

# Connecting Women With the Labour Market in Birmingham

Linda Grant  
Christopher Price  
Lisa Buckner



Centre for Social Inclusion



*Sheffield  
Hallam University*





# Foreword

As Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources for Birmingham City Council, equality of opportunity is at the heart of my vision for Birmingham, which means to ensure that all men and women have access to employment opportunities. This is achieved through fair recruitment processes and opportunities for both men and women to develop their careers. As one of the largest employers in the city, carrying out such an approach not only achieves fairness and improves morale but also results in better quality service delivery to the benefit of both employees and the communities they serve.

Over the last three years, Birmingham City Council, the largest local authority within the GELLM partnership, has worked closely with Sheffield Hallam University to undertake an important piece of research into *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* (GELLM).

Following the successful launch of the *Gender Profile of Birmingham's Labour Market* last spring, I am now pleased to launch the three follow-up studies that have been carried out in Birmingham:

- *Challenges in Meeting Demand for Domiciliary Care in Birmingham*
- *Connecting Women with the Labour Market in Birmingham*
- *Addressing Women's Poverty in Birmingham: Local Labour Market Initiatives.*

These three studies have identified the aspirations of local women, what opportunities are available to them, and what constraints hold them back. The wider GELLM research programme has also explored some of the factors leading women to accept low-paid work and part-time work, and has examined how local employers' recruitment strategies have affected certain groups of women. These research studies, and the wider work of the GELLM partnership, provide us with a concrete base to bring any required changes. Therefore I commend the outcomes of these studies strongly.

**Councillor Alan Rudge**

Cabinet Member for Equalities and Human Resources

May 2006



# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following for their help and assistance with the research. We are especially grateful to those who shared their knowledge and experience of labour market conditions and developments in Birmingham and Aston and of the circumstances of local women.

Shilpi Akbar, Aston Pride  
Sudarshan Abrol, UK Asian Women's Centre  
Lesley Bradman, Birmingham City Council  
Rohina Choudary, Saathi House  
Zanny Lomas, Jobcentre Plus  
Dawn McCracken, Learning and Skills Council  
Alan Potts, Jobcentre Plus  
Peter Vincent, Birmingham City Council  
Ray Walker, Learning and Skills Council

We would also like to extend special thanks to all the women who gave up their time to take part in the focus group discussions in Birmingham, for sharing with us their experiences and thoughts about working and living in Birmingham, and for speaking so openly about their lives. The information they have provided has been invaluable to this study. To ensure anonymity we cannot name them individually. We hope this report captures some of the key issues of importance to them.

## **Members of the GELLM Team contributed as follows:**

Statistical Analysis	Lisa Buckner; Gerard Poole
Interviews and Focus Groups	Linda Grant; Christopher Price
Report drafting	Linda Grant; Lisa Buckner; Sue Yeandle

**All Crown Copyright material is reproduced with the permission of HMSO.**



# Contents

<b>Key findings</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
Women outside paid work: a neglected group	3
Policy responses to build bridges to work for local women	3
Policy context	4
<b>Women' circumstances in Aston</b>	<b>5</b>
Women's employment	6
Women's unemployment and economic inactivity	6
<b>Changes in the labour market</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Women outside paid work</b>	<b>9</b>
Organisational views	9
Local women's views and experiences	10
<b>Local employment projects</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Building successful employment projects for women: recommendations</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Tackling issues in the wider labour market: recommendations</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 1 The Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets project</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Research methods</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Appendix 3 Ward profile for Aston in Birmingham</b>	<b>23</b>

## Key findings

This study has explored the situation of unemployed and economically inactive women in Birmingham and the scope for developing projects which could assist local women who are not in paid employment in the transition to paid work. Women's circumstances in the Aston ward were examined in depth.

### *Women's circumstances in Aston*

Although the study found that a significant proportion of economically inactive women want to work, compared with women in Birmingham and in England as a whole, in Aston:

- Working age women were much less likely to be in paid employment
- The proportion of women working part-time was very low
- Lone mothers were much less likely to work part-time
- Women workers were more likely to work in low skilled jobs, and less likely to work in skilled, managerial and professional jobs
- Many women work close to home
- Working age women were much more likely to be economically inactive or unemployed
- Female unemployment was high
- Unemployment was particularly high for women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin
- High percentages of working age women were claiming Income Support
- In contrast to the trends nationally, and in Birmingham, levels of economic inactivity amongst women have been growing
- A high proportion of unemployed and economically inactive women had last worked in low skilled jobs
- Many local women have no qualifications; these women are less likely to be in work
- Lone mothers were more likely to be economically inactive

### *Women outside paid work*

Local organisations emphasised the following as barriers to employment for local women:

- Lack of skills and qualifications
- Limited labour market aspirations
- Caring responsibilities
- Lack of fluency in English
- Limited knowledge of the labour market
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Low pay

Local women emphasised the following in their discussions about the labour market:

- Their strong desire to work

- The importance of paid work for self esteem and as an example to children
- The difficulty of acquiring up-to-date qualifications and work experience
- The potential impact of discrimination
- Their willingness to travel to work
- The limited availability of part-time jobs
- The negative impact of long absences from work on their skills and confidence
- The difficulties of sustaining a commitment to work on low wages
- The limitations of the tax credit system
- The importance of support, guidance and mentoring to aid women's transition to work

### *Building successful employment projects for women: recommendations*

Successful employment projects will:

- Understand and respond to the circumstances of women's lives
- Understand the differences between women in local neighbourhoods
- Use existing knowledge within local community centres
- Target projects on women
- Provide paid work experience for women
- Combine paid work experience with training and education, leading to qualifications
- Provide women with personal support, guidance and mentoring
- Offer a wide range of employment services
- Reach out to women in the places they go to day to day
- Secure employer support and engagement
- Establish partnerships of local employers willing to offer women a range of paid work experience opportunities
- Encourage employers to 'take a risk' and employ local women
- Understand changing needs in the labour market and the skills needed for new jobs

### *Wider policy changes are also needed, including:*

- Developing a strategic overview of the changing labour market
- Allocating local strategic responsibility for raising local levels of employment
- Tackling low pay, in partnership with local employers
- Acknowledging the potential for labour market discrimination and establishing policy to address it
- Providing affordable childcare
- Reviewing the aims and objectives of ESOL courses



## Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the potential for establishing projects, based in Birmingham, which would assist women in the transition from unemployment or unpaid family work into paid employment.

For some women outside paid work, especially those living in deprived neighbourhoods, the transition into paid work can be a complex journey, fraught with difficulties and setbacks. Other work has shown that for some groups of people it may be necessary to develop new and innovative policy and programmes to support the step into paid work and to increase people's employability in the future (Schmid 1998; Fagan and Rubery 1996).

Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) projects provide one model for such an approach. These are employment projects which seek to build a bridge to work by providing participants with paid work on a temporary basis, together with focused training, support for personal development, and assistance with job search (Marshall and Macfarlane 2000). This study was designed to explore interest in developing ILM-type projects focused on women amongst the statutory and voluntary sector locally. It also explored the views and experiences of local women who are outside paid employment.

The research was undertaken between July 2005 and February 2006, using a variety of methods: statistical analysis of ward level data; interviews with key people with a knowledge of the local labour market; interviews with people with an understanding of the circumstances of local women; and focus groups with local women who were not in paid employment. The research was focused on the Aston ward.

This study is one of six local research studies carried out within the Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets (GELLM) research programme (see Appendix 1). Parallel studies on 'connecting women to the labour market' have also been undertaken in: Camden; Sandwell; Thurrock; and Wakefield. A synthesis report, giving the findings for all five areas, is also available (Grant et al 2006). The *Gender Profile of Birmingham's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2005) provides the district-wide statistical context for the study.

## Women outside paid work: a neglected group

There are high percentages of women of working age who are outside paid employment, whether we consider England as a whole, Birmingham, or the specific ward which is the focus of this study. In England, 1 in every 3 women of working age is outside paid employment, and in the ward we are considering here, 2 in every 3 women of working age is outside paid employment.

There are many reasons for this, often to do with women's lives, as mothers and as carers, and the choices they make at particular points in their lives. But not all women of working age who are outside paid employment have chosen to be out of paid work, and many are not happy with their current circumstances. Some of these women have been made redundant, some have been looking for work but find they do not have the right skills or experience to secure a job, and some have experienced discrimination because of where they live or because of their ethnicity, sex or age. Others have found work, but struggled to stay in work. All of these groups of women are the focus of this study; they are women who want to work but who, for a range of reasons, are not working.

In many ways this group of women has been neglected, both in terms of the understanding of their lives, and in terms of policy. The widespread assumption that women outside paid employment are largely content not to work is not supported by evidence. In 2004, 23% of economically inactive women in England, a total of 903,400 women, wanted paid work<sup>1</sup>. In addition, 4.4% of women were unemployed, a further 472,000 women. In Birmingham, 18% of economically inactive women wanted paid work, and with the district's unemployment rate in 2004 at 8%, this means there were over 33,000 women in Birmingham who wanted paid work. Thus, thousands of women outside paid employment would like to work - but very little is known about their experiences, their aspirations and the circumstances of their lives.

## Policy responses to build bridges to work for local women

Policy responses which build bridges to work for local women are important because of the very scale of unemployment and economic inactivity

---

<sup>1</sup> ONS, Annual Population Survey, December 2004 – March 2005, Crown Copyright.

amongst women of working age in the locality being studied.

They are also important because women can face specific barriers in accessing paid employment. These may arise from: women's absences from the labour market related to caring and other family responsibilities; the quality of local jobs; poor access to transport; and gender discrimination. Black women and women from ethnic minority groups may face additional obstacles in the labour market, including race discrimination (Reid 2002; Willson 2003). Women who have migrated to Britain may be restricted by a lack of familiarity with the British labour market, lack of fluency in the English language, limited knowledge of British training and educational systems, and difficulty in securing recognition for qualifications gained overseas.

Despite these specific and formidable barriers to work facing women, there are few national programmes and policies specifically focused on women. The key national programmes are *The New Deal for Lone Parents* (NDLP) and the *New Deal for Partners of the Unemployed* (NDPU), but many economically inactive women who want to work do not fit these categories. Indeed, only women with some connection to the benefit system would be drawn into these programmes. Many women outside paid employment do not have this link with the benefit system, and thus lack a connection with organisations such as Jobcentre Plus.

In some localities, voluntary sector organisations have developed with a specific focus on women who are out of work. Such projects are often an invaluable support to local women but, by virtue of their voluntary nature, they are usually small scale projects, with insecure funding.

