role models can be an even stronger influence than friends or family:

> *'If I hadn't seen all these programmes on TV I would never have thought of doing it, ever. Maybe I'd have thought of going down the medicine line but probably not into surgery. My friends influenced me but not in such a strong way'.* (Schoolgirl)

> *'My aunty's in the field of medicine, but I don't really like medicine, I'm more to do with the whole forensic thing. I like "CSI".'* (Female student in further education)

Given that not all parents are informed about career options and indeed some may not necessarily give full support to their children's career aspirations, combined with the fact that television programmes may be less than realistic, this only serves to increase the importance of ensuring that young women have access to good quality information, advice and guidance.

While it is true that these points may apply equally to young men, the outcomes of poor careers advice are more severe for women. As the GLA evidence on salaries indicates, men typically end up in better paying jobs in a wider range of sectors; women who follow a traditional route are far more likely to end up in poorly-paying occupations. These research findings, therefore, emphasise the need for good quality careers advice across the board. Issues relating to careers advice are explored in the next section.

3.1.4 Careers advice

There is continuing concern about the quality of advice received by young people. This issue was noted during the recent inquiry conducted by the Women and Work Commission headed by Baroness Prosser (Prosser, 2005). In an interim report on the findings of the Commission, Baroness Prosser noted that the educational choices at age 13–14 are not necessarily the best informed of decisions, and that the patchy service currently provided by the Connexions service does little to dissuade young people from making gender-segregated job choices.

Munro and Elsom (2000) reported that many advisers, rather than seeking to challenge the career stereotypes held by young people, appeared to encourage pupils

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[1] An American television series based on forensic science, shown on British television at the time of the research.

to follow their existing interests. Their research indicated that some careers advisers considered confronting occupational stereotypes as being outside of their responsibility. In work for the EOC, to consider the reasons why apprenticeships remain strongly gender-segregated, Miller and her colleagues found the types of attitudes reported by Munro and Elsom still existed in Connexions personal advisers in 2004 (Miller *et al.* 2005). A number of Connexions advisers continue to believe it is not their role to challenge occupational segregation.

In addition to questioning the nature of the advice given by career advisers, Munro and Elsom found that, for many pupils, any interview with an adviser took place after key decisions regarding subject choice had been made. Given that subject choices made in school can serve to limit young people's subsequent choice of university course or other further training, and that qualification choices made in school largely predict adult attainment (Schoon and Parsons, 2002), any failing in careers advice is likely to have major impact on lifetime opportunities.

Research findings

The research conducted for the GLA revealed that it is still often the case that young women receive poor guidance on careers. Concerns and complaints were voiced from virtually all of the groups we spoke to:

> *'In our view, very little is being done. There was a survey, reported at a meeting I was at, that reported there was very little advice and guidance being given.'* (Local LS)

> *'There are limitations in current careers advice and it does not challenge people's perceptions of different kinds of jobs. Our submission to the Women and Work Commission identified deficiencies in the careers advice – including not making girls aware of the range of career choices or the opportunities available in higher paid sectors.'* (National body)

> *'I wasn't encouraged at all. It never crossed my mind to do anything else. The careers adviser at my school was rubbish and all my head of year did was say "What subject are you doing to do, maths? That's nice." It was my own decision.'* (Female undergraduate)

> *'More could be done. Young people say "My [Personal Adviser] did not tell me about…"'* (Local LSC)

The following exchange of views in one of the focus groups illustrates both the widespread nature of this problem and the importance that women attach to having access to adequate information about career options:

> ***Facilitator:*** *'Is there anything you think should be done to ensure that women have equal opportunities of entering all types of jobs?'*
>
> ***Participant 1:*** *'Support at school.'*
>
> ***Facilitator:*** *'What sort of support?'*

Participant 1: *'More information. I remember when I had my career guidance they just did not help me in the slightest.'*

Facilitator: *'School careers guidance?'*

Participant 1*: 'Yes. They didn't give any advice and even when you leave school you still don't get help or guidance.'*

Participant 2: *'I'd like to extend that to careers guidance at university as well.'*

Facilitator: *'Did you get any careers guidance at university?'*

Participant 2: *'No.'*

Participant 3: *'I can't remember getting any advice. I think we had one session at school and they gave us leaflets.'*

Sometimes young women only find out about the full range of options that might have been available once they have taken up their place at university:

'When I got to university I realised there were things like pharmacology...' (Female postgraduate)

The value of fully-qualified science teachers in guiding careers choices, as well as informed careers advisers, was emphasised by the postgraduate students who participated in the focus groups. Fully-qualified science teachers are in a better position to give informed advice on careers in the sector:

'My biology teacher [at school] used to lecture at university and was really helpful if anyone had any queries about what to study.' (Female postgraduate)

'[Good teachers are important because of their] enthusiasm about career choices as well, if you've got people coming in and inspiring you about going and working in science you're more likely to think it's a good idea. Otherwise how do you know, your only exposure is going to be through your parents, work experience.' (Female postgraduate)

A lack of careers advice can lead young people to make subject choices they regret once they subsequently have access to advice:

'We missed out on having a careers adviser from when we were making our choices for 'A' levels and GCSEs. Since [the careers adviser] came here this year loads of people in our year have swapped subjects and dropped or added subjects, so it has been an influence.' (Schoolgirl)

The timing of careers advice is critical. Advisers may find that young girls resent having to spend time thinking about careers when they have not yet chosen the subjects they wish to focus on at 'A' level. However, as we have seen, decisions made at age 15–16 regarding choice of 'A' level subjects may have severe implications for young people's subsequent career options. This point – that individuals ideally need to think about career options before choosing 'A' levels, rather than after completing

them - is an important one that may need stressing by careers advisers, since young women may not recognise the implications of choices made at this age:

> *'We had a careers lesson once a week but last year doing GCSEs I couldn't think about it because I hadn't started my 'A' levels yet. I hadn't taken my GCSEs - it was way too early for me to start thinking [about careers].' (Schoolgirl)*

Careers advisers may, therefore, find it beneficial to emphasise at the outset that choices made at age 16 regarding 'A' level subjects may serve to restrict the range of options available to the young person when they come to consider university or employment. Young people tend to focus primarily on what they think they want to do, and this view often changes as they grow older. Encouraging them to consider what combination of subjects will keep the maximum number of options open to them may be a useful way of ensuring young women have a broader range of possible options available to them when decisions come to be made at age 18. Again, while these points apply equally to males and females, the data on education and employment show that the potential long-term impact is greater for women than for men.

We have focussed so far primarily on the academic route. Those involved with vocational education and training feel there are particular problems with the advice that young people receive on vocational pathways and options.

> *'Generally, regarding advice about vocational training, there is a mismatch [in the amount of information given about] the academic and vocational routes, the vocational routes need more prominence.'* (Local LSC)

Some local LSCs were trying to change this situation by developing materials themselves to provide information on vocational routes:

> *'[This LLSC] has developed a pack for teachers to tell them what was available in terms of vocational options.'* (Local LSC)

> *'I am putting together a list of workbased learning provider initiatives in this area.'*(Local LSC)

Local LSCs also reported that some providers of work-based learning were being quite active in inviting children to go along and gain experience of non-traditional work-based tasters. While the LSCs would like to do more to support such efforts, funding could constrain their actions:

> *'About four years ago we had money for non-traditional tasters. More could be done but we are subject to decisions regarding discretionary funding. We rely on discretionary funding.'* (Local LSC)

Taken together, the views of stakeholders and the experiences of the girls and women indicate that careers advice in many cases falls far short of what is desirable. Where

advice is lacking, work experience can be invaluable. We turn to consider what the research told us about work experience opportunities in London next.

3.1.5 Work experience

Work experience can be of use for several reasons. First, it can provide a young person with the opportunity to 'try out' an area of work that they otherwise might not consider; second, it may give an opportunity to experience first-hand their sector of preference and discover whether or not it really is the right choice for them.

There is a range of models in place for organising work experience placements. Schools themselves may organise placement opportunities through contact with local companies. There are some commercial companies who organise work experience placements on behalf of schools. Often, though, young people themselves are left to arrange placements, either by contacting the placement organisations identified by their school, or through their own personal contacts (or, more often, other family members' contacts).

Research has shown that young people from deprived areas may be particularly affected by any shortcomings in facilitating placements. Hillage *et al.* (1996) found that students tended to take up fairly traditional placements; subsequent work by Hillage and his colleagues (Hillage *et al.,* 2001) found that schools in deprived areas felt less in a position to challenge class, social or gender issues in regard to placements. While Hillage *et al.* found a slight narrowing of the gender gap in some sectors, such as production, legal and media, nonetheless, large gender differences remained in placements in sectors such as health and education, where the majority of placements were taken by girls.

In earlier work Rolfe (1999) had reported that, where schoolchildren were left to arrange their own work placements, these were often in stereotypical areas, and this was particularly the case when they arranged placements through family contacts. The work by Hillage *et al.* (2001) confirmed this, indicating that where area co-ordinators were attempting to challenge stereotypical placements, this could be jeopardised by pupils finding placements for themselves. The researchers also reported that the numbers of pupils finding placements for themselves were increasing.

Research findings

As indicated above, work experience can be useful for a variety of reasons. A placement allows the young person the opportunity to view first-hand a variety of different types of job in an organisation as well as the one in which they are engaged, which can inform their future career decisions. Chosen well and with a good placement, a young person may gain valuable experience of their intended career that will help them feel confident they are making the correct decision. Equally, work

experience may be valuable for a quite opposite set of reasons. A young person may obtain a placement in an area they initially believe they want to work in, but once they have experience of the work, discover that it really is not what they want to do.

In between these extremes of useful positive and negative[2] work experiences lies the great majority of work experience placements: unplanned, unrelated to what the young person wants to do, and presenting few learning opportunities.

> *'Some of my friends had really good work experiences where they could get involved with doing the jobs. When I [did mine, in] journalism, it wasn't very well organised. I turned up and they had forgotten and I had to do typing. I did a bit of writing but some of the time I'd finish a job they'd asked me to do and they'd have nothing else for me to do.'* (Female undergraduate)

> *'A lot of us didn't have much option where we could go, we didn't know where or how to organise it. I regret not going somewhere more interesting that would have helped me in seeing what the work environment is like.'* (Female undergraduate)

> *'I had to work in some beauty school and they didn't have anything for me to do so I had to sit around and watch.'* (Schoolgirl)

> *'I had [my placement] in the Odeon cinema but it wasn't really doing anything in particular, there wasn't anything positive, it was just going, watching the film and that was basically it.'* (Student in further education)

Where work experience placements are well-organised these can be amongst the most rewarding learning opportunities for young people:

> *'I had to teach five children with learning disabilities the alphabet in a week and it was the most rewarding thing I've ever done. I came back to see them and they could still get to M and N.'* (Schoolgirl)

The comments from schoolgirls, undergraduates and women in employment indicated that, when it came to obtaining a placement, they took what they could get rather than doing something they were actually interested in pursuing as a career. Many had arranged their own placements, often through family contacts. As well as being disappointing for the girls, this is a lost opportunity for employers in the five sectors which are the focus of this research:

> *'I wanted to do something like working in a bank. They didn't have any of those options so then I went to do hairdressing.'* (Schoolgirl)

> *'I worked in a vets but it wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to do something creative like design work. She didn't have options like that.'* (Schoolgirl)

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[2] Negative in the sense of informing the young person they do not want to work in this area.

Providing work experience opportunities in these sectors is one way to promote job opportunities in these sectors. Given the very clear shortcomings in the work experience arrangements for many of the girls and young women we spoke to, there is an almost open field for any employer that wanted to start offering placement opportunities to young people.

3.1.6 Attitudes, stereotypes and job characteristics

Stereotypes and perceptions – those held by young people, employers, parents and teachers – are key factors affecting decisions about the appropriateness or otherwise of jobs. From a very young age children start to believe that certain jobs should be performed either by women only or by men only. These beliefs parallel existing patterns of segregation. With age, children start to become more liberal in their attitudes, believing that more jobs should be undertaken by women or men, although some jobs remain perceived as strongly stereotyped. Technical, engineering and computing jobs are amongst those most strongly stereotyped (Miller and Hayward, forthcoming).

The extent to which occupations are seen as sex-stereotyped is one of the most influential factors affecting individuals' job choices. Stockard and McGee (1990) found the sex-stereotyping of an occupation to be the strongest predictor of occupational preference amongst children, having more influence on preference than any other aspect of the job such as earnings, perceived importance, difficulty or supervisory responsibilities.

Despite the increasing tendency with age to believe that more jobs should be open to either women or men, nonetheless, a majority of young people continue to aspire to jobs they perceive as gender-appropriate (that is, largely undertaken by people of their own gender). Such entrenched preferences are even stronger in young males than young females; Helwig (1998) has reported that boys, in fact, consider a more limited range of jobs as potential occupations as they grow older. However, the lower status and pay of many occupations deemed to be 'female' means that the impact of such stereotyped views in constraining career choice are likely to be far more negative for females than for males.

Although stereotyping may be a large contributor to occupational choice, other factors such as extrinsic rewards (pay and benefits), intrinsic rewards (job satisfaction and meaningfulness), interest and the types of abilities demanded by the job also affect people's career decisions.

Ability in and of itself may be a strong determinant of job choice – individuals tend to prefer to do things they are good at, although interests have been found to have more impact on career choice than ability (Tracey and Hopkins, 2001). However, many women are unable to form a comprehensive view either of their abilities or the sorts of activities they potentially might find interesting because they have only restricted

access to some types of experience. Computer technology is one such area; while computer access is rapidly changing, given the growth in home computing, community access facilities and the linking of all schools to the Internet, until recently girls typically have had little access to equipment. A common complaint has been that, where there is potentially access to the technology in schools, boys tend to 'monopolise' the equipment, restricting girls' access to 'hands-on' experience (Miller *et al.*, 2000). Such a situation serves to limit the basis upon which individuals can make judgements both of their own abilities and of their potential interest in an activity. The long-term impact of this is still being seen in the low numbers of girls taking courses in computer science or engineering at university.