We emphasise the importance of 'the local' as the context in which people can best be supported in their engagement with work for several reasons. Central government policy and regulations may be insufficient to bring about effective and sustainable transitions into paid work for some groups of people, and there can be unique circumstances in specific localities. Instead, it is important to delegate 'more decision making power to individuals or local agencies in order to adjust to individual needs and local circumstances' (Schmid 1998).

## Policy Context

The New Labour Government regards paid employment as the best route out of poverty, and since 1997 has reshaped tax, benefit and employment policy with the aim of transferring people from welfare into work. Key policy developments include: the New Deal programmes, which provide different amounts of support and compulsion to join the labour market; the introduction of Tax Credits for low paid earners with children, as incentives to enter paid work; and the introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW).

Despite significant employment growth, the government acknowledges that pockets of worklessness persist in certain localities; developing new ways of addressing worklessness has thus become a key focus of government policy (DWP 2000; HM Treasury 2000; HM Treasury 2002; DWP 2004). These developments engage not only central government but also local authorities and their partners, in some localities through Local Strategic Partnerships. It is recognised that deprivation is often highly concentrated in neighbourhoods, and requires tailored approaches to providing services and work incentives. Government and local authorities are also committed to closing the gap between average employment rates and the employment rates of disadvantaged groups and those living in deprived neighbourhoods where unemployment and economic inactivity are high (HM Treasury 2004). The target is to achieve an employment rate of 60% for women in the European Union by 2010 (EU 2004). In the UK the government has set a target of an 80% employment rate overall.

To achieve the study objectives, we have:

- Examined the changing nature of the Birmingham labour market
- Explored the circumstances and aspirations of working age women in Birmingham who are not in paid employment
- Gathered information about existing employment projects and labour market developments in Birmingham.

On the basis of this new analysis, at the end of this report we offer recommendations on employment projects which might assist women outside paid employment in the transition to paid work.

## Women's circumstances in Aston in Birmingham

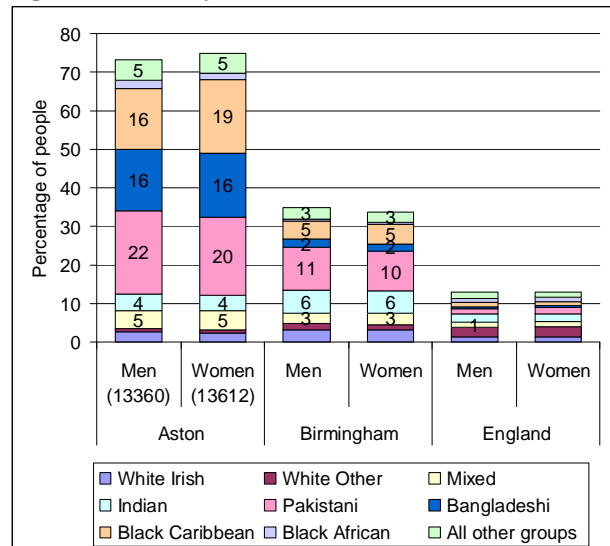
Aston is one of most deprived wards in Birmingham and England. It is an inner-city ward located in the centre of the district between the city centre (to its south) and 'spaghetti junction' (to its north) (Figure 1).

A high proportion of the population in the ward is from ethnic minority groups (Figure 2). 75% of women in Aston are from ethnic minority groups, compared with 34% of Birmingham's total female population. The largest ethnic minority group in the locality is people of Pakistani origin, representing over a fifth of the population in Aston. Other significant ethnic minority groups in this ward are people of Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean origin.

The population in this ward was relatively young in 2001 compared with Birmingham and England as a whole. 30% of the population in Aston were aged 0-15, compared with just 23% in Birmingham and 18% in England. In Aston only

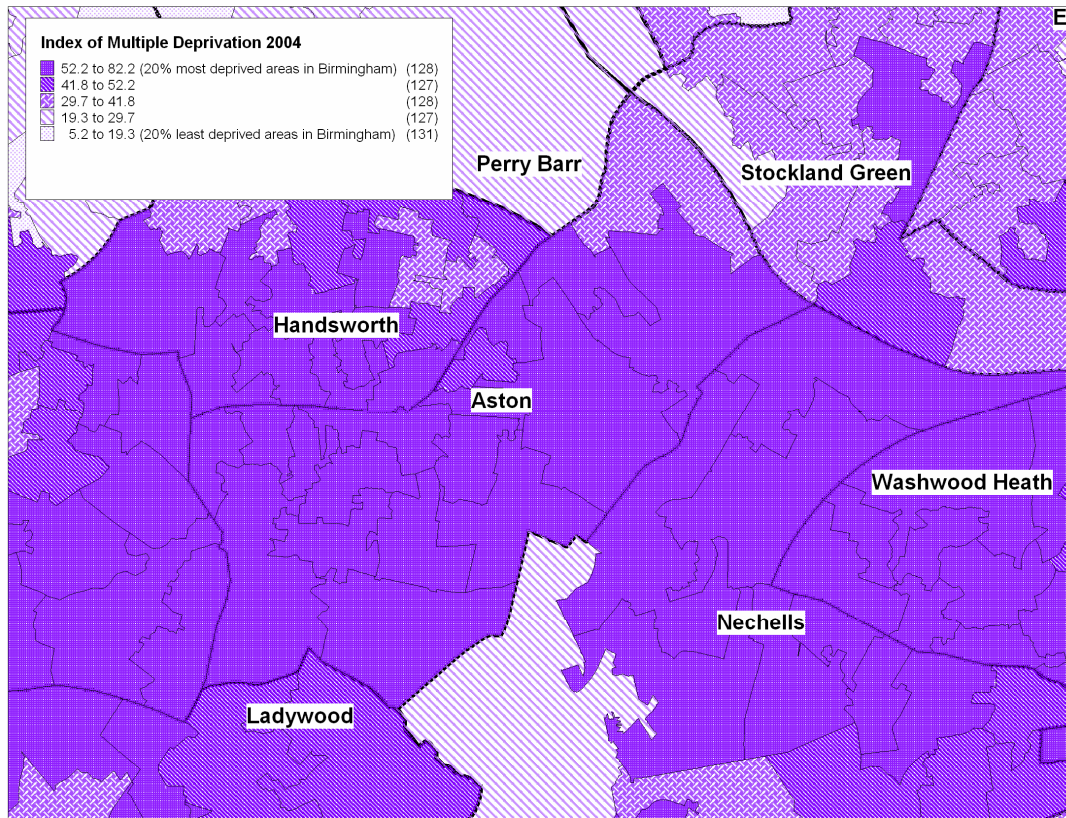
11% were aged 65 or over, compared with 15% in Birmingham and 17% in England.

Figure 2 Ethnicity in Aston ward



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003.

Figure 1 Pattern of deprivation: Aston ward 2004



Source: ODPM, Crown Copyright 2004, 2001 Census Super Output Areas, Crown Copyright 2004. This work is based on data provided through EDINA UKBORDERS with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is Copyright of the Crown

**Figure 3 Main occupations and industries of women in employment**

	Aston	Birmingham	England
<b>Occupation</b>			
Managers, senior officials	6	9	11
Professionals	5	11	10
Associate professionals & technical occupations	10	14	14
Process, plant and machine operatives	7	4	3
Elementary occupations	19	13	12
<b>Industry</b>			
Manufacturing	10	9	9
Wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurants	22	21	24
Health and social work	19	21	19
Finance and real estate	19	18	18

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Health indicators for the wards show a high proportion of women of working age in this ward have a limiting long-term illness (LLTI): around 1 in 5 women in Aston, compared with 15% of women in Birmingham and 8% in England.

### Women's employment<sup>2</sup>

Women of working age in Aston are much less likely than women in Birmingham or nationally to be in paid employment. Only 31% of women of working age were in employment, compared with 53% in Birmingham and 64% in England. Thus employment rates for women in the ward fell way below the 60% employment rate target.

Levels of part-time working amongst women in the ward were low. Many women who want to combine caring with paid employment prefer to work part-time or in jobs with flexible working patterns. In Aston only 10% of women were part-time employees compared with 18% in Birmingham and 23% nationally.

Part-time working amongst lone mothers in this ward was at a very low level. Although part-time employment can be particularly helpful for lone mothers, in Aston just 15% of lone mothers worked part-time, compared with 20% in Birmingham and 26% in England as a whole.

Women workers in Aston were more likely to work in low skilled jobs, and less likely to be in skilled, technical, professional or managerial jobs than in either Birmingham or England. Over a quarter of women in Aston worked in elementary jobs or operative positions. This is high compared with the national figure of 15% (Figure 3).

At the same time, only 6% of women in Aston worked as managers or senior officials, compared with 11% nationally.

Women workers in the ward had a similar industrial distribution to women in Birmingham and England as a whole (Figure 3). Almost a quarter of women in Aston (22%) worked in the wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurants sector, compared with 24% in England as a whole, while 10% of Aston women worked in the manufacturing sector, compared with 9% nationally.

Many women workers in the locality worked close to home. Over two thirds of women workers in Aston (69%) travelled less than 5km to work, well above the national figure of 48%.

A high proportion of women workers in the locality walked to work or travelled by bus. 17% of women in Aston walked to work, compared with 12% in Birmingham and 13% in England, whilst 41% took the bus, compared with 26% in Birmingham and 11% in England.

### Women's unemployment and economic inactivity

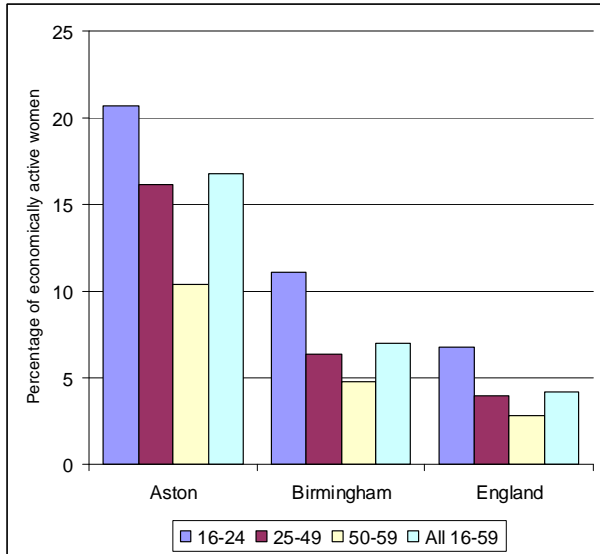
A high percentage of working age women in the ward were either economically inactive or unemployed in 2001. In Aston, 65% of working age women were either economically inactive or unemployed, well above the figures for Birmingham (43%) and England as a whole (33%). This represents almost 5,000 women in this ward alone.