Research findings

Young people may think that certain jobs can only be done by men only (or conversely, only by women). Alternatively, while they may feel they are capable of doing the work, they may not relish the idea of being the only woman in a particular department or office:

> *'The technical side of the business is viewed as being a male dominated area which may put off female applicants.'* (Telecommunications employer)

> *'The IT sector is perceived as male-dominated, techy and geeky. These perceptions are formed at an early age and most girls will have already made choices which will have shaped their long-term options before they leave school.'* (IT employer)

The young women themselves commented on the often quite erroneous nature of the stereotypes that abound about these sectors:

> *'A lot of people stereotype maths students, [saying] "maths is very isolating and you don't spend time with other people". I don't think that's true. I always find if there's something I don't understand, if I talk through it with someone else then I can understand it so much more. It is a sociable subject.'* (Female undergraduate)

The schoolgirls who took part in the research were readily able to identify male-dominated areas of work. They also shared common stereotypes about the nature of some of these jobs:

> ***Facilitator:*** *'Are there any barriers in any of those sectors where young women might find it harder to get in than young men?'*
>
> ***Schoolgirl 1:*** *'Some jobs prefer women to men or men to women.'*
>
> ***Schoolgirl 2:*** *'Some jobs just have men, especially doctors.'*
>
> ***Facilitator:*** *'There are some [other] jobs in which women really are underrepresented, can you think of any?'*
>
> ***Group:*** *'Dentists', 'Sport', 'Builders', 'Construction', 'Engineering', 'Mechanics', 'Electrician', 'Plumber'*

Schoolgirl 3: *'There's not many female mechanics.'*

Facilitator: *'Why is that?'*

Schoolgirl 3: *'They don't want to get dirty.'*

Schoolgirl 4: *'It's a stereotypically male job which might put some women off and it's dirty.'*

Schoolgirl 3: *'You go home stinking of grease and oil!'*

Facilitator: *'There are some jobs like manual jobs that don't attract women?'*

Schoolgirl 3: *'Yes'.*

Schoolgirl 4: *'If you want to do that you could get a job but most women don't want to be in that.'*

There was a very strong consensus of opinion amongst all the London region local LSCs to whom we spoke, and amongst other stakeholders as well, that work to address such stereotypes needs to start very early on. By the time young girls start to consider career options and subject choices such attitudes may already be deeply entrenched.

'What is important is to get them when they are quite young and still at school, get rid of the stereotypes about what men should do, what women should do. You need to get to them before they go into post-16 education and training.' (Local LSC)

'Schools – that is where work needs to be done, getting them interested in maths.' (Admissions tutor, university)

'Education and careers guidance. There is a lot they could do to change perceptions of the industry in the roles [areas] in which women are under-achieving.' (Trade union representative)

The interviews revealed that most of the stakeholders believed that work needed to be done much earlier on to prevent children acquiring such attitudes in the first place. Employers believed this needed to be done, but felt that they were limited in what they were themselves able to do to affect this situation. We have already noted that one way in which employers may play a key role in changing perceptions of various jobs and sectors is by engaging more with schools to offer work experience placements in the key sectors to girls. One employer suggested there was a role for the GLA to play in helping to promote jobs in these sectors too:

'Women need to be influenced earlier in the decision-making process. The industry is aware of how male dominated the IT sector is, particularly at the higher levels, and increased participation of women and awareness of the issue may help to redress this balance over time. As only one of a small group of companies it is difficult and the cost is prohibitive to talk directly to children in all schools. Organisations such as the GLA and schools careers services could encourage and promote the sector at an early age. The company would be

happy to work with public sector organisations to promote the sector to schools, for example talking to GCSE students, even if it is not branded marketing. Very often companies take a short-term perspective weighing cost against immediate benefit. Perhaps the GLA could take a longer-term view and companies would be able to support it as it would be better than anything they could do alone.' (IT employer)

Motivation for choosing careers in these sectors

The sectors selected for examination in this research for the GLA are largely well-paying ones. Is this a consideration for many young women? This was one of the questions the research set out to explore. Trainers and lecturers believed that pay was a factor that attracted both women and men:

'Both women and men are attracted by the financial element. But men are more attracted because of what they are taught at school, and they are more likely to get involved with family business.'(Vocational training provider)

'The people who apply to us generally want to get well-paid jobs and we confirm that a maths degree is a good way to go if this is what you want. We also offer a wide range of joint degrees. And both males and females are equally enthusiastic. The fact is that with a good degree in maths from a place like [us], an employer who would pay a lot of money would be interested in you.' (Admissions tutor, university)

The young women we spoke to, though, were likely to cite other factors as well as issues of money and status. We are not suggesting that money is not a factor – and a highly influential one at that – for these women, but other issues are also very important in their career decisions:

'I was attracted by the different challenges – it is interesting – you would be doing different types of work all the time, especially during training, early on. It was exciting working on high profile cases. The appeal was working with international clients, important cases, and if you were good then as a woman you could succeed – and it was well-paid.' (Law employer)

'I wouldn't want a job where you were constantly working underneath someone and being told what to do. I'd like to have a job where I'm capable of managing my own day. If you've got a maths degree and you know what you're doing in a job you can do it yourself. That's what I want.' (Female undergraduate)

'Ultimately I was thinking about my career, I want a good job and I know I wanted to work in London, and use my language and work in Europe. The fact that I love maths so much, I thought "It's a no brainer, do maths and go into finance".' (Female undergraduate)

'I have aspirations to start work with Deutsche Bank or a merchant bank. I think the amount of money you earn reflects your status in the company. You can keep on working up and up. I like to set myself goals to become the next step up. It gives you a kick to get to the next stage. It's what I've been like since I've been a little girl. I'm so competitive. I want

to achieve my goals and with a maths degree you can put your knowledge to that use. In a team as well. You can work up the ladder to the top.' (Female undergraduate)

Employers would be well advised to consider quite what it is that young people are seeking from a job when they plan the content of their careers advertising materials. Minor modifications to material to emphasise the range of varied jobs available, the status, the team work and, possibly, international work may serve to attract a wider range of applicants.

3.2 Conclusions

Young women continue to see many areas of work as strongly segregated. Parents still exert a strong influence on subject area and career choice. Where parents are well-informed this can be helpful, but many women do not receive encouragement to reach their full potential. Teachers too are influential, and shortcomings identified in the quality of current science teaching in schools impacts on young people's attitudes to careers in areas requiring a scientific or technical background.

There are shortcomings in both the quantity, quality and timing of careers advice. Even in the case of young women who go to university, they may not be aware of the full range of options that could have been available to them until after commencing their undergraduate programme.

Work experience is a lost opportunity for most young women. Placements are poorly planned, unrelated to career aspirations and with few learning objectives specified. In some cases, the young person does little other than watch. Companies are losing a major opportunity to engage with, and attract, young people into their sector. Given that many employers expressed frustration that their efforts to attract female graduates were not paying off, more attention to engaging with children before they make decisions about university would seem a sensible investment.

By the time that young girls start to consider their options at 'A' level (or vocational equivalent) they often already hold deeply-entrenched stereotypes about the nature of different jobs. Almost all stakeholders pointed to the need for more to be done at much younger ages in schools to start to challenge the development of stereotypes.

Employers felt that the money they spent on initiatives to attract female graduates often did not show much benefit, and they pointed both to the need for public action to challenge stereotypes at younger ages and to the need for some centralised action to promote jobs in expanding sectors.

Girls and women cited a range of factors that influenced their career choice. More use could be made of information on career motivations in recruitment materials. Females were concerned that their higher education studies should give them a broad set of work options on graduating. The fact that certain types of degree programme open up, rather than shut down, opportunities, is an important point to emphasise in

careers material. The development of new careers material could be undertaken jointly between London-based universities and employers, perhaps with the employers sponsoring the new materials, so that information about degree programmes is combined with pictures and vignettes illustrating jobs in the capital to make young women aware of the range of job opportunities available for graduates in specific disciplines such as mathematics.

4 Flexible Working

This chapter reports on the views of women employees we interviewed about their experiences in the workplace. We also draw on the interviews with a range of employers in the growth sectors.

4.1 Definition of flexible working

The term 'flexible working' is used to cover a wide range of working patterns that do not conform to the traditional nine to five day, 48 weeks per year on an employer's premises. Flexibility can refer to both the place of work and the hours worked, and to a variety of different options, including: flexitime; term-time working; annualised hours; reduced hours contracts; part-time work and job sharing; and working from home. Flexible working arrangements can play an important role in enabling people to balance different aspects of their lives.

In April 2003, the right to request a flexible working arrangement was introduced for parents of children under six, or parents of disabled children under 18. The Second Flexible Working Employee Survey, published in July 2005, found that women employees were most likely to have requested part-time work, followed by flexitime and reduced hours for a limited period. Just over four-fifths of requests had been fully or partly accepted.[iii]

According to the Spring 2004 Labour Force Survey, 25 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men worked a flexible pattern in terms of hours (excluding those working part-time).There was a large gap between the public and private sector, with only 15 per cent of women in the private sector working a flexible pattern, compared with 45 per cent in the public sector.[iv]

4.2 Availability of types of flexible working

Women in the focus groups particularly valued the type of flexibility that was offered by employers who understood the need to vary hours or place of work at short notice to deal with family commitments. A flexible manager was one who could approve

time off to deal with family emergencies or illness. A woman in the ICT focus group said:

> *'Supposing my daughter's sick in the morning or through the night, I've rung up my line manager, "can I look after her for the day", or "I'm going to be late". "Fine, but if you need to stay at home it's not a problem." I do try my best to come in and make other arrangements but it's nice that they say "If you can't, don't worry".'*

Generally, the women employees felt that their employers would be willing to allow them flexibility to deal with short-term family crises. They did not seem to be aware of the legislation affording those eligible the right to time off to care for dependants. Flexible working, therefore, was viewed as discretionary, and dependent on the manager.

There was less awareness of the range of regular flexible working patterns or formalised policies, rather than one-off *ad hoc* arrangements. In the ICT focus group, however, home working was mentioned by the participants. One said of her company:

> *'They are really flexible, I know a couple of people on my project have kids and one has a two and a half year old and needs to pick up from nursery every day. The project manager [arranged for her to] work from home; she comes in one day a week. There's a lot of home working.'*

4.3 Part-time working

Part-time working was also discussed as a type of flexible working. Generally, focus group participants held the view that part-time workers were not seen as 'serious players' by managers in terms of career progression and promotion. In the focus group of women working in administration in the private sector, the view that part-time workers were not taken seriously was put forward:

> *'I'm not convinced that if you work part-time, they take us as seriously as someone who really wants to develop. I think the flexibility is there and I know plenty of people who get it, but I don't know them well enough to know whether that then hinders their career progression. But I think if you suddenly said "OK I want to work three days a week", you would be well looked after, but then you would suddenly find yourself not being considered for jobs at a more senior level.'*

> *'Two people that I know who are part-time, I think three days a week, said that it impacted on their careers and they've not been able to find the roles at the next levels. They have been faced with coming back full-time or not taking the jobs.'*

This view was strengthened by their perception that there were few women at senior levels working part-time. Other kinds of flexible working patterns, such as home working and flexibility over hours – *eg* start and finish time – were seen as more widely available than part-time working in the better paid and more skilled jobs.

This perception, that it was difficult to get part-time working above a certain level, was equally pervasive amongst the focus group participants in the schools. As one girl said:

> *'If you are really good at your job, then they'll probably make exceptions, but it would be hard for the employer. It would cost them more if you were part-time. Most employers don't want that. They want someone that's there who can do the job'.*

The attitudes of employers towards part-time working echoed those of the focus group participants. While supporting a range of flexible working options, they tended to see part-time working as the pattern least compatible with senior roles.

In our interviews, a typical view was that in some jobs it became more difficult to work part-time with increasing seniority. In a law firm, working part-time was seen as stepping out of the 'partnership race'. In one telecoms company, there were no women on part-time contracts in technical or senior posts. As the interviewee explained, although in theory part-time working should be available at all levels, *'this has not translated into practice'*.

Women who did work part-time at management level in these sectors had to be prepared to continually prove themselves by, for example, putting in extra hours. According to a senior woman in a law firm:

> *'All those who have gone part-time seem to have done "part-time plus" to prove themselves. Whether it works depends on the business area you are in and the type of clients you have. If clients expect you to drop everything and fly off in the middle of the night, it would not work.'*

A woman in the administration focus group said that there was a joke in her company, that *'you're paid part-time but you end up working full-time, because of the pressure from the organisation'*.

Despite the high demand for part-time working identified in employee surveys, lack of access at senior levels to part-time posts appears to present a significant barrier to career progression for many women. The perceptions of the women in this research are borne out in a recent study for the EOC which found that part-time women workers were often employed below their potential and lacked opportunities for progression and promotion.[v]

4.4 Flexible working policies

We spoke to several employers in the growth sectors about whether they had formal policies on flexible working and what these covered. Of the sectors we examined, the IT and finance sectors were most likely to have formal policies.

In these two sectors, employers who participated in the research said that all employees could request flexible working patterns, not just those who had statutory rights to do so. One ICT company explained its approach:

> *'[After the merger] the HR team looked at both companies' policies and increased flexible working. This was not done from a female bias point of view and the same arrangements and opportunities are available to all staff. The staff are responsible for their own time and can work from home if they choose to. They can also take sabbaticals for any reason – travel, charity work, childcare etc.'*

A telecoms company said that it now has a wide range of flexible working arrangements open to staff, including flexitime, home working and sabbaticals. The company was clear about the business rationale:

> *'Flexibility will encourage employees to be loyal and will improve retention. It also means [the company is] less likely to lose members of staff going through life-changes. For example, it is possible to come back from maternity leave on a reduced-hours contract and not have to leave employment. Staff that have been in the job for a while and know it inside out tend to be more productive. In addition, the company does not have the recruitment and induction training costs.'*

In another IT company, a flexible working policy was introduced last year which allows an employee to request any pattern of working hours, provided it could be accommodated by the business. The company publicises to employees the wide range of benefits to be gained by flexible working. It also sets out the formal process for reviewing requests for flexible working.

In contrast, in the creative industries sector, flexible working arrangements did not appear to be so widely available and tended to be negotiated in some companies on an individual basis. As one senior woman working in this sector said:

> *'You have flexibility informally for really good people, but you wouldn't want everyone to have it'.*

Requests were dealt with on a case-by-case basis, and the outcome of the request could depend on how much they are valued by their managers.

Flexitime – choosing start and finishing times around core hours – was seen as relatively unproblematic by most organisations.

4.5 Take-up of flexible working

In organisations with formal policies on flexible working, there is a clear procedure, and requests are typically forwarded to the HR department. Most employers we interviewed could give a broad picture of the pattern of take-up. The majority of requests for flexible working came from women in junior or middle range job grades, and this was where the bulk of flexible workers were found. A small proportion of requests were from men. As one HR manager explained:

'While there are some people in more senior job grades who work flexibly, there is a definite decrease as job grade increases. This could be linked to expectations of senior staff, ie the perception you need to appear "dedicated" to make it to the top, and the job patterns and level of travel required of senior staff, who are often in global roles'.