Levels of unemployment amongst women were high in Aston across all age groups (Figure 4). The level of unemployment was very high for

<sup>2</sup> Source for the data in this and the following section: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

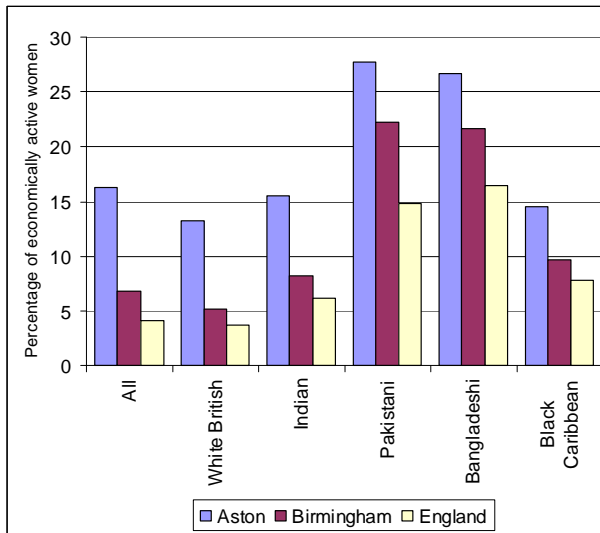
young women, at 21%, compared with 7% in England.

**Figure 4 Unemployment rates for women by age**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure 5 Unemployed women aged 16-74<sup>3</sup> as a proportion of those who are economically active by ethnicity**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

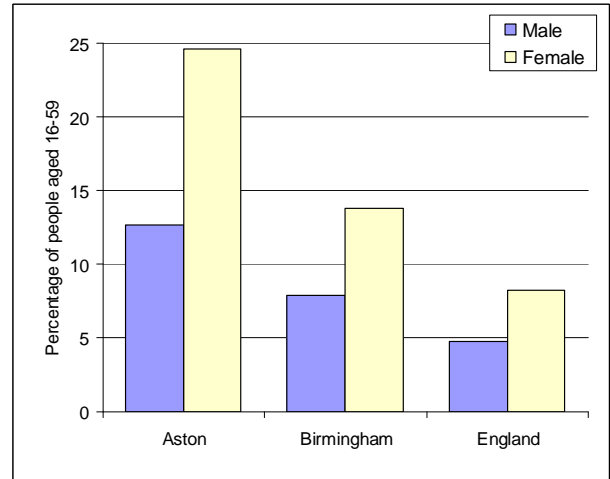
Unemployment rates varied between different ethnic minority groups, and were particularly high for women in some ethnic minority groups (Figure 5). Most strikingly, in Aston over a quarter of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women were unemployed, compared with 15% in England. This represents 220 unemployed Pakistani and

<sup>3</sup> Data at ward level by ethnicity are only available for women aged 16-74.

Bangladeshi women in this ward alone. It should be stressed that this measure excludes any women who choose not to work, and refers to those who are actively seeking paid employment.

Almost 1 in 4 women of working age in Aston, claim Income Support (Figure 6). This represents over 1,800 women in the locality.

**Figure 6 Income Support claimants**



Source: DWP August 2003 and 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Against the national trend, between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of women of working age who were economically inactive increased in Aston (from 49% to 58%) and in Birmingham (from 36% to 39%). In England it decreased, from 32% to 29%<sup>4</sup>.

In line with national trends in unemployment figures, between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of women who were unemployed fell from 26% to 17% in Aston. The figures for Birmingham were 11% to 7%, and in England 7% to 4%. However, the level of unemployment for women in Birmingham remained high<sup>4</sup>.

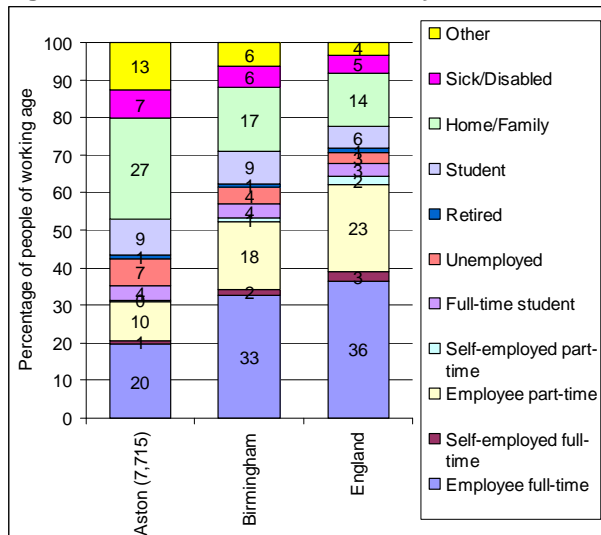
A high proportion of unemployed or economically inactive women in the ward had last worked in low skilled jobs. 39% of unemployed and economically inactive women in Aston had last worked in elementary jobs or as process, plant and machine operatives, compared with 33% in Birmingham, and 26% nationally.

A high percentage of working age women in this ward were looking after their home and family full-

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003, 1991 Census LBS, Crown Copyright 1993.

time. Over a quarter of working age women in Aston (27%) were looking after their home and family full-time, considerably above the national average of 14% (Figure 7).

**Figure 7 Women’s economic activity status**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

The reasons for economic inactivity amongst women varied across ethnic groups, as Figure 8 shows. The level of economic inactivity amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women in Aston

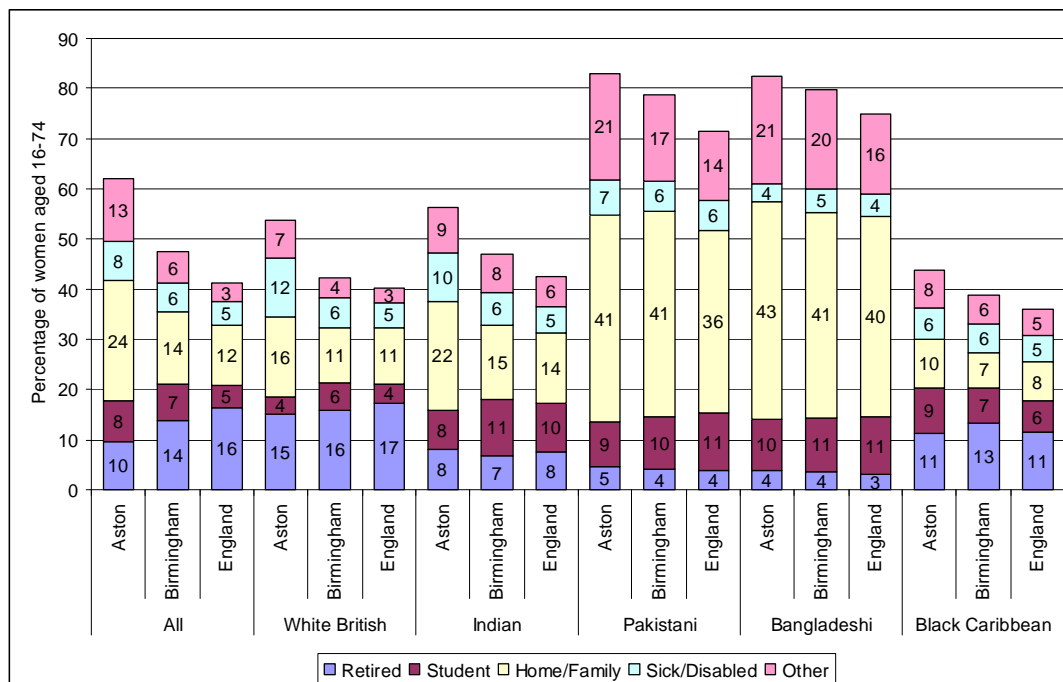
arising from looking after their home and family was high (41% of Pakistani and 43% of Bangladeshi women), compared with the same groups of women nationally (36% and 40%). The proportion of Indian women in Aston who were looking after their home and family full-time was also comparatively high at 22%, compared with 14% in England.

A high proportion of women in the ward had no qualifications (Appendix 3). For example, 33% of women aged 16-24 in Aston had no qualifications, compared with 21% in Birmingham and 16% in England. For women aged 25-34, 45% in Aston had no qualifications, compared with 26% in Birmingham and 14% in England.

A high proportion of women without qualifications were not in paid work. In Aston, just 19% of women without any qualifications were in employment, compared with 36% in Birmingham and 50% in England as a whole.

Women in Aston who were well qualified, with a degree or higher, were also less likely to be in paid work; only 58% of highly qualified women in Aston were in work, compared with 76% in Birmingham and 79% nationally.

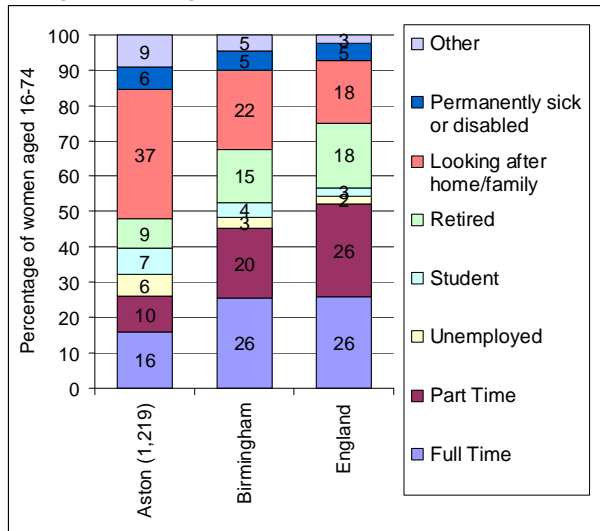
**Figure 8 Economic inactivity by reason by ethnicity (for selected ethnic groups) - proportion of women aged 16-74**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

In Aston, women who have unpaid caring responsibilities<sup>5</sup> were much less likely to be in paid employment than women in Birmingham or nationally (Figure 9). Only 26% of women with unpaid caring responsibilities in Aston were in paid work, compared with 46% in Birmingham and 52% in England.

**Figure 9 Economic activity of women aged 16-74 who provide unpaid care**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Lone mothers in this ward were much more likely to be economically inactive than lone mothers in England. 59% of lone mothers in Aston were economically inactive, compared with 52% in Birmingham and 46% England.