One law firm did not receive a large number of requests, but most of the requests it did receive came from secretarial or support staff returning from maternity leave. The firm said that it tried to agree to the requests and work around them, as part of an active policy of retaining staff.

In the finance sector, there were positive examples from individuals of flexible working arrangements being approved and successfully implemented. One woman said that her bank was very supportive to people wanting to work full-time on a flexible basis. She herself worked a compressed week of four days, involving longer hours on those four days. She felt there was a clear procedure for making requests, and a business case had to be made showing, for example, that the working pattern requested would not be detrimental to either the team, or the customers.

Some women did, however, express reservations about the extent to which access to flexible working depended upon the support of the line manager.

Another barrier to accessing flexible working was the type of work being undertaken. For example, in the finance sector, flexible working was generally not seen as possible in client-facing roles, according to some women interviewees. There was a perception that employees needed to be available '24/7' in case clients needed to contact them. This meant that homeworking or any form of reduced hours or compressed week would be ruled out. A woman working in an insurance company thought that flexible working could be managed but this involved managing clients' expectations and setting some boundaries on availability. She had heard a senior woman in the sector call for an open debate on the issue. There is a need to evaluate untested assumptions held by some employers that flexible working would not be possible in certain jobs.

One senior woman stressed that if a culture was to be developed where flexibility is acceptable, staff need to see it being led from the top. In her organisation, the focus is on building a culture of 'supported trust' where employees are expected to deliver their work to high standards, but in a way that best suits them. Flexibility is not just associated with balancing work and family commitments, but as a way of supporting staff, for example, those with mental health problems or other impairments.

4.6 Impact of the long hours culture

In all the interviews and focus groups, mention was made by participants of the long hours culture and its impact. It appears as if long hours are now widely accepted as an intrinsic aspect of some areas of employment in these industries. Reasons may differ, but the trend is the same.

4.6.1 Meaning of long hours

The term 'long hours culture' is used to denote a regular pattern of working more than the contracted hours. In finance, legal services, the creative industries and ICT, long hours have become increasingly widespread.

In the finance sector, according to a national trade union officer, junior managers are expected to work more than the contracted hours – up to around 45 hours per week. *'But at the senior management level this can go up to 60 hours per week at least.'* Another woman working in finance said that in client-facing roles, there was a perception that long hours were essential and people might start at eight in the morning and finish at nine at night.

In the creative industries, long hours were the norm. Skillset's film production workforce survey showed that 70 per cent of those surveyed were working for 11 hours or more per day. A survey of members carried out by Women in Film and Television in 2004 found that nearly half of the respondents worked more than 48 hours per week.[vi] Of these, a quarter had children aged six or under.

Similarly, in some areas of legal practice, long hours are taken for granted. One HR manager in a city firm attributed the long hours to the requirements made by clients:

> *'Your clients are making the demands; they're giving you the deadlines. If they say I need X done in 72 hours, you have to deliver X in 72 hours. …Real estate, which deals with property and planning, tends to be more regular hours, and so it's easier for you to have more of a routine in your life. The same with litigation to a greater or lesser extent.'*

Focus group participants were aware of the pressure to work long hours in certain industries. As a student in a college focus group said of the finance sector:

> *'You may be getting the money but what are you going to do with it, if you can't use it because you're working 24 hours. In a lot of banking firms, they make you work a lot of hours. You get paid for it, but at the same time, when do you get time to socialise or spend the money?'*

4.6.2 Impact of long hours on career progression

Some women felt guilty about sticking to their contracted hours, because their colleagues were staying late. Whereas leaving on time might be possible for someone at a relatively junior level, it was not seen as acceptable in a senior job: *'It's a lot more pressured at the top. You have to work more hours'*. Generally, the long hours culture was not seen as something that could be challenged. An indirect impact of this was that many women believed they would not be considered for promotion unless they were able to conform to that pattern. For women with children or other caring responsibilities, it was not possible to work late into the evening on a regular – rather than one-off – basis. Their perception that this was necessary deterred those with

families from applying for promotion, because, as one woman said: *'Women are still expected to run the house'*.

Another barrier resulting from the long hours culture was that of exclusion from opportunities to network. Because networking often took place after work, women who had to leave promptly felt excluded. One senior woman commented that:

> *'It is much harder for a carer to participate at the top level, because not only do you have long hours, but you have networking at night. You have to promote yourself and attend after-work drinks and dinners'.*

A further consequence was to channel women into certain jobs within the sector for which long hours are less of a feature. In the finance sector, for example, women are more likely to be in compliance or credit rather than in sales or trading. In the legal sector, women are disproportionately found in areas such as employment law rather than corporate law.

It may appear that this element of gender segregation is an inevitable consequence of business pressures which must be accommodated. However, it does mean that a range of options is shut off from women who require regular hours or some degree of flexibility. It is also the case that the careers characterised by long hours are amongst the highest paying in these sectors. As one woman in the finance sector explained, there were higher bonuses for those working in the client-driven, long hours occupations.

In the following chapter we turn to look at the issue of caring responsibilities.

5 Caring Responsibilities

The social norm that women fulfil caring roles seems to be replicated from generation to generation, with young women without children assuming they would be responsible for childcare, and reporting that this would be likely to present them with challenges at certain points in their career. Many young women had started to think and plan for how they would cope. However, 'eldercare' did not emerge as a primary barrier to work or progression for any of the women, perhaps because of the age profile of the women we interviewed.

5.1 Childcare specific barriers

A number of barriers to the progression of women at work were specific to finding and being able to afford childcare which fits with work responsibilities and is flexibly provided. The long commute from home into London for many women, which in some instances was over one and a half hours each way, also increased the cost, and hence, affordability of childcare. Finding and affording childcare was also an issue for some women in education, primarily those interviewed in work-based training, and was recognised as a barrier to participation in learning, and indirectly to career progression, by many of the education and training providers and stakeholders who were interviewed.

5.1.1 Availability

There were two main issues concerning the availability of childcare: first, the absolute number of places, and second, the flexibility of the provision to meet the demands of women who work unpredictable hours, outside of 'core' nine to five hours, or on a contract or freelance basis.

Around the issue of availability, there was a general perception that obtaining a childcare place for young children was difficult.

> *'I don't know whether the provision meets the demand. You have to put the child on a waiting list.'* (Woman working in research at a university)

'There are only two registered childminders that deal with the primary school my daughter goes to, so if I wasn't lucky, what would I do?' (Woman working in the ICT/Telecom industry)

One law employer reported that more senior and better-paid law professionals who have children tend to opt for live-in nannies or au-pairs rather than childcare providers because of limited flexibility in other forms of childcare provision.

Where a job requires an individual to work flexibly, such as to stay late for meetings, or where a mother is working on a freelance basis, then the flexibility of childcare provision is paramount. Lack of suitably flexible childcare is likely to restrict the hours and nature of work that working mothers can undertake.

For many women, particularly those who perhaps did not get the opportunity to gain qualifications through compulsory schooling, the availability of childcare to support them while they undertake further study later in life to enhance their career prospects was also reported to be an issue.

Several of the local Learning and Skills Councils stakeholders that we interviewed for this study said the lack of affordable and flexible childcare to allow carers to study was a substantial barrier to progression.

Similar views were put forward by some education and learning providers. Despite having childcare provision on site, they described the difficulties associated with childcare for learners, due to the limited number of places and cost.

'There is a nursery, but it is hard to get into.' (HE provider)

'There are childcare facilities, a college nursery, and students could use this…the other issue is cost. Although the college does subsidise it, it still works out to be pretty expensive.' (FE provider)

5.1.2 Affordability

A union representative described lack of affordable childcare as a primary barrier to the employment and progression of women. There was some evidence from the working mothers we interviewed and the experiences of their friends and colleagues that the cost of childcare is a significant barrier which affects the feasibility of working in particular jobs, or at all.

One senior woman described how some women she works with are spending half their earnings on childcare. In contrast, another senior woman working in law felt that women who work in London are sufficiently well rewarded that they can afford good quality childcare. Clearly, perceptions vary according to the level of remuneration in the sector.

Some women mentioned that the cost of childcare was more of an issue for women who work part-time. It was generally felt that it becomes marginal as to whether it is

worth the effort of working part-time once childcare costs have been taken into account.

There are also other tax and benefit issues which appear to affect the decisions and position of women in work. One woman working in the ICT and telecom sector felt that the impact and financial benefit of promotion would be wiped out as she would lose the tax credits that she had previously been entitled to.

> *'Although I've progressed over the past few years, on the other hand the government take away the pittance they've given me towards my childcare …and I'll probably get nothing again.'* (Woman in ICT focus group)

Many of the women in focus groups and individual interviews said that time spent commuting had a significant impact on childcare costs. One woman thought that when she did have children, she would reconsider whether or not to work in London, because of the cost of childcare and time spent commuting:

> *'I'm in Hertfordshire, so if I have a child in a nursery in Hertfordshire, I'm an hour and a half away from home. It affects your choice of where you can work.'*

One senior woman mentioned that commuting by train was unreliable which meant that childcare provision needed to be flexible. One employer in the law sector said that:

> *'When you're working in London your childcare arrangements could possibly be one to two hours away and that's significant. If you're working till 7pm at night, by the time you get to your train station that could be 30-45 minutes later you get your train home, but the time you get to your childcare it could have a knock on effect…I know a lot of people pay £800 a month per child'.*

5.2 Balancing work and family

Several barriers to women entering work and progressing in work emerged from the interviews. These were related to the existence of and pressure of social norms which traditionally expect women to undertake domestic and care responsibilities. The women employees with children whom we interviewed had, to some extent, managed to overcome, or to cope with, these social expectations, and combine employment with family commitments. It was common for women to be responsible for dropping off and collecting children from childcare, which required them to leave work promptly. Women also were almost invariably responsible for the care of children or dependants when they fell sick, which required them to take time off.

There seemed to be a perception that if a woman was in paid employment, then it was she who had to perform a 'juggling-act' to meet both the expectations of work and home. One woman working in the ICT and telecom sector described how she has to effectively fulfil two roles:

'It's a classic situation of having to do two jobs… I get home and have to do the other job which is making sure the house runs. My husband comes home, he opens the fridge, there's food in it and the washing's done'.

One LSC stakeholder took the view that a wide range of care responsibilities – 'eldercare' as well as childcare – affects women's employment opportunities. As the population profile of the UK becomes older it is likely that 'eldercare' will become an increasing problem.

5.3 Progression barriers for those with caring responsibilities

Perceived barriers to the progression of women with caring responsibilities varied by sector.

5.3.1 Commitment

There were several examples of the perception that employers felt women with children were less committed to their job than other employees. This perception was particularly acute in sectors where working long hours is the norm, such as the legal and financial sectors. One student, who had work experience in a city financial firm in London via a programme set up by a Regional Development Agency in order to expand horizons and career opportunities, reported that the director of the company said:

'If you wanted to get anywhere that you couldn't have children… the director said that… so if it was a choice between a career and children, I'd choose children, but you have to accept that basically it'd be a big setback'.

The majority of women with children said that they were responsible for taking time off work, or making arrangements to work from home, when a dependant fell sick. One union representative said this was a problem and that if women in the workplace *'show any weakness, such as taking days off to care for dependants, then they "lose points"*.

Women's experiences of employer understanding in these instances were mixed. A woman in the ICT focus group said that her employer had been very flexible when she had to make arrangements to work from home because of unforeseen caring responsibilities. In contrast, another woman working in a senior management role said that if her son was ill, she would rearrange her diary to work from home, but give a reason other than childcare for doing so.

There were also perceptions of discriminatory treatment at interviews. Some women, particularly those on short-term contracts, said that when employers recruited they took into account a woman's age and inferred from this whether or not they were likely to have children in the duration of the contract.

The perception of discrimination in recruitment and promotion, owing to women having children and therefore needing time out of the workplace, was also voiced among one group of university students.

> *'They'd [employers] rather have men at the top to take more responsibility… I think it's probably quite hard for a woman to get to the top. They may choose someone else like a man, they never have children ordinarily!'* (Student in a university focus group)

5.3.2 Long hours culture

There was a widely shared view amongst both stakeholders and employees that many employers expect employees to work beyond their contracted hours in order to meet client demands and to be seen to be a 'committed employee'.

> *'There is a long hours culture [in the City] which is one of the biggest barriers for women with caring responsibilities.'* (Trade union)

One woman with a young child, working in the telecom sector, felt that although she works her contracted hours, this wasn't seen as being enough:

> *'People don't leave at 5:30 and I have to pick up my daughter at 6:30. I always feel I'm the first one out of the office, I don't know why I feel bad, but I do.'*

An employer in the law sector said that working patterns typically became easier with seniority. However, she gave an example of something that had occurred in a recent round of promotions to partner level which she felt illustrated the work culture against women having children:

> *'They [the employer] picked strong candidates for partnership… once the successful candidates were announced, two [women just made partners] then announced they were pregnant. I thought that was interesting, they didn't feel sufficiently comfortable to mention that before. That possibly tells you that things aren't quite as advanced.'*
> (Employer in the law sector)

5.3.3 Flexibility requirements

Having caring responsibilities was perceived to limit work flexibility in some instances, for example, whether an employee is able to work beyond contracted hours at short notice, and also the extent to which they are able to travel outside of 'core hours'. For women working in one multi-national company there was often a requirement to travel internationally, which did not necessarily fit with family and caring commitments.

> *'There's an expectation you will move abroad… and I said no. I'm thinking about children… and I'd like a job where I don't have to travel for a period and I've been told, sorry, not available in the field you're in and the work you're doing, its a global job and that's it.'*

She went on to say that if she decided she did want a family, then she would have to look for another job, or another employer which would allow more flexibility.

In order for employees with caring responsibilities to work in this way, flexible childcare or a supportive partner is of utmost importance.

Short-term contracts / freelancing

Some sectors, such as the creative industries, are organised with a large proportion of employees working on short-term contracts or on a freelance basis. Working in this way, although flexible, presents some specific challenges to women who have children, or who plan to have them in the future. In the creative industries sector, where freelance contracts are prevalent, women with children are under-represented in the workforce.

In the sciences, short-term contracts are often an issue. One woman currently studying for a PhD in a science subject said that:

> *'If you're on three-year contract when do you decide to try for a family? You don't want to start straight away when you start a job, then you've got to work long enough to be entitled to maternity leave. It's difficult to balance the two.'*

A representative from one university's Academic Opportunities Committee reported that this is a common problem across all fields in academia.