## Changes in the labour market

Aston, and Birmingham as a whole, have experienced significant changes in industrial structure and job opportunities over the past 30 years. These changes have had important outcomes for women.

As highlighted in Buckner et al (2005), in Birmingham there was a significant decrease in both full-time and part-time employment in manufacturing for women between 1991 and 2002. This was offset by increases in women's employment in banking and finance, distribution,

<sup>5</sup> These are people who look after or support family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental illness, disability, or problems related to old age (this excludes anything people might do as part of their paid work).

hotels and restaurants, and in transport and communications.

The changes in the labour market have had a significant impact on the Aston ward and the people living within it. Many families are living in poverty, and the changes have left large numbers of working age women out of work or unable to engage easily with the newly developing labour market. This study is concerned with these women: women who have been made redundant; women who have never worked but want to work; and women who have taken a break from work and now want to return but who are finding returning to paid work a difficult process.

## Women outside paid work

### Organisational views

To build a picture of local women who are currently not working we talked to representatives of voluntary and statutory organisations who provide employment programmes and support. Their perception of local women is important, as it can shape local policy responses. These organisational representatives identified the following key barriers facing local women.

Local organisations were acutely aware of local women's limited skills and qualifications, already highlighted in our statistical evidence.

*We know there are those who are simply under-skilled. There's no question about it. There's lots of skills issues.*

Organisations also felt that some local women lacked aspirations.

*There will be jobs here in 5 years time, but we've got to raise aspirations and say, 'You've got to go out and do something about your qualifications levels'. Because they're not scrotty jobs, they are high-tech jobs. We're looking for at least A Level entry. So, "How's your maths girl?" We've got to get that right. It's about capturing the imagination of people who live in these housing estates and trying to show them a vision of the way that Birmingham is going.*

Organisations also highlighted the language difficulties faced by some local women but, at the same time, the difficulties women can encounter in improving their language skills.

*We started English as a Second Language course and a lady who doesn't live very far from here, she was very keen to learn. I mean, that aspiration is there and I am proud of it. So she was very keen and her child came with her. But the tutor said, 'I can't have a child here all the time.' So we tried to arrange childcare, but the child won't go to the childcare. So these are the difficulties.*

Some organisations were concerned that local women lacked knowledge about the kinds of jobs available in the contemporary labour market and the new opportunities that are opening up. Others argued that women lacked the confidence to engage with the labour market and the services associated with it, or that they were not encouraged to use these services.

*Women who have not been in this country's education system. It's not that none of them are willing to come out and get themselves involved in training. Most of them want to, but they are not encouraged.*

*The people we're meeting are very capable of working, but what they don't know is the kind of jobs that exist, or where to get information if they're not getting it from the Job Centre.*

As is widely recognised, the poor availability of affordable childcare was also a concern to some local organisations. This was highlighted in our *Gender Profile* (Buckner et al 2005), which showed that some areas of Birmingham have little if any day nursery provision.

*Childcare is always an issue. You can never get it when you want it.*

There was also a view that local women were not prepared to travel to work, for example into the city centre.

*There is the issue of the ability to be mobile and the willingness to be mobile...Some elements of that are linked to culture, and I don't necessarily mean in terms of ethnicity. I think one of the characteristics that you find in deprived communities is that if it isn't on the doorstep then it's not a local job, even though if you got on a bus, and in half an hour you're actually at the Bull Ring. It is a job for you from Aston.*

Finally, local organisations felt that the combination of low pay in the local jobs available to the women living in Aston, and the workings of the tax and benefit system, left women trapped outside the labour market.

*The problem comes when they get a job and they lose their benefits, or they get very little. It's not*

*helpful. They'd be better off if they had a better job, but better jobs are not available because of their skills.*

*The main barrier that these people have is problems with their tax credits when they go into work....because their tax credits don't come through, they have to give up the job because they can't wait any longer. Or they just don't go into work because they're hearing of the problems people are having with their tax credits.*

## **Local women's views and experiences**

Some of the issues referred to in the interviews with representatives of local organisations emerged also in the discussions with local women. However, the discussion with women helped to deepen our understanding of the circumstances of local women and their relationship to the labour market, and challenged the views expressed by some of the organisational representatives.

The women who took part in the discussion were mostly women of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and African Caribbean origin. The views and experiences of other groups of women might add further dimensions to these findings.

The discussions with women uncovered the high value local women place on paid work, but also the ways in which the transition to paid work can be a process fraught with difficulties and setbacks. The discussions also revealed the kinds of organisational and personal support women wanted and needed to successfully enter paid work.

We met with two groups of women: women aged 25-49 and women aged 16-24. Some similar themes emerged across the age groups, but there were differences also. We therefore set out the views of the two groups separately.

### **Women aged 25- 49**

Many of the women who took part in the focus group discussions had had paid employment in the past. Thus experience of paid employment was common. But most women lacked experience in the areas of work that they most desired. Typically women had worked in low paid jobs which brought them little satisfaction. Some had worked in factories, some had worked in bars and restaurants, others in call centres or in care work.



Yet despite this, women explained that they placed a high value on paid work because it brought them a sense of achievement and offered a camaraderie not available from other situations.

*I enjoyed working...I loved the atmosphere of working with people, having a good laugh...It felt like you were achieving something for yourself.*

And a high value was placed on paid work because of the example it set to children.

*You're trying to teach your kids something. You keep going out there and you keep saying, 'let me go out to work', because the kids have to see it's the right thing to do.'*

Being out of work was largely viewed as a negative experience. Women spoke of their low self-esteem, loss of confidence and boredom because of a lack of interaction with other people. There was a general experience of feeling worthless.

*This constant discussion about the welfare state comes on the TV or in the newspaper and you think, 'Oh my god, I'm one of those people'.*

These are women who want to work.

Despite the desire to work, the process of looking for work was often a fairly depressing experience. Many women sent out endless applications and received no response. When they did elicit a response it often pointed to their lack of qualifications or lack of experience. But trying to secure relevant experience was one of the major hurdles women faced.

*If I've got lack of experience, why don't they give me a job, then I can get the experience. Even when you've got experience, it's not enough as far as they're concerned.*

And, trying to improve qualifications was expensive and required considerable personal resources and time. Moreover, the qualifications required for the jobs desired were constantly changing. Having qualifications which were currently recognised was the key, but it was often not possible to find or afford suitable training courses. The problem was less to do with a lack of aspirations, the issue raised by some of the organisations, but rather to do with securing support to extend skills, experience and qualifications.

For many of the women in the discussion group their early experience of education was not positive, and their lives as young people had

often been difficult. It was often only as they got older that they tried to gain the qualifications that were required in the labour market.

*When it comes to educating yourself, you can't do it until the time is right. Because I didn't start educating myself until I was in my 20s, cos nothing was right in my life - and when things started falling into place, that's when I could go and educate myself.*

The lack of qualifications and experience was not the only barrier to work referred to by women. Some of the women believed that employers discriminated against them because of where they lived.

*They look at your post code and they say, 'Well, we don't want anyone from Handsworth or Aston because these are no-go areas' ...you're scary because you're from Aston.*

*As soon as I said I lived in Aston everyone gasped and said, 'Oh my God, people get murdered there all the time.'*

*I've actually applied for jobs and put my sister's address, Perry Bar, and my home address in Aston, and I got a reply with my sister's address*

Some women felt that they had been discriminated against because of their race. For example, one woman cited an incident when a white male had been given a job, even though she had greater experience.

Some women also felt that their difficulties in finding work were because they were lone mothers. Employers, they argued, discriminated against them because of a concern that they would take time off work to care for children.

Because women often lacked skills and experience, the jobs market they faced was limited. Many local jobs paid the minimum wage and no more and, for lone parents particularly, living on such a wage was extremely difficult.

*I do want to work, but because of lack of experience or lack of knowledge or whatever you can't get a decent job to maintain you financially.*

Women were also disappointed by the poor availability of part-time jobs and jobs with flexible hours of work. The women argued that part-time employment would offer them an opportunity to combine work and childcare, a situation that was desirable.

*You haven't got the time to work full-time, because we've still got a job when we get home. You can't be saying we can do 40 hours, and we can't just do overtime any given occasion, it can't work like that, because we've got a family at home as well. But nobody wants to take that into account.*

The women questioned why employers were not able to offer greater flexibility of working hours.

*If they want women to work, they've got to recognise our situation.*

The availability of local jobs was also important to some women. Thus while many of the group were prepared to travel into the city centre to work, others were looking for work closer to home. But this was not an outcome of a culture of immobility but rather stemmed from a desire to meet the needs of their families.

*Because we have got family we have to always bear in mind we can't work too far out.*

Taking the step into paid work was often a process fraught with difficulties and setbacks. The key problem for many women was trying to survive on the low wages offered in the kinds of jobs available to them.

*Paying the bills was just impossible...it was too low, the wage, and they demanded too much, like paying the rent and Council Tax and all that.... Being on Income Support for so many years, and being independent of paying all those things - and all of a sudden you're thrown in at the deep end. ..It's a headache, it really is.*

Often women who moved into work were left in debt, and experienced the anxiety associated with it. This was often the factor that forced women to withdraw from work.

*I went back to work and I got debts beyond reason...You're in a worse situation and there's nobody that helps you.*

*There's a lot of talk about going into work and you think, OK. And you go into work, but it doesn't benefit you financially...it can cause more problems. I've been told I'm better off on Income Support than going out and getting work, because it's not going to benefit me. You don't want to be told that, but that's the way it is.*

While the process of transferring from claiming benefits to earning a low wage left many women in debt, the tax credit system had not led to any significant improvements in women's standard of

living and was thus not seen as a supportive measure, especially for lone parents.

*From my experience, if there's a mum and a dad in the house and you are both working it can work. Unfortunately, in this day and age, there are lots of single parents and being one of those... and if the other parent isn't providing, then you've literally got to do everything and pay all your bills in full. It doesn't work. I'm going to start crying now.*

Even for women who had improved their qualifications the transition to work was not straightforward, particularly for lone mothers.

*I'm kind of stuck in the middle, because I want to get a job but it doesn't really benefit me to get a job...I've trained to become a teacher...I don't know how it's going to work out if I go and get a teaching job, if I'm going to be worse off. Put yourself in that position if you've got children, it's difficult.*

### **Women aged 16 - 24**

All of the young women wanted to find work but, as with older women, their search had been disappointing:

*You give your CV out, but they never get back to you.*

Many of the young women appeared to have quite limited horizons in relation to the labour market. Most were looking for work in the retail industry and didn't consider themselves qualified to do other jobs. This was despite the fact that some women were studying on childcare courses at the local college.