Successful working on a freelance basis or on short-term contracts is often dependent on networking and being seen by the right individuals. Time out of the work environment because of having children can mean that some of these networks are lost and this makes it difficult to return to work with the same momentum as prior to maternity leave.

Time out of the workplace

Time out of the workplace can be challenging, not only for women working on a freelance basis, but also for those on permanent contracts. There were some perceptions that work moves on while women are on maternity leave, particularly in fields such as law and IT where there are frequent changes to practice or to technology. An IT employer said that:

> *'If someone has career break from IT, for any reason, then it is likely that things will have moved on when they return, as the sector moves quickly.'*

Within this company, IT work was organised on a project basis. While this can be conducive to time out of the workplace, provided that it is planned in advance and worked into project plans, often when people return, *'they are not networked and can be out of people's minds for projects'.* Where contacts are lost and women out of the

workplace are not built into project teams for their return, this may impact on the rate of progression and workplace opportunities they have in the short- to medium-term.

One woman working in law believed that in this highly competitive sector, time out of the workplace to have children would affect promotion chances:

> *'If you're up against three other people, something's got to give and it will be the fact that you've taken that time out.'*

5.4 Balancing work and family demands

Owing to the nature of the interviewees, the strategies for dealing with conflicts between work and family commitments were those made by women with children who had successfully returned to work in some of the growth industries. However, in the discussions, a range of other decisions made by women with children were frequently mentioned, including leaving the labour market and finding alternative employment.

5.4.1 Leaving the labour market

Several examples were given of women who had left an industry when they had children and had not returned. In general, the interviews seem to suggest that women who are 'established' in their field, or who are 'highly networked' with good contacts find it easier to return to work after having children.

One senior woman working in the IT sector has noticed that *'women leave the IT sector when they are around 30 when they have children'*. She has had children herself, but was able to fulfil a demanding senior role because her husband stays at home and has main responsibility for the care of their children.

'Missing women' – women who disappear from the job market – had also been noticed by an employer in the finance sector. The company had recognised that this was an issue, not least because they were losing highly trained and experienced staff:

> *'How can we get people who slip off the career ladder and bring up children? We have invested money in these women for years and then they just disappear.'*

An employee in the creative sector also reported that it is difficult to return to the creative industry after a career break, unless you are well-networked, or established in the field:

> *'If a woman takes a career break they either stay out of the industry, and this represents a loss of investment and talent for the industry, or they move into another area within the sector which is more stable.'*

5.4.2 Finding alternative work

Many of the women who go 'missing' from the growth sectors after having children may find alternative employment in another sector, or move within the sector to a job better suited to juggling work, home and caring responsibilities, with more 'family-friendly' working patterns and expectations. One woman currently studying science at post-graduate level said that:

> *'Colleagues of my age have… got to a point where they either carry on with a speciality and commit themselves to that, or they become a GP.'*

This is because the job of a GP was seen as offering more regular hours than other areas of medicine and could be fitted around the employee's needs for flexibility. One interviewee currently working in a City law firm felt that she could not continue with the pace and with the expectations of her working life when she had children, so would consider moving to a high street or local law firm in order to cope.

One woman working in the creative sector said that if women were able to return to work on a freelance basis after having children, as she did, then this gave them the opportunity to have maximum flexibility over their time and to undertake work when it best suits. This interviewee decided to work freelance after having children, so that she could take the school holidays off to care for them.

There were other examples of women swapping industries or jobs in order to meet the expectations of working while fulfilling caring responsibilities. For example, the mother of a schoolgirl in a focus group had worked in the legal sector prior to having children. After having children, however, this had changed:

> *'My mum went back, but not to a high flying career, she went back to filing papers in an office.'*

5.4.3 Support networks

For those women who continue to work in full-time jobs that demand flexibility and travel outside work hours, family support networks were often reported to be critical in enabling them to work flexibly to meet employer and work demands. For example, one woman working in the creative sector felt that she was only able to sustain her career after having children because she had a very good family support network who could provide flexible childcare.

Another working mother, who is an employee of a multi-national company where global travel and overnight stays are part of normal working life, said that many women can only undertake this type of work because they have strong support networks, from both families and partners. Other women in the same focus group, currently without children, reported that they plan to move out of London when they have children in order to be nearer to their families and support networks. This is likely to be a particular trend within the London economy, given its relatively young

demographic, and may be a contributory factor to the loss of young talent from the city.

5.4.4 Career planning

Across all ages of women we spoke to, from school age to women already in work, it was very common for them to have thought out a 'career plan', and many had an idea of when they would try for a family in order to minimise disruption to their career. Others planned to have children at a time when they could 'afford' to have time out of work, usually when they felt they were or would be established, which was thought to make it easier for women to return to work. It was also believed that this would increase the likelihood that return to work could be arranged on flexible terms to provide the required balance between work and family:

> *'I really want to make something of myself, but I also want a family, so it's important to get as far as I can now so that I will have the opportunity to take some time out later on.'* (A woman working in the law sector)

5.4.5 Updating skills

In some particularly fast-moving sectors, such as law and ICT, interviewees felt that women returning from a career break would need to undertake refresher training to get back up-to-date. This was one strategy that some women adopted to enable them to re-enter the labour market after having children. In some sectors or working environments where practice and technology are constantly changing, such as IT, women returners are expected to get up-to-date in the same way that all other employees that have been in work are expected to. This may or may not be a substantial barrier depending on the length of time out of the workplace.

One senior woman working in the law sector reported how she 'minimised' her maternity leave to just three months in order to make it easier for her to return to work and so that she did not have so much technical information to catch up on. She mentioned that the Law Society ran a two day refresher course for legal professionals who had been out of practice for a while.

6 Good Practice Initiatives and Policy Implications

6.1 Good practice initiatives

A number of organisations have introduced specific initiatives to address the barriers that women face in entering and progressing within the growth sectors. The business case for recruiting and retaining women is well understood in competitive industries. They cannot afford to miss out on the talent and skills of half the workforce.

6.1.1 Flexible working

Several organisations have formal flexible working policies in which a wide range of options are open to all employees, not just those covered by the legislation.

IBM: Flexible Working Policy

IBM offers a wide range of flexible working options, and these have been extended to all staff, not just those with childcare or elderly-care responsibilities. A key objective is to enable staff to achieve a better balance between their work role and their personal lives. Among the flexible working options are a variety of reduced hours contracts (including compressed hours, annualised hours, jobshare and term-time contracts); home working; and mobile working (at different sites). In addition, staff can suggest other working patterns for consideration. To support the flexible working policy, IBM has communicated to its employees the potential benefits of working flexibly. These include: the opportunity to combine domestic commitments with a career; increased job satisfaction, motivation and commitment; saving of money, inconvenience and time commuting; a more efficient approach to work; and better health and less stress.

In the creative industries sector, Skillset is developing an initiative to address the needs of those with family responsibilities.

Skillset: Back to Work Scheme

Skillset are currently developing a scheme in partnership with the film industry. The scheme aims to provide 16 women (eight teams of two women), who have a wealth of production experience in some of the technical grades of film production, with the opportunity to benefit from a flexible working schedule which will accommodate their parental responsibilities. The specific objective is to match the eight teams with eight film productions that are able to offer job-share roles for the participants.

6.1.2 Training for career progression

To address career progression barriers, some organisations have introduced tailored training programmes for women.