*If you've got no qualifications you just do retail jobs.*

Some young women wanted to extend their education but found, like the older women, that there was little financial support.

*As soon as you leave school you realise, gosh, it's so expensive. There's no help at all suddenly... They want you to go, to carry on with your education... but then you're left on your own.*

Young unemployed women could find themselves sucked into caring and domestic work for their families, particularly in large families where there were young children or elderly relatives.

*I'm at home helping my mum every day.*

Some of the young women were quite critical of their parents, who they felt didn't understand the

value they placed on work and its importance in claiming a stake in the world.

*It builds your confidence, you're out, you know what's happening, you understand the outside world. If you're stuck at home doing housework and someone says something and you don't understand their point of view they're going to say, 'There's no point in talking to her, she's just at home, she wouldn't understand.' With the majority of our parents we normally say they're backward because they don't understand, they haven't been working. If you're outside in the world you know what's going on...you meet new people, and you understand different points of view.*

And some women had faced resistance from their parents in taking certain jobs, particularly if they involved interaction with men.

### **Using employment services**

We asked both groups of women about their experiences of using employment and job brokerage services. Some women had looked for help in making the transition to work. But women's experience of using job search or brokerage services was not always positive. Women were particularly critical when agencies simply point to job vacancies, but offer no further support.

*They're supposed to help you in your search for work, but I often wonder, 'Is this a real job for you, because you're not actually doing anything.' They sit there...and they bring on the screen possible jobs and they give you a piece of paper and an application form, and they say 'Fill it in and send out the application form', and that's the end of it. They're not helping. I said to my advisor, 'Is there any way I can get some training that will make the possibility of me getting work much easier?'. She said, 'No, we don't do that.'*

*I thought they'd be more about sitting you down and looking at what you want to do, a plan or something. Something constructive. But all they're doing is looking on the internet and getting jobs up. You can do that yourself.*

Nevertheless some locally-based projects, including Aston Pride, were praised for providing a wider range of services, including preparation for job interviews and an understanding of their situation as women.

Some women, however, were unaware of any local employment services or of where they could turn to get help in accessing work.

In part, they wanted an employment service based on the range of issues facing them. The idea of a mentor was widely supported; a person to build confidence and offer guidance.

*When you've been at home for a lot of years you've lost that confidence of going out there and joining in...When you haven't been at work for a number of years you've forgotten how to interact with other people. The work involved is alien to me. I need coaxing back into it.*

They also wanted support founded on an understanding of them as women in the labour market.

*It's not just about filling in an application form. It's how you come across when you do get an interview. It's about bringing the best of us out, letting us recall that before we had all these kids we were somebody. It's about bringing our individuality back.*

Many local women who are outside paid work want to work, and local women place a high value on paid work, both for their own self-esteem and enjoyment of life and as an example for their children.

But making the transition to paid work is a process requiring considerable support, guidance and advice. Women would welcome greater support to help them update and extend their labour market skills, experience and qualifications. Some of the employment services used by local women have not fully addressed their needs in the labour market.

Low pay is a significant barrier to the labour market and there are concerns that discrimination may affect local women's opportunities in the labour market.

## Local employment projects

As is to be expected in a large city like Birmingham, there is a high level of commitment to, and activity associated with, raising employment levels and engaging people from disadvantaged communities with the labour market. The local authority works with its partners in the city-wide *Employment Strategy Group*, out of which have developed local *Access to Employment groups*. These groups focus on the needs of local communities, seeking to

*...identify gaps in provision, put together new activities to address local needs and try to influence the mainstream activities that are already there.*

*Access to Employment Groups* have emerged from a recognition that:

*...despite all the programmes, there are still lots of people not accessing those programmes and not getting the right support.*

Crucially, from the perspective of this study, there is a commitment to tackle employment issues on a localised basis. *Access to Employment Groups* engage with local voluntary sector organisations which have a good knowledge of local issues and local populations to develop local plans.

One approach to be adopted on a localised basis is the *Employment Hub*, a model previously tested in relation to the recent Birmingham Bull Ring development. The Bull Ring 'employment hub' had three key elements. First, it secured the commitment of the Bull Ring developers and the future Bull Ring employers to recruit from communities under-represented in the labour market. Secondly, it organised relevant training linked to employer needs. Thirdly, it targeted disadvantaged communities, encouraging local people's engagement with the employment hub. The hub approach was extremely successful and this will be a key method to be developed in Aston in coming years.

A further project being developed is called *Experience to Work*. This is an ILM-type project which will provide work experience in clerical work, retail and hospitality. The aim is to link the project to areas of employment growth locally, where job opportunities are likely to be more plentiful.

*Aston Pride*, the New Deal for Communities project in Aston, explained how local health, family and community education projects also provide opportunities to connect with local people and to offer them employment services. For example, the newly developing breakfast clubs in Aston:

*..provide great opportunities for us to bring in our employment services.*

Both of the local voluntary sector organisations we made contact with offer women help and support in accessing employment. One of these organisations explained that they were currently prioritising the provision of assistance to women in the labour market.

*Our priority is to get people into jobs, to get people trained, up-skilled and into jobs.*

Some recent mainstream programmes had involved a focus on Aston. The Jobcentre Plus programme, *Working Neighbourhoods* has been partly based in Aston, offering services such as an 'intensive jobs search service, and help with CVs' over a 26 week period, along with financial incentives to people who take work and stay in their jobs. However, this pilot scheme is to be phased out because of the high costs involved.

*It finishes in April, even though it's been very successful. It is very expensive in comparison to other similar projects.*

The *Fair Cities* initiative, a pilot project based in three cities including Birmingham, is also an important project locally. Arising out of the investigation of the National Employment Panel, this initiative seeks to increase the participation of ethnic minority groups in the workforce (National Employment Panel 2005).

However, some concern was expressed about the level of engagement of mainstream providers with Aston. It was felt that there needed to be more commitment to Aston from mainstream providers alongside the deployment of more resources in the area. Part of the problem is that there are no mainstream employment services in the area.

*Jobcentre Plus is located directly over the boundary. Although it's not very far from the Aston Pride area, it clearly isn't in the area and therefore it's not seen as a resource that's available locally... and there still isn't any physical presence from other employment service providers in the area,*

*they are actually located quite a way outside the area.*

Concern was also expressed that some organisations operated with only a limited understanding of local people and their needs. Support for people into employment needed time and a good knowledge of the local community. This was especially important in a diverse community with a variety of different circumstances and labour market barriers.

*There should be targets for getting people into jobs, but these organisations forget the journey involved...It depends what kind of jobs you are looking for. You have to develop your skills and for some that will take longer.*

It was argued that the focus on certain groups of people was sometimes because they fitted into a particular claimant group (e.g. lone parents, claimants of Incapacity Benefit), but that this did not lead to a focus on who they were as individuals, in terms of their work history and their specific support and personal needs. The same generic service was delivered, regardless of the unique circumstances of the person.

There was also a concern that labour market support for women in Aston was not as widely available as it might be.

*There aren't many places they can go for advice or job search or careers advice, but the need is certainly there.*

In addition, it was felt that some key agencies did not always fully understand or acknowledge the needs and aspirations of local women. Some, it was argued, held a view that women in Aston who were aged over 30 and not working did not want to work. This was worrying for those seeking to develop employment opportunities for local women:

*If you've got key workers holding that kind of attitude then they will never present women with opportunities...and because they hold those views they reinforce the problem of women not working even further.*

Those working in the locality and seeking to address the employment needs of local women, wanted mainstream providers to lend greater support to targeted employment programmes.

*What we need is focused and targeted work, in partnership with mainstream providers over a long period of time for a lot of people.*

In our interviews we explored perspectives on ILM-type projects. There was interest in the notion of ILMs focused on para-professional type jobs, such as classroom assistants, but some informants also expressed a note of caution. There had been previous ILM programmes in Birmingham focused on para-professional jobs in the health service, but this had not been entirely successful as the para-professional layer of jobs had not been fully accepted by health professionals and trade unions. It was important to prepare people for jobs that will actually exist.

*We are running against this para-professional barrier in the health service, where there just isn't necessarily the jobs. It might work better in hospitals, where the career escalator works really well, but in the community we haven't got the dynamic behind appointing people into these para-professional roles, and there is a lot of controversy about that.*

Mainstream providers also expressed concerns about the costs.

*The value for money thing is what cripples ILM projects, because it really is such an expensive game.*

Employer commitment was seen as the key to successful ILMs.

*I'd like to see much more focus on the end employer investing in their recruitment.*

This needed to go beyond the commitment of a single employer. For example, with the classroom assistant role it would be important to establish the involvement of a group of schools within a locality.

*I'd like to see the schools buying into it and saying we all need classroom assistants, why can't we start recruiting and training them all, rather than for each individual school. So if there was a need for classroom assistants, it could be shared between institutions.*

Whatever the scope and value of local projects, there was a concern that too many local people who were unemployed or economically inactive were not making use of them. Many employment services were reliant on individuals themselves making contact. More needed to be done to reach out to people in the places they have contact with, like local schools, health centres and community centres as a means to draw them into using services.

*We've got to reach out to people and I don't think we have succeeded in doing that.*

There were no local projects specifically focused on women, and this was a concern to some local organisations. There was an acceptance that women faced a specific set of circumstances in their relationship with the labour market. There was support for the idea of projects targeted on women.

## **Building successful employment projects: recommendations**

This study has been concerned to understand how best to support women who want to work into paid work.

Our interviews with local women and our examination of the statistical data show that there are many local women who want to work. Local women place a high value on paid work, both in terms of their own lives and those of their children. However, there are some significant barriers to be overcome in order to fulfil women's desire to work.

The research has also explored whether the model provided by Intermediate Labour Market-type employment projects would be appropriate to help local women in their transition to work and whether it would appeal to them. Moreover, we have considered whether there are other measures that might assist local women into work.

Based on our research, we set out below some of the key principles that we regard as essential aspects of employment projects if women from deprived communities are to make the transition into paid work. We also make some recommendations regarding the wider policy context.

We have found that basing projects on the key principles associated with ILM-type employment projects (paid work experience, the opportunity to gain qualifications and personal support and guidance from a project co-ordinator) would be beneficial to unemployed and economically inactive women. But projects need the engagement of a range of local employers willing to offer women paid work experience.

The key starting point is to accept that many women living in disadvantaged communities who are not currently working want to work. To assist their transition to paid work it is important to understand the features of women's lives that can prevent them from engaging in paid work.

Women in their 30s and 40s who have taken long absences from work lack up-to-date skills and experience of the labour market. They also lack confidence in their value as potential workers. This makes it difficult for individual women to make the transition to work without support, advice and guidance.

Younger women, in their teens and 20s, can also lack experience of work and, in deprived communities they do not always have the qualifications and confidence to engage successfully with the labour market. As a result they often set their horizons in terms of work at a low level.

Many women of all ages have children, and they are searching for ways to combine caring for their children with paid work. Yet the jobs available to them are often very low paid, and this makes childcare costs beyond their reach, even if they qualify for Childcare Tax Credits. And part-time jobs are not widely available, especially good quality part-time jobs.

Successful projects will need to accept and respond to these aspects of women's lives.

Many deprived neighbourhoods are characterised by diverse communities, with people from a wide range of backgrounds in terms of ethnicity. There are different needs and circumstances across these communities, and we can only begin to understand this by talking and listening to local people from different communities.

Sometimes myths and assumptions about women from ethnic minority groups develop, and these can stand in the way of the development of constructive solutions to help unemployed women. For example, some people hold the view that local women from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds do not want to work, or face family pressure to work close to home. Yet women themselves refute these assumptions. It is important to discard assumptions and instead to listen to women themselves.

Local community centres with knowledge of local people can provide an excellent starting point in exploring the reality of women's lives.

Some existing projects are helping local women to access employment, but more needs to be done to make a real difference in the employment rates for local women. Here we set out some of the key elements that should be incorporated into employment projects.

### ***Targeting projects on women***

As we argue above, women face a distinct set of issues in relation to the labour market. Successful projects for women should be informed by an understanding of women's lives, as well as the differences between women in terms of age and ethnicity. For this reason it is important to develop projects targeted on women.

### ***Incorporating work experience***

Women have had spells outside the labour market, and young unemployed women, usually lack work experience. Without experience most employers are not willing to offer them work. And without work experience women's confidence in relation to work remains low.

Projects need to offer women a substantial period of work experience, for at least 6 months.

### ***Up-dating and extending qualifications***

Women who are trying to find work often lack either up-to-date qualifications or sufficient qualifications. Employment projects should not simply be about getting women into jobs but also about improving their employability, thus laying the basis for subsequent progression at work.

Employment projects need to provide opportunities for women to gain qualifications which provide a stepping stone to progress at work.

### ***Providing support, guidance and mentoring***

Many women who want to make the transition into work will find it difficult without support. Simply providing women with lists of vacancies is often not enough. We need to understand women's situation, re-build the confidence lost, and offer guidance so that women can extend their horizons. Mentors may be helpful and supportive.

Employment projects should offer personal support to women, guide them into the labour

market and, in some situations, use mentors to help build their confidence and aspirations.

### ***Offering a range of services***

Employment projects should aim to provide a range of services to women. Women may have a range of needs, from training needs, to help with building confidence, interview techniques, filling out forms and preparing CVs.

Employment projects should be funded so that they can provide a wide range of services tailored to women's needs.

### ***Reaching out to women***

To connect women with available services it will be important to make contact with them in the places they visit day to day. We can make contact with women in schools, and in community and local resource centres. If we are to tackle high levels of worklessness amongst women and help women who want to work in the transition to work it will not be enough to wait for women to make contact with employment services.

Employment projects must reach out to women.

### ***Getting employers on board***

There are a range of community-based projects which offer training courses in skills such as IT, food hygiene and sewing. However, courses are often disconnected from real jobs and the skills and qualifications needed for them, and thus are not sufficient, in themselves, to ensure women get jobs. For this reason, employment projects need a link to employers and employer support.

Getting employers involved with employment projects means that training and qualifications can be geared to specific jobs with specific employers. This will put women in a much stronger position to gain employment.

### ***Encouraging employers to 'take a risk'***

If employers are to commit themselves to employment projects for women in disadvantaged communities they have to be persuaded to take a risk. The potential recruits may be different from the kinds of people who normally apply for their jobs, and they may take time to re-adjust to the rhythms and demands of paid work. But for many employers, being prepared to take on the kinds of women who have taken part in this research can be a genuine advantage. In many jobs a knowledge and understanding of local communities is a real asset, and for many

employers achieving a more diverse workforce is an unachieved goal.

### ***Understanding the changing labour market and identifying appropriate jobs***

Successful employment projects are based on an understanding of real labour market conditions and the changing jobs market. Links with employers are vital, along with an understanding of which types of jobs are expanding and may appeal to local women.

One area of employment growth in which knowledge of local communities will be an asset is in para-professional jobs, such as health care assistants and teaching assistants, and jobs in childcare services. Our research shows that these kinds of jobs also appeal to some women.

Employment projects must understand their local labour market and combine this knowledge with an appreciation of the interests of women.

### ***Engaging partnerships of local employers***

However, women are interested in a range of job opportunities. Some of the women interviewed were interested in para-professional jobs in health, care and education. Others had different employment aspirations. The way forward may be to establish partnerships of local employers willing to offer women paid work experience and the opportunity to gain qualifications.

The partnership approach can be linked with a project co-ordinator who would offer trainees personal support and guidance.

## **Tackling issues in the wider labour market: recommendations**

Alongside our recommendations with respect to employment projects, we also recommend a fresh look at the wider labour market context and the policy approach to it.

### ***A strategic approach***

At present there are a range of small-scale employment projects, alongside statutory employment services for people claiming working age benefits, although these are not located in Aston. Regardless of the effectiveness of these services, it is important that the wider employment strategy, which seeks to elevate employment levels, has a clear focus on addressing the employment needs of women who want to work and who are living in deprived communities.

### ***Tackling low pay***

A key barrier to work for women is the low pay associated with many of the jobs in which women typically engage.

At present tax credits do not always raise income levels sufficiently to prevent low pay being a barrier to employment, particularly for lone mothers.

We know from one of our other studies (Grant et al 2005) that many employers increase pay in line with their competitors, year on year. Employers are reluctant to break out of these pay norms. Nevertheless, the problems created by low pay will need to be addressed if worklessness is to be comprehensively tackled.

There may be a role for local authorities to address this issue with local employers as they engage with them as partners in a local employment strategy.

At the national level, a more generous minimum wage and an increased value for tax credits would also be beneficial.

### ***Challenging discrimination***

Discrimination against ethnic minority groups and people living in certain areas does occur. In addition, some people from ethnic minority groups perceive that racial or religious discrimination could be a factor in preventing them from getting a job. The much higher levels of unemployment



amongst some ethnic minority groups suggest that discrimination persists.

Local authorities could explore and challenge discrimination and unfair practices in the local labour market. At the same time, local people would value a clear commitment to address discrimination.

### ***Extending childcare***

Existing childcare can be too expensive for low paid women - and local women are not always confident about the quality of the care provided. Childcare must be affordable, and local women need to be reassured that their children will receive the highest quality care and attention. Unless they have this assurance they will not be confident to use the services provided.

Local authorities could review the availability and affordability of childcare services and research local women's views and experience of using it.

### ***Reviewing ESOL courses***

An important barrier facing some local women is a lack of fluency in the English language. Yet English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses do not always succeed in raising language skills amongst all the women who want to work.

Part of the problem is the frequency of courses. Often classes take place only once a week, and more can be forgotten in the intervening week than learnt. The content of courses is also more about dealing with everyday situations, such as shopping and going to the post office, rather than with the demands and requirements of paid work.

Local authorities could review the scope and frequency of language courses, and consider whether new approaches to language teaching are required to address the language needs of local women.

## **Conclusion**

This study has considered how to connect women who are outside paid employment, and who want to work, with the labour market. The research has shown that many local women have a strong desire to work. They regard paid work as important for their standard of living and quality of life, essential for their self-esteem and, an example to children. Yet local women face difficulties in acquiring up-to-date qualifications and work experience, and they sometimes lack confidence about paid work, especially after long absences from the labour market.

Much could be done to enable local women to connect with the labour market, but employment programmes must be based on an understanding of the diverse circumstances of women's lives and should reach out to women. Successful projects will provide women with paid work experience and training, and secure the engagement of employers. Women also need personal support and guidance as they make the transition to work. Employers must be encouraged to take a risk. To this extent, the key principles underpinning Intermediate Labour Markets (ILMs) should be adopted if women from deprived neighbourhoods are to be connected with the labour market. The ILM model can be adapted to fit local circumstances, as long as these key principles are embedded in employment projects for women.

Women are searching for a range of jobs, but many of the women expressed an interest in jobs as childcare workers and as classroom assistants. It will be important, however, to ensure that projects focus on areas of employment in which there will be real jobs in the future for which local women can apply. The involvement and commitment of employers in the development of projects is vital if women are to secure real jobs in the future.

Finally, tackling women's unemployment and economic inactivity must be integrated within the wider employment strategy, aimed at raising levels of skill and employment in the local labour market.

## References

Buckner, L., Tang, N. and Yeandle, S. (2004) *Gender Profile of Birmingham's Labour Market* Sheffield: Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University.

DWP (2000) *Jobs for All*, Report of the Policy Action Team on Jobs, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

DWP (2004) *Building on New Deal: local solutions meeting individual need*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Fagan, C. and Rubery, J.(1996) 'Transitions between family formation and paid employment', in G. Schmid, J. O'Reilly, and K Schomann (eds.) *International Handbook of Labour Market Policy and Evaluations*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Grant L., Yeandle, S. and Buckner, L. (2005) *Working below potential: women and part-time work*, Working Paper Series No.40. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.

Grant, L., Price, C. and Buckner, L. (2006) *Connecting women with the labour market* Sheffield: Centre for Social Inclusion, Sheffield Hallam University.

HM Treasury (2000) *The Goal of Full Employment: opportunity for all throughout Britain*, London: HM Treasury.

HM Treasury (2002) *Opportunity and Security for All: investing in an enterprising, fairer Britain*, London: HM Treasury.

HM Treasury ( 2004) *Stability, Security and Opportunity for All: investing in Britain's long-term future*, London: HM Treasury.

EU (2004) *Facing the Challenge: the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment*. Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok, November 2004.

Marshall, B. and Macfarlane, R. (2000) *The Intermediate Labour Market: a tool for tackling long-term unemployment*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

National Employment Panel (2005) *Enterprising People, Enterprising Places: measures to increase ethnic minority employment and business growth*, London: National Employment Panel.