Citigroup: Women's Development Programme

Women often experience barriers to progressing beyond a certain level within finance organisations. To address these barriers, Citigroup has been running a successful women-only training programme since 2002-2003 aimed at junior professionals. The objectives of the course, 'Coaching for Success', are to retain and develop Citigroup women and provide them with the training to advance their careers. The course includes formal training sessions on subjects such as Leadership Skills for Women, Goal Setting, and Influencing Skills. It also provides experience in public speaking, presentations and networking events. Course participants work in teams with 'coaches' drawn from the same business areas. Although promotion is not guaranteed, a measure of the course's success is that a high proportion of participants subsequently progress upwards through the organisation. Participants also say that the course has helped them and encouraged them to stay within the organisation.

6.1.3 Higher education initiatives

We came across examples of HE institutions trying to encourage women into degree subjects where they are traditionally under-represented, and which can open opportunities to enter a wide range of professional careers in growth sectors.

Department of Mathematics, University College London

In response to the under-representation of women in mathematics degrees, University College London decided to set up a 'Women in Maths' day to encourage young women in the lower-sixth form to consider taking a mathematically-based degree. It consists of interesting maths lectures and puzzles along with a talk about careers (usually with a woman careers officer) and a session on admissions. One aspect of the day which seems to work very well is that the young women get talking to each other and realise that there are lots of others like them. The department has had a good response from the young women who have attended these sessions. The Admissions

Tutor said, *'We sometimes see that young women mention on their UCAS application forms that they attended the Women in Maths day. Although we have not formally evaluated the scheme, I estimate that usually two or three of the attendees end up coming to study maths at UCL'.*

6.2 Policy implications

This research has identified some of the barriers facing women in five growth areas in London: ICT, the creative industries, finance and legal services, and administration. Many of these barriers stem from the gender stereotypes which influence and limit from an early age girls' perceptions of what careers are open to them. Once in an industry, however, other barriers come into force at the point at which women have children or other domestic responsibilities. In this chapter we look at some of the policy implications under three headings: careers advice; flexible working; and caring responsibilities.

6.2.1 Careers advice

- Work experience is a lost opportunity for most young women. Placements are poorly planned and unrelated to career aspirations. Companies are losing a major opportunity to engage with, and attract, young people into their sector. Given that many employers express frustration that their efforts to attract female graduates are not paying off, more attention to engaging with girls before they make decisions about university would seem a sensible investment.
- Almost all stakeholders pointed to the need for more to be done at much younger ages in schools to challenge the development of stereotypes.
- Employers pointed both to the need for public action to challenge stereotypes at younger ages and to the need for some centralised action to promote jobs in expanding sectors.
- Girls and women were concerned that their higher education studies should give them a broad set of work options on graduating. The fact that certain types of degree programme open up, rather than shut down, opportunities should be emphasised in careers material.
- The development of new careers material could be undertaken jointly between London-based universities and employers, perhaps with the employers sponsoring the new materials.

6.2.2 Flexible working

- Flexible working arrangements were highly valued by women, including flexibility to deal with short-term crises.

- Flexitime and home working were seen as available options, subject to the discretion of the managers. But part-time working was not generally seen as compatible with senior jobs involving responsibility, and it was felt that part-time workers would not be considered for promotion.
- Some organisations, particularly in ICT and the finance sector, had extended the right to request flexible working beyond the legal entitlement and have well-publicised formal policies. In other organisations, flexible working is less formalised and dependent on informal individual negotiation.
- The prevalence of the long hours culture was seen as restricting the availability of flexible working opportunities.
- More role models were needed of flexible working at all levels, including the most senior.
- The line manager plays a crucial role in supporting or rejecting requests for flexible working. Organisations need to ensure that managers are in tune with the objectives, so that the policies are consistently implemented. This may require a training strategy to address these issues.
- There were no examples of organisations claiming that flexible working arrangements were detrimental to productivity, but a lot of untested assumptions that these arrangements could not work in particular jobs. Pilot schemes to evaluate how such arrangements work out in practice would be valuable.

Caring responsibilities

- Lack of provision for caring responsibilities is a major barrier for women in the workplace.
- Despite the existence in many organisations of a wide range of formal family-friendly policies, there was a perception by women with caring responsibilities that the work culture did not support people with family commitments.
- The dominant long hours culture in some sectors was seen as conflicting with policies promoting work-life balance.
- Women who attempted to balance work and family life were often perceived as less committed to their job than employees without family responsibilities.
- To cope with the barriers, some women resorted to leaving an industry to find alternative employment with more family-friendly working patterns. Other women said that they delayed having children until they had established their career.
- The lack of available and affordable childcare places in London was frequently cited as a barrier. Many women come to work in London from outside the capital and do not have family networks to fill the childcare gap.

- Women said they needed childcare provision with flexible hours.
- Employers cannot be expected to address the supply of childcare places – that is the task of the Government's National Childcare Strategy. But employer initiatives, such as emergency provision when normal childcare arrangements break down, can make a major contribution.
- There is also a need for childcare provision, preferably on site, by colleges and other training providers, especially for women who want to retrain later in life.

7 Appendix 1: Focus Group Methodology

The first stage in recruiting our focus groups was to compile a list of employers and educational institutions who could put us in touch with suitable women to participate in our groups. We were particularly interested in employers in our target sectors or educational institutions with women or girls studying atypical subjects. The list was compiled through a variety of contacts and organisations:

- IES's Research Network of employers
- IES's partner organisations and other contacts
- GLA contacts and recommendations
- community groups, local LSCs, training organisations and employer bodies.

Named contacts within employers and educational institutions were then approached by letter with a follow-up telephone call to discuss their willingness and suitability to take part. We also provided, where appropriate, posters to assist with recruitment of participants.

The following focus groups were held:

- four in schools
- three in universities
- one in an FE college
- one in Work Based Learning
- one of women in ITC and telecoms companies
- one of women working in a range of middle level administrative or technical management roles.

In addition, a small number of women in the finance sector were interviewed individually as it was not possible to arrange a focus group.

We sought to obtain a cross section of girls and women, and Table A1.1 sets out the profile of the three groups from which participants were drawn: school girls, students and employees.

Table A7.1.1:Characteristics of focus group participants

		Schoolgirls	Students (FE, HE and WBL)	Employees	All
Age	Under 18	32	2	0	34
	18 to 24	0	27	1	28
	25 to 30	0	12	5	17
	31 to 35	0	2	3	5
	36 to 40	0	0	2	2
	41 to 45	0	3	3	6
	46 to 50	0	0	3	3
	51 and over	0	0	0	0
Current marital status	Single	31	31	8	70
	Living with partner	0	10	2	12
	Married	0	3	6	9
	Divorced/Separated	0	2	1	3
	Unanswered	1	0	0	1
	Widowed	0	0	0	0
Any children?	Yes	0	3	6	9
	No	32	43	11	86
Ethnic origin	White	21	22	12	55
	Turkish	0	8	0	8
	Black Caribbean	2	3	3	8
	Black African	3	4	0	7
	Mixed	4	1	0	5
	Indian	0	3	1	4
	Pakistani	0	1	0	1
	Bangladeshi	1	0	0	1
	Chinese	0	1	0	1
	Korean	0	1	0	1
	Other	0	2	1	3
	Unanswered	1	0	0	1
Any long-term illness, health problem or disability?	Yes	2	5	1	8
	No	27	39	15	81
	Unanswered	3	2	1	6
Total participants		32	46	17	95

Source: IES, 2005

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