Reid, L. (2002) ' Occupational segregation, human capital and motherhood: black women's higher exit rates from full-time employment', *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 5 pp.728-747.

Schmid, G. (1998) *Transitional Labour Markets: a new European employment strategy*, Discussion Paper FS1 98-206, Berlin: Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin fur Sozialforschung.

Willson, A. E. (2003) 'Race and women's income trajectories: employment, marriage and income security over the life course', *Social Problems*, Vol. 50, No. 1, pp. 87-110.

## Appendix 1 Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets

The *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* project was funded, between September 2003 and August 2006, by a core European Social Fund grant to Professor Sue Yeandle and her research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion*, Sheffield Hallam University. The award was made from within ESF Policy Field 5 Measure 2, 'Gender and Discrimination in Employment'. The grant was supplemented with additional funds and resources provided by a range of partner agencies, notably the Equal Opportunities Commission, the TUC, and 12 English local authorities.

### The GELLM project output comprises:

- new statistical analysis of district-level labour market data, led by Dr Lisa Buckner, producing separate **Gender Profiles** of the local labour markets of each of the participating local authorities (Buckner, Tang and Yeandle 2004, 2005, 2006) - available from the local authorities concerned and at [www.shu.ac.uk/csi/research](http://www.shu.ac.uk/csi/research)
- 6 **Local Research Studies**, each involving between three and six of the project's local authority partners. Locality and Synthesis reports of these studies, published spring-summer 2006 are available at [www.shu.ac.uk/csi/research](http://www.shu.ac.uk/csi/research). Details of other publications and presentations relating to the GELLM programme are also posted on this website.
  1. *Working below potential: women and part-time work*, led by Dr Linda Grant and part-funded by the EOC (first published by the EOC in 2005)
  2. *Connecting women with the labour market*, led by Dr Linda Grant
  3. *Ethnic minority women and access to the labour market*, led by Bernadette Stiell
  4. *Women's career development in the local authority sector in England* led by Dr Cinnamon Bennett
  5. *Addressing women's poverty: local labour market initiatives* led by Karen Escott
  6. *Local challenges in meeting demand for domiciliary care* led from autumn 2005 by Professor Sue Yeandle and prior to this by Anu Suokas

### The GELLM Team

Led by Professor Sue Yeandle, the members of the GELLM research team at the *Centre for Social Inclusion* are: Dr Cinnamon Bennett, Dr Lisa Buckner, Ian Chesters (administrator), Karen Escott, Dr Linda Grant, Christopher Price, Lucy Shipton, Bernadette Stiell, Anu Suokas (until autumn 2005), and Dr Ning Tang. The team is grateful to Dr Pamela Fisher for her contribution to the project in 2004, and for the continuing advice and support of Dr Chris Gardiner.

### The GELLM Partnership

The national partners supporting the GELLM project are the Equal Opportunities Commission and the TUC. The project's 12 local authority partners are: Birmingham City Council, the London Borough of Camden, East Staffordshire Borough Council, Leicester City Council, Newcastle City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Somerset County Council, the London Borough of Southwark, Thurrock Council, Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council, Wakefield Metropolitan District Council and West Sussex County Council. The North East Coalition of Employers has also provided financial resources via Newcastle City Council. The team is grateful for the support of these agencies, without which the project could not have been developed. The GELLM project engaged Dr Damian Grimshaw, Professor Ed Fieldhouse (both of Manchester University) and Professor Irene Hardill (Nottingham Trent University), as external academic advisers to the project team, and thanks them for their valuable advice and support.

## Appendix 2 Research methods

This research was conducted in 2005-6 using a variety of methods, including: analysis of statistical data, including the 2001 Census; interviews with key informants with knowledge of the circumstances of local women's lives, local employment projects and the local labour market; and two focus groups with local women.

The interviews with key informants explored: the activities and priorities of their organisation; local social and economic conditions; the nature of the local labour market for men and women; the social and economic circumstances of local unemployed and economically inactive women and men; local services; local employment projects; and views about, and experience of, the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) model.

The focus groups with women covered the following topics: work history; experience of looking for work; labour market support and advice; reasons for not working; views about not working; aspirations in relation to paid work; views about the ILM model.

Two focus groups with local women were held; one group of women aged 25-49 and another group of women aged 16-24.

- 11 women participated in the group aged 25-49. Their characteristics were as follows:
  - 5 were aged 25- 30; 2 were aged 31-35; 2 were aged 36 - 40; 2 were aged 41-49
  - 7 had dependent children, with family size ranging from families of 3 children to families of 1 child
  - 2 of the women were of Bangladeshi origin; 1 was of Indian origin; 4 were of Caribbean origin; 1 was of mixed white and African origin.
  - English was the first language for 7 of the group
  - All 11 women were looking for work
  - 6 of the 11 women had worked in the past
  - 7 of the 11 women had qualifications: 1 was educated to degree level; 1 had a Certificate in HE; 4 had GCSEs/O Levels; 1 had an NVQ Level 2/3
  
- 9 women participated in the group aged 16-24. Their characteristics were as follows:
  - 8 were aged 16 - 20; 1 was aged 21 – 24
  - None had dependent children
  - 5 of the women were of Bangladeshi origin. 1 was of Indian origin; 2 were of Pakistani origin; 1 was of Caribbean origin
  - 3 had had paid work in the past
  - 8 were looking for work
  - 8 of the 9 women had qualifications: 1 was educated to degree level; 1 was educated to A Level; 4 had GCSEs; 1 had NVQ Level 2/3

# Appendix A3 Ward profile for Aston in Birmingham

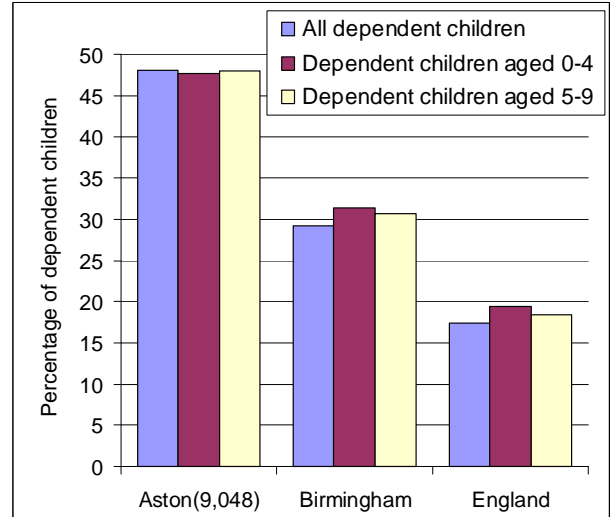
## General information

**Figure A1 Population profile – proportion of people in each age group** *per cent*

	Aston	Birmingham	England
All males (numbers)	13,354	473,267	23,922,144
0-15	32	25	19
16-24	15	14	13
25-49	33	35	36
50-64	10	15	18
65-74	6	7	8
75+	4	5	6
All females (numbers)	13,608	50,3827	25,216,687
0-15	29	22	18
16-24	17	13	12
25-49	33	34	35
50-64	11	14	17
65-74	6	8	9
75+	5	9	9

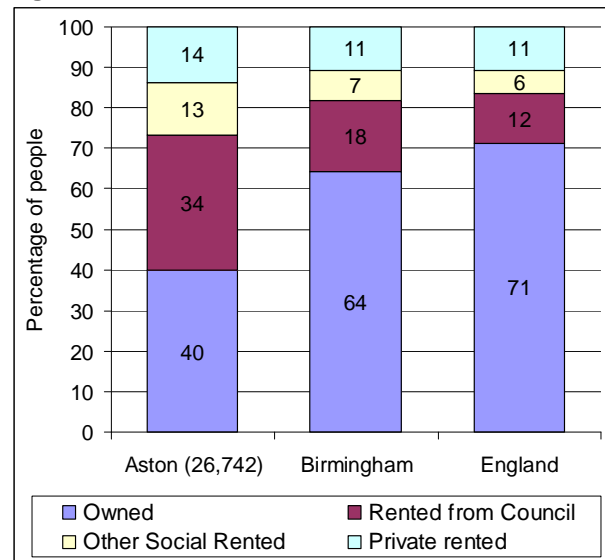
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A3 Dependent children in families with no working adults**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Theme Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A2 Tenure**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

## Economic inactivity and unemployment

Figure A4 Economic inactivity and unemployment in the wards

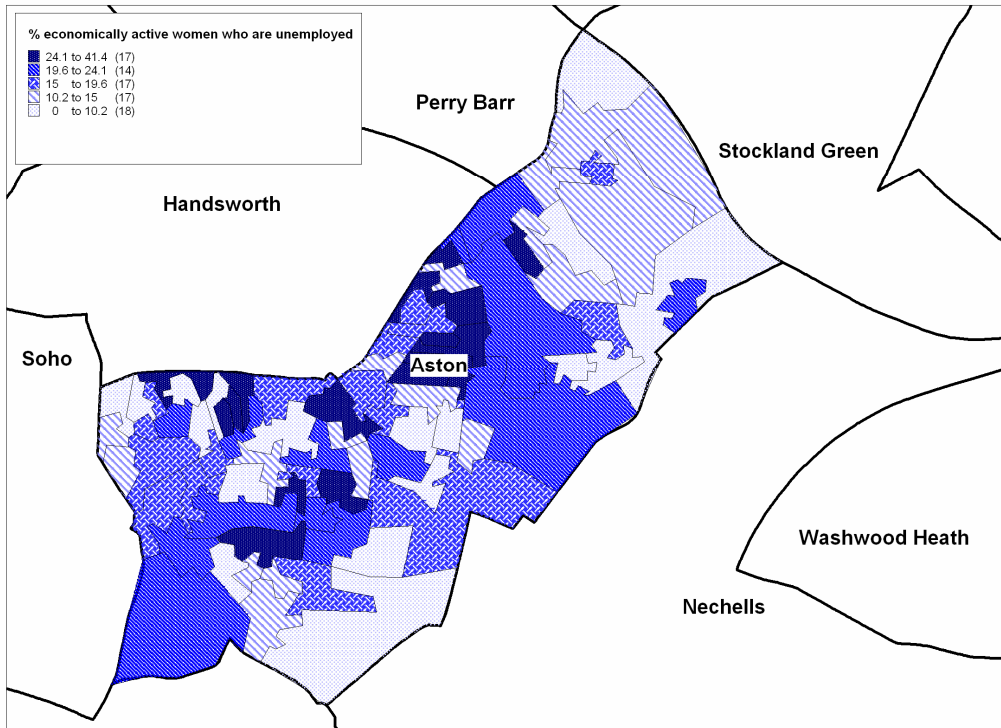
	Aston		Birmingham		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Working age population</b> (16-64/59)	7,807	7,715				
<b>Employment rate</b>						
Proportion of people of WA	46	31	63	53	74	64
Proportion of EA people	69	74	84	87	91	91
<b>Unemployment rate</b>						
Proportion of people of WA	17	7	9	4	5	3
Proportion of EA people	25	17	12	7	6	4
<b>Economic inactivity rate</b> - Proportion of WA	34	58	25	39	18	29
<b>Economic inactivity rate by reason</b> - Proportion of WA						
Retired	2	1	2	1	3	1
Student	10	9	9	9	5	6
Looking after home/family	3	27	2	17	1	14
Permanently sick/disabled	10	7	7	6	6	5
Other reason	9	13	5	6	3	4
<b>Economic inactivity rate by reason</b> - Proportion of Econ. inactive						
Retired	6	2	10	3	16	5
Student	30	16	35	23	29	19
Looking after home/family	8	47	6	43	6	48
Permanently sick/disabled	31	13	30	15	33	19
Other reason	26	22	18	16	16	12
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Change in economic inactivity</b> - proportion of WA						
1991	20	49	15	36	13	32
2001	34	58	25	39	18	29
<b>Change in Unemployment rate</b> - proportion of WA						
1991	30	13	15	7	10	5
2001	17	7	9	4	5	3
<b>Change in Unemployment rate</b> - proportion of EA						
1991	37	26	17	11	11	7
2001	25	17	12	7	6	4

Source: 2001 Census Standard Statistics, Crown Copyright 2003

### Census definitions:

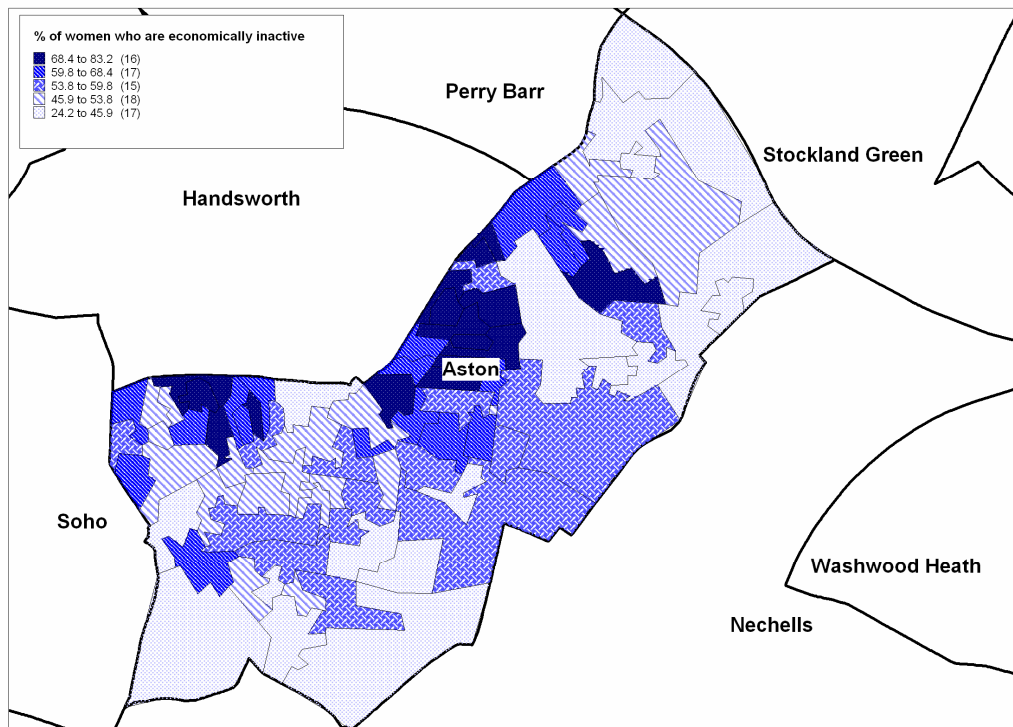
<b>Economically Active</b>	All people who were working in the week prior to the census are described as economically active. In addition, people who were not working but were looking for work and were available to start work within two weeks were also included. Full-time students who were economically active are included but identified separately. This question was only asked of people aged 16-74.
<b>Economically Inactive</b>	Specific categories of Economic Inactivity are: retired, student (excludes students who were working or who were in some other way economically active), looking after home/family, permanently sick/disabled and other. A person who is looking for work but is not available to start within two weeks is counted as economically inactive. This question was only asked of people aged 16-74.
<b>Unemployed</b>	A person is defined as unemployed if he or she is not in employment, is available to start work in the next two weeks and has either looked for work in the last 4 weeks or is waiting to start a new job. This is consistent with the International Labour Office (ILO) standard classification.
<b>Working age</b>	Working age is defined as 16 to 64 for males and 16 to 59 for females.

**Figure A5 Percentage of economically active women of working age who were unemployed**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Theme Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 2001 Census Output Area boundaries, Crown Copyright 2003. . This work is based on data provided through EDINA UKBORDERS with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is Copyright of the Crown

**Figure A6 Percentage of women of working age who were economically inactive**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Theme Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 2001 Census Output Area boundaries, Crown Copyright 2003. . This work is based on data provided through EDINA UKBORDERS with the support of the ESRC and JISC and uses boundary material which is Copyright of the Crown

**Figure A7 Unemployment rates for men and women from different ethnic minority groups in the wards**

	Aston		Birmingham		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Unemployment rate						
Proportion of people aged 16-74						
All	15	6	8	4	4	2
White British	15	6	7	3	4	2
Indian	8	7	7	4	5	4
Pakistani	14	5	13	5	9	4
Bangladeshi	13	5	13	4	10	4
Black Caribbean	17	8	14	6	10	5
Unemployment rate						
Proportion of economically active people aged 16-74						
All	25	16	12	7	6	4
White British	23	13	9	5	5	4
Indian	13	15	11	8	6	6
Pakistani	23	28	20	22	14	15
Bangladeshi	25	27	22	22	16	17
Black Caribbean	29	15	21	10	15	8

Source: 2001 Census Standard Statistics, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A8 Qualifications by age and employment**

	Aston		Birmingham		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
People with no qualifications (%)						
16-24	33	33	23	21	19	16
25-34	48	45	27	26	17	14
35-49	56	58	39	38	29	26
50-64/59	79	79	65	62	56	52
People of working age in employment (%)						
No qualifications	41	19	54	36	65	50
Lower level	48	40	65	57	76	66
Higher level	58	58	79	76	85	79

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Note: Lower level qualifications were equivalent to 'A' level and below and higher level qualifications were equivalent to first degree and above

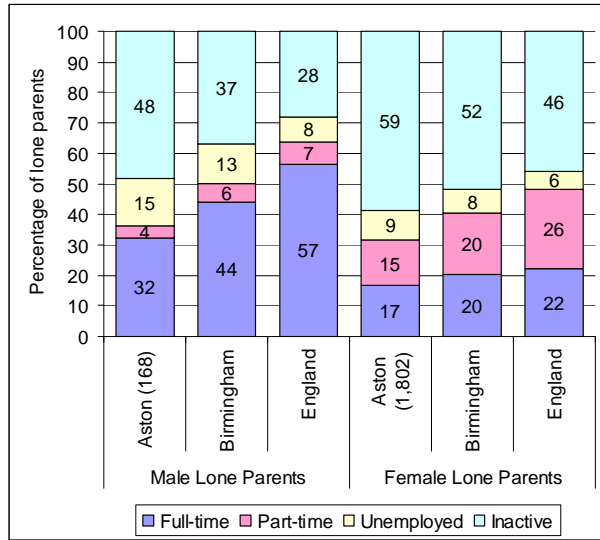
**Figure A9 Former occupations and industries of unemployed and economically inactive women**

	Aston	Birmingham	England
<b>Occupation</b>			
Managers, senior officials	4	5	7
Professionals	4	5	6
Associate professionals & technical occupations	5	7	9
Process, plant and machine operatives	13	8	5
Elementary occupations	25	24	21
<b>Industry</b>			
Manufacturing	17	13	11
Health and social work	14	16	16
Finance and real estate	10	14	15

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

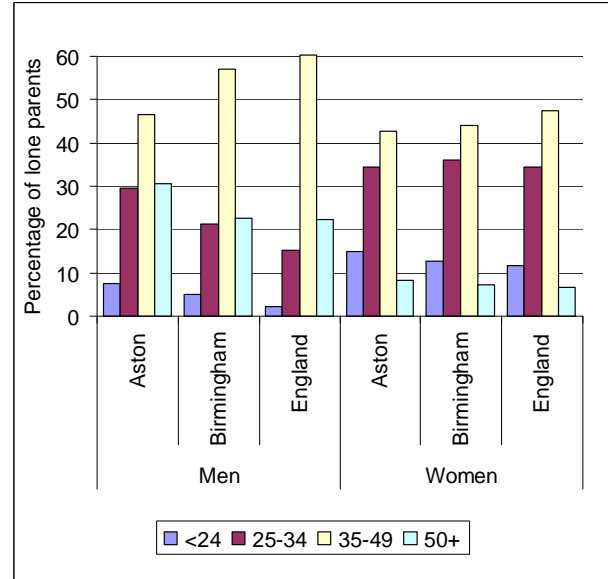


**Figure A10 Lone parents and economic activity, by sex**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Figure A11 Lone parents by Age**



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

**Travel to work**

**Figure A12 Method and distance travelled to work**

People of working age (%)	Aston		Birmingham		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Method</b>						
Work mainly at /from home	8	7	8	6	10	8
Underground, metro, tram	0	0	0	0	3	3
Train	3	2	2	3	5	4
Bus; minibus; coach	23	41	15	26	5	11
Driving a car or van	43	26	58	44	58	51
Passenger in a car or van	7	5	5	7	5	8
On foot	12	17	6	12	7	13
Other	4	2	4	1	7	3
<b>Distance</b>						
Home	8	7	8	6	10	8
0-2km	25	34	12	22	15	25
2-5km	27	35	23	28	18	23
5-20km	24	19	42	39	34	33
20-40km	5	1	4	2	9	6
40+km	5	2	4	2	7	3
Other	5	1	6	1	7	2

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright