

Connecting Women with the Labour Market in Camden

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Foreword

Over the last three years, Camden Council has worked in close partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, and eleven other local authorities to assess the impact of *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets (GELLM)*.

Tackling worklessness, increasing employment rates among disadvantaged groups and tackling inequality are key priorities of Camden's Local Area Agreement. This valuable piece of research will enable us to focus our efforts to address gender-based disadvantage in the labour market.

A key challenge for us is to assist local people into local jobs. There is a strong labour market in Camden, with two jobs potentially available to every resident, however, we know that a significant number of people are excluded from the workforce, particularly women and lone parents, people from BME communities, including refugees, and people on incapacity benefits. It is timely therefore that this detailed analysis of women's employment situations is being published at a time when we have prioritised the need to tackle the barriers which prevent Camden residents from economic activity.

This research will help us to respond to the wider agenda around Welfare Reform and the Gender Duty requirements of the Equality Act 2006. The assessment of the challenges which men and women face in being able to participate in Camden's vibrant local economy will assist us as we focus on outcomes which make a real difference to helping local people access jobs and the benefits which come with work.

I look forward to working with local partners and employers to respond to the challenges outlined in the following pages.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Moira Gibb".

Moira Gibb

Chief Executive

London Borough of Camden

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 Camden and of the circumstances of local women.

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Members of the GELLM Team contributed as follows:

Statistical Analysis	Lisa Buckner; Gerard Poole
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Key findings

This study has explored the situation of unemployed and economically inactive women in the London Borough of Camden, and the scope for developing projects which would assist local women who are not in paid employment in the transition to paid work. Women's circumstances in the Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town wards were examined in depth.

Women's circumstances in the three wards

Although the study found that a significant proportion of economically inactive women want to work, compared with women in England as a whole, in these three wards:

- Working age women were much less likely to be in paid employment, especially in Haverstock
- A much smaller proportion of women worked part-time
- Women workers were less likely to work in low skilled jobs, and more 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, especially for women aged 50+ in Haverstock
- High percentages of working age women were claiming Income Support, especially in Haverstock
- A high proportion of unemployed and economically inactive women had last worked in high skilled jobs
- A high proportion of women were well-qualified
- 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 part-time and flexible jobs
- Low pay
- Lack of job application skills and techniques
- Lack of knowledge of employment opportunities
- Limited Employment Service support
- For some women, a complex mix of barriers
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of affordable childcare

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 recent work experience
- The difficulty in presenting their skills and abilities to employers
- The poor availability of jobs with flexible and school hours
- The negative impact of absences from work on their skills and confidence
- The importance of support, guidance and practical help to aid the transition to work
- The importance of opportunities for well-paid work
- Racial and age discrimination
- The negative financial consequences of moving in and out of paid work

Building successful employment projects for women: recommendations

Successful employment projects will:

- Understand and respond to the personal circumstances of women's lives
- Understand the differences between women
- Target projects on women
- Provide job-focused training
- Make education and training more accessible to women returners
- Provide women with personal support, guidance and practical help
- Offer women 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 support the employment aspirations of economically inactive women
- 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 approach to the changing labour market and economic inactivity
- Allocating local strategic responsibility for raising local levels of employment
- Tackling low pay, in partnership with local employers
- Encouraging employers to offer more flexible working opportunities
- Providing affordable, good quality childcare
- Better access to work-focused ESOL

Introduction

The aim of this study was to explore the potential for establishing projects, based in Camden, 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.

This research was undertaken between July 2005 and March 2006, using a variety of methods: statistical analysis of ward level data; interviews with key people with 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 Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town wards in Camden.

This study is one of six local research studies carried out within the GELLM research programme. Parallel studies on *Connecting women with the labour market* have also been undertaken in: Birmingham; Sandwell, Thurrock and Wakefield. A synthesis report, giving the findings for all five areas, is also available (Grant et al 2006a). The *Gender Profile of Camden's Labour Market* (Buckner et al 2004) provides the district-wide statistical context for this 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, Camden, or the specific wards which are the focus of this study. In England, 1 in every 3 women of working age is outside paid employment. In Camden as a whole, and in Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town, the proportion is higher – by about 10%. Thus in Haverstock, for example, 43% of working age women are outside paid employment.

There are many reasons for this, often to do with women's roles 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 work¹. In addition, 4.4% of women were unemployed, a further 472,000 women. In Camden, 34% of economically inactive women wanted paid work, and with the district's unemployment rate in 2004 at 7%, this means there were 6,000 women in Camden 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.

¹ ONS, Annual Population Survey, December 2004 – March 2005, Crown Copyright.

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 amongst women of working age in the localities 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. 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 and local agencies in order to adjust to individual needs and local circumstances' (Schmid 1998).

Policy Context

Central 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; DWP 2006). 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 overall 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 Camden labour market
- Explored the circumstances and aspirations of working age women in Camden who are not in paid employment
- Gathered information about existing employment projects and labour market developments in Camden

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 Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town in Camden

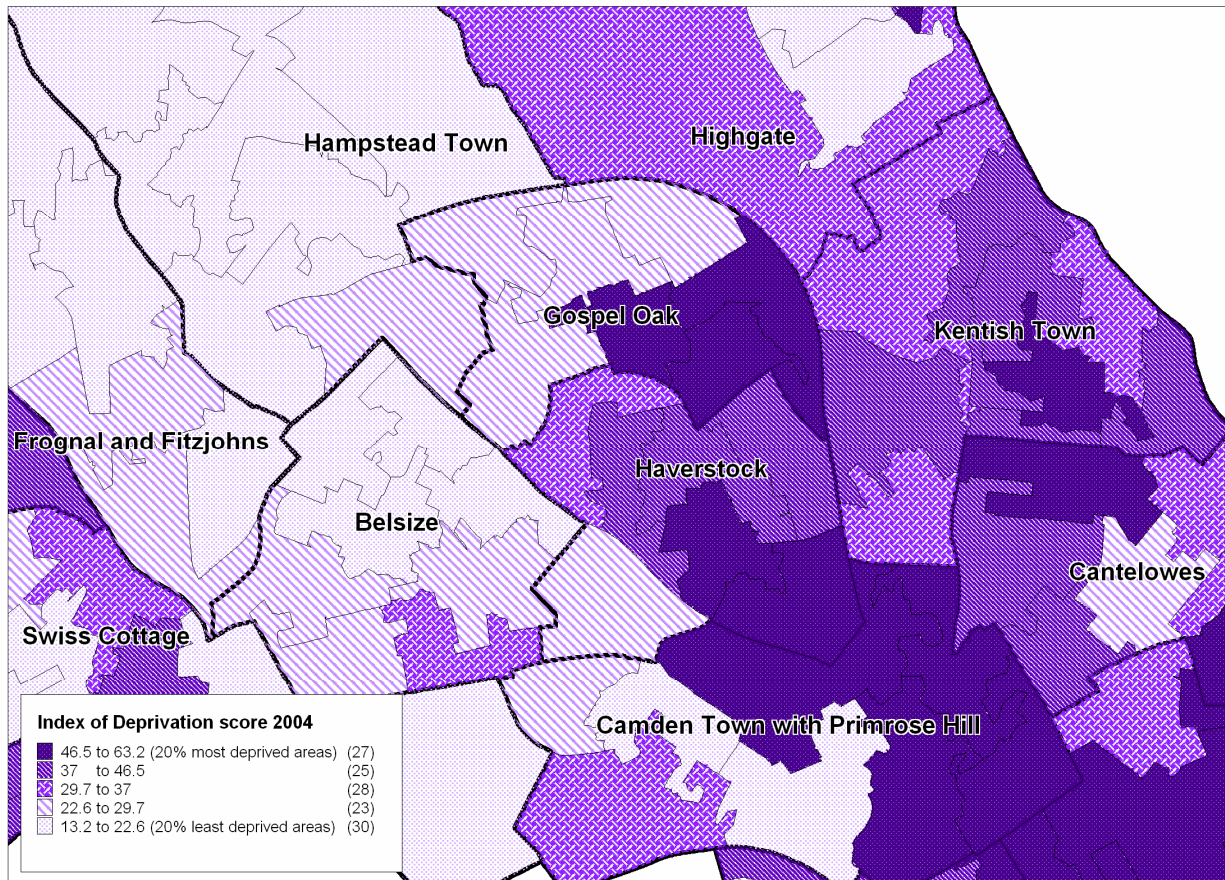
Parts of the wards of Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town include some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Camden and England. They are located in the north and east of Camden, with Kentish Town bordering on Islington (Figure 1).

The population in these wards was relatively young in 2001, compared with Camden and England as a whole. 21% of the population in

Haverstock were aged 0-15, compared with just 16% in Camden and 18% in England. In Kentish Town, 47% of people were aged 25-49 (compared with 45% in Camden and 35% in England), whilst only 9% were aged 65 or over, compared with 11% in Camden and 17% in England.

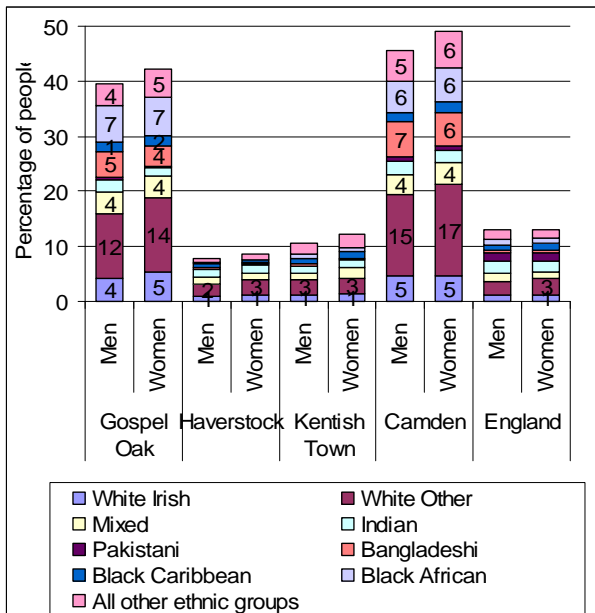
A high proportion of the population in Gospel Oak is from ethnic minority groups (Figure 2). 42% of women living in this ward are from ethnic minority groups, compared with 49% of Camden’s female population. The largest ethnic minority group in the locality is people from ‘White Other’ backgrounds. This category includes Romany Gypsies, Turkish Cypriots, people from the former Yugoslavia, and other people of Eastern European origin, as well as people from other European countries, South Africa, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Other significant ethnic minority groups in this ward are people of Black African and Bangladeshi origin.

Figure 1 Pattern of deprivation: Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town wards 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 2 Ethnicity in Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town wards



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003.

Health indicators for these wards show that a high proportion of women of working age in these wards have a limiting long-term illness (LLTI): 15% in Gospel Oak, 13% in Haverstock and 14% in Kentish Town, compared with 12% of women in Camden and 8% in England.

Women's employment²

Women of working age in the three wards are much less likely than women nationally to be in paid employment. Only 53% of women of working age in Haverstock, 57% in Gospel Oak and 59% in Kentish Town were in employment, compared with 64% in England. Thus employment rates for women in the three wards fell below the 60% employment rate target.

Levels of part-time working amongst women in the wards were low, as is the case in Camden as a whole. Yet many women who want to combine caring with paid employment prefer to work part-time or in jobs with flexible working patterns. In Haverstock, only 9% of women were part-time employees - in Gospel Oak and Kentish Town only 10% - compared with 23% nationally (and a rate of 8% across the whole borough of Camden).

Part-time working amongst lone mothers in these wards was also at a very low level. In Gospel Oak, just 14% of lone mothers worked part-time, and in Haverstock and Kentish Town just 16% (compared with 15% in Camden and 26% in England as a whole).

Compared with the national picture, women who were in work in the three wards were less likely to work in low skilled jobs, and much more likely to be in skilled, technical, professional or managerial jobs. Almost two thirds of women in Kentish Town, and over a half in Gospel Oak and Haverstock, worked in skilled technical, professional or managerial posts. This is about double the national figure of 35% (Figure 3). At the same time, only 5% of women in Kentish Town and Gospel Oak and 6% in Haverstock worked in elementary jobs or operative positions, compared with 15% nationally. It is likely that this situation is related to both the structure of local employment and to high costs of living (including high childcare costs) in the Borough.

Women workers in the three wards were particularly concentrated in certain industrial sectors (Figure 3). Thus over a quarter of women in all three wards worked in finance and real estate jobs, compared with 18% in England as a whole, while only 13% of Gospel Oak and Kentish Town women worked in the wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurant sector, compared with 24% nationally.

Many women workers in the locality worked close to home or at home. 58% of women workers in Haverstock, 54% in Kentish Town and 51% in Gospel Oak, travelled less than 5km to work (compared with 48% nationally), and 13% of women in Gospel Oak worked at home, compared with 8% in England as a whole.

A high proportion of women workers in the locality (and across the borough) walked to work. 19% of women in Gospel Oak, and 18% in Haverstock, walked to work, compared with 13% in England. Many women also used the bus to get to work, 21% in Gospel Oak, 20% in Haverstock, and 19% in Kentish Town compared with 16% in Camden and just 11% in England. As expected, a high proportion of women in the locality took the underground.

² Data in this and subsequent sections is from the 2001 Census Standard Tables unless otherwise stated.

Figure 3 Main occupations and industries of women in employment

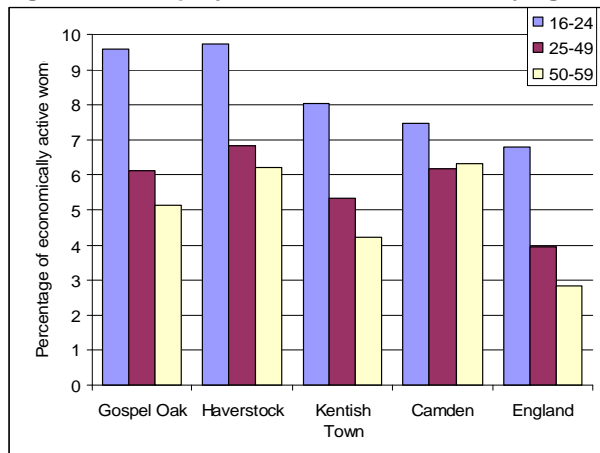
	Gospel Oak	Haverstock	Kentish Town	Camden	England
Occupation					
Managers, senior officials	13	16	15	17	11
Professionals	19	19	21	20	10
Associate professionals & technical occupations	25	23	28	26	14
Process, plant and machine operatives	1	0	0	1	3
Elementary occupations	5	6	5	5	12
Industry					
Manufacturing	7	7	7	6	7
Wholesale, retail, hotels and restaurants	13	16	13	15	24
Health and social work	19	15	15	15	19
Finance and real estate	27	29	29	32	18

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Women's unemployment and economic inactivity

A high percentage of working age women in the three wards were either economically inactive or unemployed in 2001. In Haverstock, 43% of working age women were either economically inactive or unemployed. In Gospel Oak the figure was 39% and in Kentish Town 36%, compared with 40% in Camden, all well above the figure for England as a whole (33%). In these three wards, this represents over 4,500 women who were either unemployed or economically inactive.

Figure 4 Unemployment rates for women by age



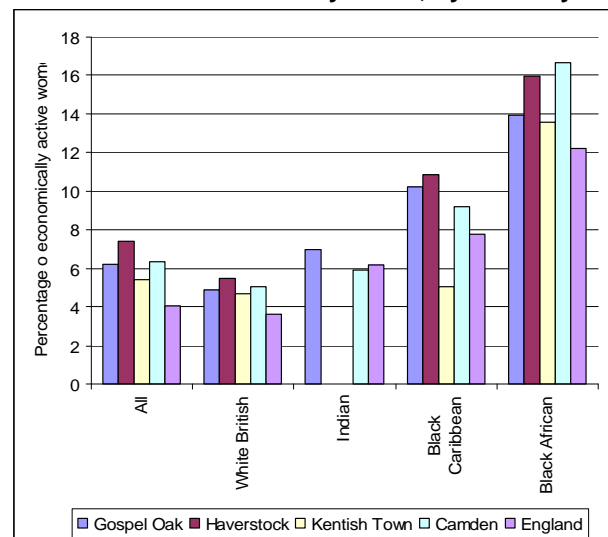
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Levels of unemployment amongst women were high in the three wards across all age groups (Figure 4). The level of unemployment was very high for young women in Gospel Oak and Haverstock at almost 10%, compared with 7% in England (Figure 4). Levels of unemployment amongst older women were also high, especially in Haverstock, where there was an

unemployment rate of 6%, compared with 3% in England.

Unemployment rates varied between different ethnic minority groups, and were particularly high for women in some ethnic minority groups (Figure 5). Most strikingly, in Haverstock, 18% of Black African women and 11% of Black Caribbean women were unemployed.

Figure 5 Unemployed women³ as a proportion of those who are economically active, by ethnicity

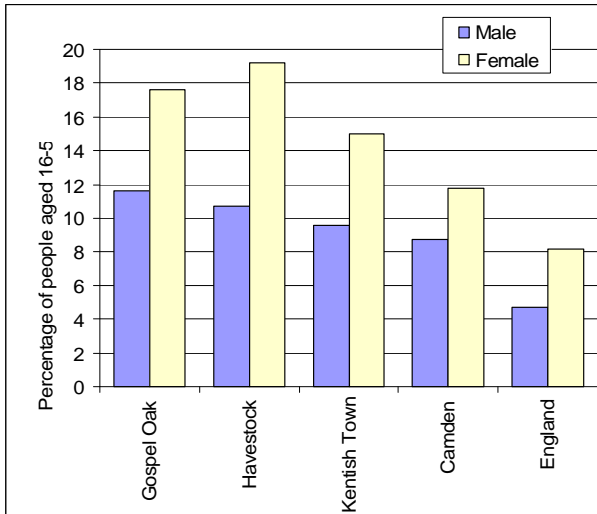


Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

The percentage of working age women claiming Income Support is also higher in the three wards than in England as a whole. Almost 20% of women of working age in Haverstock, 18% in Gospel Oak and 15% in Kentish Town, claim Income Support (Figure 6). This represents almost 2,000 women in the three wards.

³ Women aged 16-74. Data at ward level by ethnicity are only available for this age group.

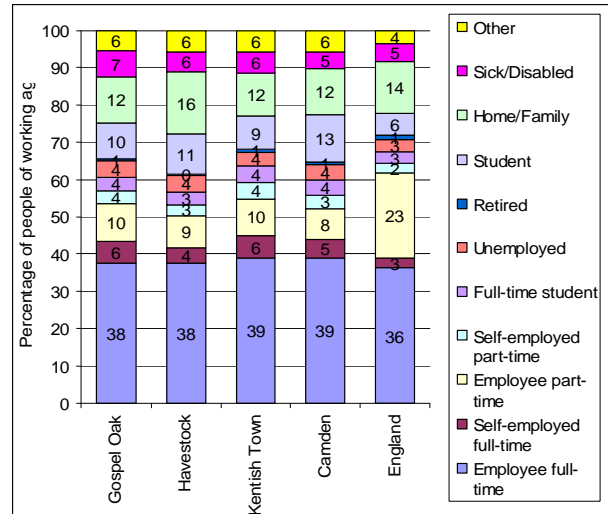
Figure 6 Income Support claimants



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

A high proportion of unemployed or economically inactive women (aged 16-74) in the three wards had last worked in highly skilled jobs. 38% of unemployed and economically inactive women in Haverstock had last worked as managers, senior officials, professionals, associate professionals or in technical jobs. In Gospel Oak the figure was 34% and in Kentish Town 36%, compared with 41% in Camden, and just 21% nationally.

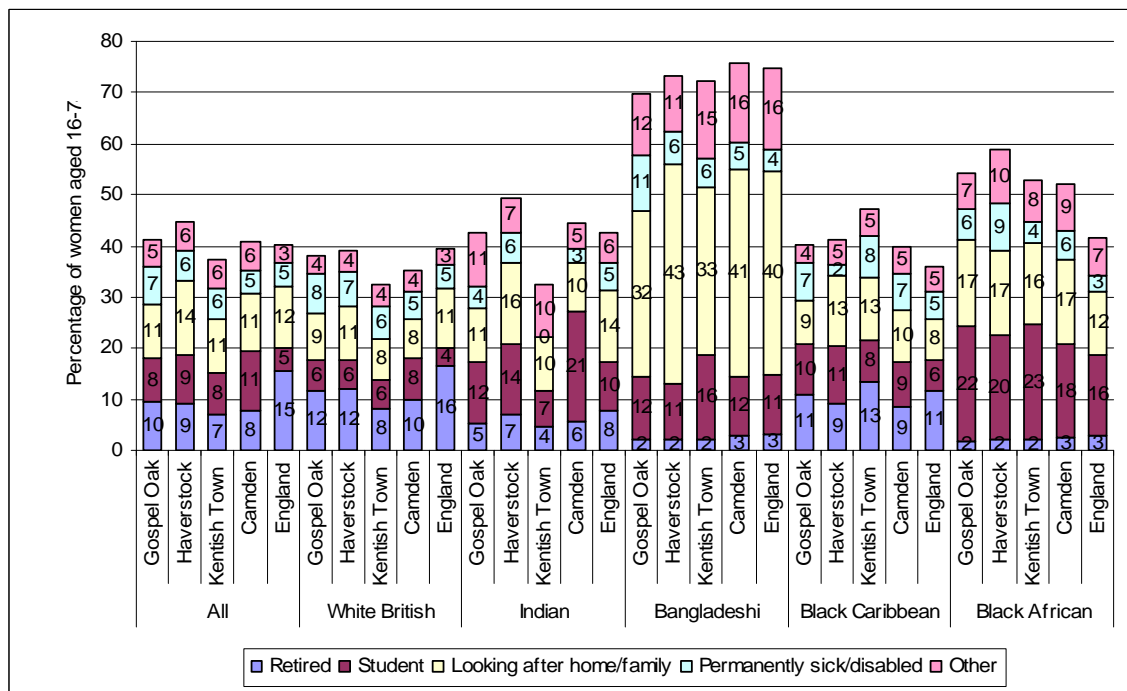
Figure 7 Women's economic activity status



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

With the exception of women in Haverstock, a relatively low percentage of working age women in these wards were looking after their home and family full-time. 16% of working age women in Haverstock were looking after their home and family full-time, compared with just 12% in Gospel Oak, Kentish Town and Camden, and 14% nationally.

Figure 8 Women and economic inactivity, by reason⁴ (selected ethnic groups)



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

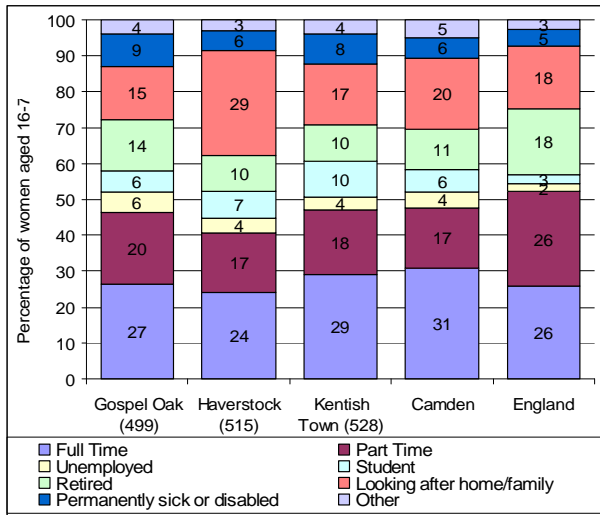
⁴ Women aged 16-74.

The reasons for economic inactivity amongst women varied across ethnic groups, as Figure 8 shows. Amongst local Bangladeshi women, the level of economic inactivity arising from looking after home and family full-time was relatively low (32% in Gospel Oak, and 33% in Kentish Town), compared with the situation of Bangladeshi women nationally (40%). In all the three wards, a relatively high proportion of Black African women were looking after their home or family full-time.

A high proportion of women in these wards are well qualified, to degree level or above. For example, 63% of women aged 25-34 in Kentish Town, 62% in Gospel Oak and 56% in Haverstock have degree-level qualifications, compared with just 29% in England (65% in Camden as a whole). For women aged 16-24 the figures are 29% in Kentish Town, 23% in Gospel Oak and 24% in Haverstock (compared with 29% in Camden and 13% in England).

Women with degree level qualifications were however less likely to be in employment in Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town (all 74%) and in Camden (72%) than nationally (79%). The employment rates for women without qualifications are also very low. Among women with no formal qualifications, only 27% in Haverstock and 32% in both Gospel Oak and Kentish Town were in employment. This compares with a similar figure (31%) in Camden as a whole, but with a very much higher national figure (50%).

Figure 9 Economic activity and provision of unpaid care by women aged 16-74



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Women in Haverstock who have caring responsibilities were less likely to be in paid employment than in Camden or nationally. Only 41% of women with caring responsibilities in this ward were in paid work, compared with 48% in Camden and 52% in England.

Lone mothers in these wards were much more likely to be economically inactive than lone mothers in England. 57% of lone mothers in both Haverstock and Kentish Town wards were economically inactive, compared with 51% in Gospel Oak, 56% in Camden and 46% England.

Changes in the labour market

The three wards focused on here, and parts of the wider Borough of Camden, have experienced significant changes in industrial structure and job opportunities over the past 30 years. These changes have had important outcomes for women.

Buckner et al (2004) showed that in Camden between 1991 and 2002 the overriding feature in terms of employment was one of job growth. Growing numbers of women in Camden have found work in the retail sector, in hotels and restaurants, in banking and finance and in public administration, education and health. A large proportion of the new jobs have been part-time, but in a context in which the overall availability of part-time jobs is relatively scarce.

Yet despite job growth, levels of economic inactivity and unemployment amongst women have remained relatively high in Camden. Clearly many women have found that they cannot engage easily with the newly developing local labour market. The rest of this report is concerned with these women: women who have been made redundant; women who have never worked but who 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.

Between 1991 and 2001, the proportion of women who were economically inactive in Camden increased from 31% to 36% against a decrease across England as a whole (32% to 29%). Over the same period, unemployment decreased from 11% to 6% in Camden and 7% to 4% in England.

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 as the key characteristics of, and barriers facing, local women:

One of the most consistent themes was the high skill levels and high level of employability amongst many local women who are currently outside paid employment.

The skill level of these women is quite high. You'll be surprised at the skill level in Camden. So it's often not a problem of skills, as it might be in other areas.

In previous jobs I worked with much 'harder to reach' people. Here, we've got people who could get jobs, they're reliable, they've got good communication skills, they're well-presented, they want to work and English is not a barrier.

Indeed, one important group of women outside paid employment in Camden were very well-educated women who, after a break from employment, had difficulties in re-engaging with the labour market.

There are all these able women who can't get a job. Women who have done really interesting things before.

There are nevertheless also many women who are currently outside paid employment and looking for work who have low skills levels and a range of other barriers to work.

We've got loads of women coming in looking for work, but 50% will never get jobs with the kinds of employers we work with. 50% are unsuitable and they need some bigger intervention than we can offer to get them a job.

There are a lot of women returners who can't get there because they've got various barriers. They need a lot of one-to-one support to address whatever their barriers are - whether they are benefits issues, financial issues, or skills issues, or language issues.

Amongst the refugees in the borough there's a small proportion who are job-ready, but a lot of

refugees have language issues and other barriers to sort out.

The differences in individual women's circumstances were frequently emphasised, and this is important when considering unemployed and economically inactive women in Camden.

Representatives from organisations argued that one of the key barriers facing many of the skilled and educated women was a lack of confidence.

These are women who are lacking in confidence. They just don't believe in themselves.

But they could also lack knowledge of the employment opportunities available to them in Camden.

The employers think the women aren't there, and the women think the jobs aren't there.

This lack of knowledge about the conditions of the labour market was partly because some groups of women, particularly highly educated women returners, may have no contact with mainstream employment services. One of the voluntary organisations referred to them as 'lost women', women who may never come into contact with support services.

We started talking about 'lost women', women who are lost to the labour market and are not on the radar of other support agencies. If they are not on benefits they are not being accessed by anybody. No-one is reaching them.

Other organisations also identified this as an important group of women who are trying to re-engage with the labour market.

We get a lot of people who want to work, but aren't registered with the Job Centre. We've had a lot of women returners whose partners work.

But when these women approach organisations for help with finding work they were looking for a sophisticated level of advice and guidance which was not always available to them.

If you are a woman returner with lots of skills and experience, you're savvy, although you're lacking in confidence. You are not going to be comfortable with the poor end of the advice spectrum, because you might not take them seriously.

Other groups of women may lack knowledge of the labour market for different reasons. For example, there are particular issues for women who have migrated to the UK, including refugees.

With refugees there's the whole thing about understanding the UK labour market, the processes, and the cultural expectations in interviews.

There were also other issues that needed to be tackled to help women connect with the labour market. Many of those with skills, previous labour market experience and qualifications had undeveloped interview skills, and difficulties in filling out application forms appropriately.

I think they don't get short-listed because they are rubbish at application forms.

A lot of people have tried and failed. I always thought that unemployed people were very bad at filling out application forms and presenting themselves, but I actually think all humans are, but we just happen to be lucky in getting jobs. Most people don't get past the application form stage.

However, many of the difficulties faced by women in Camden in accessing the labour market are to do with the labour market itself and the job opportunities open to them, rather than their own personal qualities.

For lone parents, making the transition from benefits to paid work is extremely difficult, as their earnings have to be high enough to meet the high cost of living and housing in Camden. The kinds of jobs being offered to women through mainstream employment services were often too poorly paid for women to take the risk of giving up benefits.

The women who have been out of work for a long time feel that the only jobs that are offered to them are low paid jobs, particularly in retail.

For women with partners who are in employment, pay levels could be less critical but these women often want part-time jobs or jobs with flexible hours of work to enable them to combine childcare with employment. Again, in Camden, such jobs are hard to find.

Women want to use the skills they've built up before having kids. But they want something local, something that is flexible, something that will fit around the kids, and they often don't want to work full-time.

As is widely recognised, the poor availability of affordable childcare is an important barrier to women in the labour market, and this was also a concern to some local organisations. This was highlighted in our earlier report (Buckner et al

2004), which showed that some areas of Camden have no day nursery provision. Where childcare is available in Camden it is often very expensive, and thus beyond the financial reach of many women.

The other thing is childcare. In Camden, childcare is very expensive, and even if someone gets a job there's nothing left once they've paid for childcare. It doesn't work for Camden. And childcare is about choice. Who we leave our children with is very important to us.

Local women's views and experiences

All of the issues referred to in the interviews with representatives of local organisations also emerged in the discussions with women. However, our discussions with women helped to deepen our understanding of the circumstances of local women and their relationship to the labour market.

The women who took part in the discussions were from a range of ethnic backgrounds, including Black African, Pakistani, White British and 'White Other' backgrounds. 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 aged between 24 and 49: one group of women had limited labour market experience and low levels of qualifications; another group had considerable labour market experience and a high level of qualifications. Some similar themes emerged across the two groups, but there were differences also. We therefore set out here the views of the two groups separately.

Qualified women with labour market experience: aged 24 - 49

Many of the women who took part in this focus group discussion had had paid employment in the past. However, most women lacked recent work experience.

The women were also mostly well-qualified, to degree or A Level, or held a professional qualification.

Most had experienced a period - sometimes quite a long period - outside employment. It was this gap in their employment history which they felt was a key barrier in their efforts to find work.

Now I've been out of work so long, I feel I couldn't possibly go into work when every one else is so fresh and young. And I feel under-qualified now. Even though I've got qualifications, they seem out of date now.

Despite this lack of confidence in relation to the labour market, all of the women wanted to work. Work was important as a source of self esteem and as a means to break down isolation.

I want to work for the esteem, and as a mum it is very isolating if you're not working. You think it's just you, and you feel crap.

I feel my career is ahead of me even though time is marching on.

As much as I love being at home and being a mum, I don't feel I have anything to say to anybody. I have become more and more resentful of others gaining success in an industry I could have contributed to.

They felt strongly that their negative experience of being out of work was not acknowledged or understood.

When men are out of work, everyone knows how emasculating it can be and what it does to them, and what a disaster it is for them. But nobody seems to acknowledge what it does to us.

However, the process of looking for work was difficult, and they lacked confidence in presenting their skills and abilities.

I have been struggling with my CV - because how am I supposed to big myself up on a piece of paper? I don't know what to say.

For me, it's having to look at my CV and having big gaps. How do you explain that to an employer?

I know I am educated. Once I am in a job, I know I could do it. But for me, it's the application. It's putting myself under scrutiny.

Moreover, the qualifications required for the jobs women desired were constantly changing. Having qualifications which were currently recognised

was the key. And women also found their lack of recent work experience a barrier.

I found it the same with the application process. I couldn't even get a waitressing job, because it always says 'experience', and I thought, well, I worked in a restaurant, but I never literally waitressed. So how could I convince them I was qualified? I just choke sometimes.

One further complication for skilled and educated women who have had a gap from the labour market is the fear that employers will question their motives in trying to re-connect with the labour market at a particular level. Women are seeking to slot back in at a level at which they feel comfortable after a break, but employers may question why they wish to work below their potential.

I've been in a position where I've had a break from work and I've had the high flying jobs and to have a long break of a few years and to go back, they are almost saying, 'You're over-qualified', or 'Why do you want to do that now when you've been at this high level before?' So they are very dubious.

Some women were disappointed by the limited availability of jobs with school hours or flexible hours of work. These women argued that school-hours employment would offer them an opportunity to combine work and childcare, a situation that was desirable for some. But the flexibility women were searching for was hard to find.

I saw this opportunity for a job share for women who used to be in film production, it was to team up with another working mother and you would share a job. When I saw it, I thought, 'This is brilliant', but then when I read down, you had to find someone to partner with - and I don't know anybody. They should be teaming people up.

Despite a willingness to readjust to a slightly lower level of job than those typically held in the past, women had clear aspirations in terms of job level and pay. This was a critical issue for educated women in Camden seeking to re-engage with the London labour market. Unless the status and pay level of the job was sufficiently high, the transition to paid work was simply not possible. A high income was very important to most women, and essential for lone parents.

Once you are past 30 and have kids, the money you need to live on is greater than if you are a single, younger person. You have more responsibilities, so you need to go back into a job that will give you that level.

I would have to be earning an awful lot of money to pay the rent, the council tax and buy everything else.

They don't realise that when you get to our age, you need to jump into a job with a good salary. There's no use being £10 or £20 better off than on benefits.

Overall, this group of women felt very disadvantaged in a labour market that appeared to emphasise recent work experience, up to date qualifications and youth.

The Camden labour market acts as magnet for well-qualified women and men from across London, and the country as a whole, and it may be that gaps in labour market experience represent a more significant barrier in the London labour market than elsewhere.

At the same time, the need to earn a very high salary in order to make the transition from benefits to work for those women claiming benefits represents a particularly acute problem in the Camden labour market.

Women with limited labour market experience: aged 24 - 49

Most of the women in this group had limited experience of the labour market, or had no experience of the British labour market. Some of the women had worked in low paid jobs in retail, social care and childcare. Some had had no previous paid employment

These women placed a high value on paid work and qualifications, particularly because of the example it set to children.

I am a single parent, and I really want to do what's best for my son. I want to show my son that you go out there and work hard for it. Even now, I am still upset that I didn't go to University. I did want to do that, for myself - but also for my son. I want my son to get a degree.

Being out of work was largely viewed as a negative experience. Women spoke of their low self esteem, lack of confidence and boredom because of a lack of interaction with other people. Some women were depressed because they were out of work. Being out of work often meant it was hard to make ends meet.

To be honest, I feel terrible about not working. I'm very conscious of it. I really do feel it. It would be nice to provide for myself and my children.

There are a lot of sacrifices you have to make. You have to do without, so the children can have something. You are always in debt, and you can't give the children the things they want. There's a lot of stress, a lot of worry.

The majority of these women are women who want to work.

Despite the desire to work, the process of looking for work was often a fairly depressing experience.

Lots of times you don't even get into that pile. They look at your age and they put your application to one side.

Many of this group of women lacked the kinds of qualifications that would help them in the labour market. But trying to improve qualifications was sometimes expensive and required considerable personal resources and time. Without qualifications, women felt very disadvantaged.

College courses are like gold dust. You go to the Lone Parent Advisor and they give you information on all these courses, but they're £405. Where am I going to find that money? It's not going to happen. There's no way of finding out about free courses. I've looked on the internet.

Because these women often lacked skills and experience, the jobs market they faced was limited. Many of the jobs available to them paid the minimum wage, or even less.

I know people earning £2.75 for shop work, under the minimum wage. You can't earn enough to do a weekly family shop.

Low pay was a major barrier to the labour market. And for women who could only work less than full-time hours, the combination of low pay rates and insufficient support through the tax credit system, made it extremely difficult to enter paid employment.

If you're on your own you've got childcare, you can only work 10 to 2.30 to have time to drop them off and pick them up. What you can earn in that 4 ½ hours isn't enough to pay the rent. So the system is all messed up. People do want to work, but all the tax credit in the world isn't going to pay your rent, unless you're earning maybe £350 a week. It's sad, because I don't want to sit in the house all day.

Some of the women in this group also felt they experienced discrimination in the labour market, because of their race.

They look at the way you dress (indicating her headscarf and dress) and they won't call you after the interview. I've applied for jobs and thought that was the reason they blocked me. Even though I have a health and social care qualification, they didn't get back to me. Maybe it was the language. They didn't say.

You don't get feedback. They won't tell you the truth, will they? They'll say someone is better qualified, or has more experience than you.

They say there's no sexism or racism, but there is. You can't deny it. It's there in the workplace.

Language is a big barrier for Somali women. People are impatient, they don't listen, they don't even try.

Some of the women in this group, particularly the Somali women, felt that the barriers they faced would defeat them in their efforts to find work. Some had taken up voluntary work to fill their time and to make a contribution to their community. But the desire to work was very much alive, and being lived out through their hopes for the next generation. They were looking forward to better opportunities for their daughters.

They will do better than us, because their language is better and because they've grown up here. Their attitude is different. We have ideas from our own country, they grow up here. But the image is still there to other people. But they are younger. They will have a better chance.

We help our boys and girls to get higher grades in their GCSEs and A Levels. Each year their grades get higher and higher. We want them to do the best they can to go to university. That is our aim.

Those who had worked in the past had found the transition to work a very difficult process.

Every time I tried to get off benefits I found myself in financial straits. I always end up being in debt, and going back on benefits.

One woman who got a retail job was forced to give it up because of her son's illness and a lack of a support network. But she was not able to re-establish her right to benefits subsequently for several months, during which time she suffered extreme deprivation.

It made me feel like a failure, because I failed to provide for my son. I tried to go to work and failed.

I got really badly depressed. I felt like I was useless. When I tried to sort out my benefits, they were saying: 'go away', 'come back', 'go away'. I didn't have any money. You try to do it the right way, but I felt very let down. I wanted to kill myself. I was so overwhelmed by everything.

This experience had damaged her desire to work in the future. Any movement in or out of the labour market can create significant financial problems for women in on low incomes.

The problems experienced by this group of women would be significant barriers in any labour market. But they are intensified in the London labour market, where there is a ready supply of people available to fill entry level jobs from across the city and beyond.

At the same time, the investment necessary to improve women's language skills and broader skills to an appropriate level, and to provide work experience in the British labour market, has not been made, although it would be welcomed by women within this group. Many can only access generic ESOL, and other short courses, opportunities which do not always equip them adequately for specific jobs and for entry to paid employment.

It is a real testimony to their desire to work that they mostly persist in their search for paid employment, despite these barriers.

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.

I went to the Job Centre. I said I wanted to work in the hours my son is at school. I said I didn't want to be on benefits for the rest of my life. They told me to go and look at the machine.

Women also felt that mainstream employment services were failing to recognise their needs, their aspirations and their skills. Women were looking for employment services which responded to them as individuals, and listened to them:

Recently I was called up by the Job Centre - and I was asked, was I looking for work - and the woman couldn't give a damn. I said, 'Actually, I am starting this course', but she wasn't listening.

There was also a view that the range of jobs offered by mainstream services was very limited, and not at all what women were searching for.

The Job Centre is absolutely useless if you want anything more than an NVQ in hairdressing or childcare. They don't have any other jobs. All these incentives that they say they are offering, free training, free childcare, it's only if you want to do one of their courses.

It's all hairdressing, childcare – it's for people without qualifications.

The tag of 'single parent' that was attached to some was also criticised as a concept that bore no relationship to their circumstances.

They are not looking at us as individuals. Not at all. You've got to fit into one of their groups. I asked for help with my training, but because it doesn't fit into one of their categories, they couldn't help me.

They assume that if you are a single parent you just went out and got pregnant by some boy, haven't finished school and never wanted to work.

There's a huge gap between who we are and the way people on the other side are seeing us.

Others argued that because they were skilled and qualified, services often overlooked their need for support in re-engaging with the labour market.

They are missing us out. They assume everyone in the middle class is sorted. That doesn't make any sense. The system seems to reflect these assumptions. There isn't a box for educated women.

They are missing this whole pool of women like us with qualifications and experience.

The women wanted an employment service based on the range of issues facing them. They wanted support founded on an understanding of them as women in the labour market, or as women bringing up children alone. This meant that they needed practical help and guidance on how to re-enter the labour market.

You become so isolated. But for someone to look at your skills and give you ideas of the direction you could go was really helpful.

It's helpful to get help with your CV and some career counselling.

Greater financial support for re-retraining would also be welcomed. Women also wanted advice in an environment in which they feel comfortable and listened to.

I've just done a career counselling course, with other women. It was fantastic because not only was it really good, but it was also finding that I hadn't done this to myself, and that I wasn't alone in feeling completely useless. It brought me to realise that I did have something that I could use again.

Many local women who are outside paid work want to work, and they 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 the transition to paid work is a process requiring considerable support, guidance and practical help. It can also be very precarious financially. Women would welcome greater support to help them update and extend their labour market skills, experience and qualifications and boost their confidence. Some of the employment services used by local women have not fully addressed their needs in the labour market and their circumstances as individuals.

Low pay is a significant barrier to the labour market and the perceived lack of jobs with flexible working hours affects local women's opportunities to secure employment.

Local employment projects

There are a range of employment and training projects and programmes in Camden. In the recent period, the London Borough of Camden has undertaken a review of employment and training providers in the borough, and is working with other organisations in a partnership to develop an *Employment and Training Strategy* for the period 2006 to 2010.

This emerging strategy identifies a range of challenges facing the borough in relation to the labour market, including: high levels of economic inactivity; high levels of unemployment; the lack of 'employability' skills amongst a proportion of the Camden population; the significant number of young people not in employment, education or

training; and the relative under-development of vocational and work-based training and apprenticeship schemes.

Our research confirms the importance of many of these key issues in Camden. But our study has also enabled us to focus on, and highlight, the significance of gender in any examination and policy response to unemployment and economic inactivity. Women's experiences of being outside paid employment are distinct and specific, and linked to their wider position as women in the Camden economy. Moreover, as in overall London economy, how we address the position of women in the economy will be a key to future prosperity (GLA 2005). It is with this perspective in mind that we consider some of the important and critical themes in relation to connecting women with the labour market raised in our discussion with local organisations.

One important area of concern related to organisational issues for service providers. To be successful, organisations providing training and job brokerage needed clarity in terms of their client group. At one end of the spectrum are people who are almost 'job ready', whilst at the other end are people who may need several years of help and support to engage with the labour market. Organisations may need to decide where to place their focus in terms of a client group, and to tailor their services accordingly. This focus needs to be clearly understood and communicated publicly; it is about being clear about different people's distance from the labour market. It also involves being honest with people who approach an organisation about their prospects in the labour market. Organisations also need well-qualified staff. Advice, guidance and training need to be of a high quality for success. There was considerable criticism of organisations who employ guidance staff on low salaries and who are unable to deliver a quality service to clients.

The biggest thing is, all the people who deal with clients are the poorest paid in the organisation, and that doesn't work. You can't pay people £14,000 to deal with really vulnerable people. If the advice is going to be really good quality advice, the people delivering it need to be well paid, or you won't get that quality.

A good quality service also needs resources, and investment in project and programme managers. The importance of this was not always acknowledged by funding agencies, which rarely provided core funding to ensure appropriate

continuity and investment in organisational and management skills.

You need good staff members to do the training and get people into jobs, but it also takes a lot of management time getting the training right for the employers.

The importance of good links with employers was emphasised as a key to success in engaging women outside employment with the labour market.

It's about signing up HR managers and then individual departmental or line managers, because managers control their own recruitment

The *Camden PCT Job Shop*, situated in Kentish Town, is an excellent example of a provider with a close link with employers – in this case the local NHS Trusts - and with managers within the NHS. The Job Shop is able to link local people with job vacancies in the NHS. But it also offers other services to clients who are less than job ready, for example helping them to understand what is needed in an application form, and preparing people to undertake interviews.

People can walk in here and speak to a jobs advisor about work, get matched to a job vacancy, and get support to apply for job.

The NHS is leading the way in making links with local, economically inactive people and offering employment services to local people outside paid employment; this is a model that other public sector organisations could fruitfully adopt. The visibility of the *Job Shop*, situated as it is on the High Street, makes this an extremely accessible way of finding out about jobs. It can also be accessed by a client group much wider than those who are registered as unemployed, but which includes many who nevertheless want to work. Many of the clients using this service are economically inactive women.

There was some criticism that the training courses available lacked a clear focus on contemporary labour market and employer needs. Many organisations offered short courses in a variety of skills, but these did not always prepare people to apply for specific jobs or for expanding areas of employment.

The importance of linking training courses to the requirements of real job vacancies, the approach often adopted by the *Communities into Training and Employment project*, was a further example of ensuring successful transitions into work.

Whilst there was a wide range of training available locally, it can become 'training for training's sake'. People can take one course after another, without ever taking the step into work and without gaining job specific skills and knowledge.

It's important to focus things on employment and jobs, and not to run training for the sake of it. There's a lot of training out there, and people go from training course to training course.

Job vacancy-related training required excellent links with employers, and a thorough knowledge of job requirements. Even relatively short courses of this nature, of 4 or 5 weeks, can lead to very successful outcomes. Again, many of the clients who use this service are economically inactive women.

Sector-specific training can also be helpful. Here again, training providers need excellent knowledge to deliver appropriate training.

The importance of linking people to 'good jobs', as opposed to 'any job', was emphasised. In the context of London, this was particularly important.

The Jobs that go through the Job Centre tend to be crappy security jobs, retail jobs that are here today and gone tomorrow, minimum wage, 40 hour week jobs - and you never see your kids. These are not the jobs women want. The jobs might be entry level jobs, but they need to be jobs where people can progress.

It was unrealistic to expect people to make the transition from benefits to work unless a good level of income was guaranteed.

Lots of people would like to work, but they see it as such a major risk. And if you put them into a crap job, it just enhances it.

This was important in a broader sense. The women we have considered in this study want jobs which offer opportunities for progression.

There are some clear messages emerging from the organisations and women consulted in this research in terms of what helps women engage with, or re-engage with, the labour market. Most importantly, employment services and training programmes need to understand the specific circumstances faced by women. For example, the category 'lone parent' does not capture the variety of women's circumstances, needs, abilities and ambitions. And each individual woman seeking work has a unique history which must be

understood. There was also concern that the *New Deal for Lone Parents* was now seen as the programme for women. The view that '*the war is won or lost on how well the New Deal for Lone Parents works*' does not appreciate the diversity in the female population of economically inactive and unemployed women.

It is also important to recognise that women tend to lose confidence in their abilities and skills after an absence from the labour market. Providers need to appreciate that many women in this situation undersell and undervalue themselves.

We also need to underscore that many women want local jobs. There are good reasons for this. Often, women want to be near to their children. Local jobs are accessible and convenient and women may be more likely to sustain their employment in these circumstances.

The one really good advert for 'local' is that people stay, because they feel more of a link, and it's more convenient.

This is particularly important in London, where travel times, even for short distances, can be lengthy.

Training and employment services which had a lot of contact with women clients stressed the importance of working with employers and of engaging them in discussion about flexible working. Some local employers already offer flexible working hours, part-time jobs, school hours jobs and term-time working. These are working patterns that many women are seeking in the labour market at particular points in their lives. There is considerable work to be done, however, in persuading more employers to offer these flexible working arrangements on a routine basis, and at higher levels (an issue explored in greater depth in another of the GELLM studies [Grant et al 2006b]). Training and employment service providers are well-placed to develop this dialogue with employers, and thus help to address the shortage of part-time work in Camden.

We can make jobs more accessible by educating managers who can't recruit to jobs because they advertise them as 35 hours. If they advertised them as part-time they'd get much higher quality candidates. It's so obvious.

It was also important in the dialogue with employers to persuade them of the importance of taking a risk and employing people who are

different from the kinds of people they normally employ.

What we need to do is persuade an employer not to take the normal people, but to take unusual people, stretch their criteria, change their ways of working.

Employers will look for a business case if they are to be persuaded to recruit in new and different ways. There should be considerable scope to develop this approach as the new public sector duty, being introduced in 2007 under the *Equality Act 2006*, comes into effect. Public bodies will need to demonstrate that they are promoting gender equality in their employment policies, as well as in the services they provide, and there may also be opportunities to influence employers in the private sector through the commissioning and procurement process.

In our research, it was pointed out that women are often unaware of the training and employment services available to them. The importance of 'reaching out' to women was therefore emphasised. The organisation *Women Like Us* based in Camden, provides an excellent example of the success that flows from this approach. *Women Like Us* have developed their job brokerage and support services by making contact with women in local schools. This has brought them into contact with a large group of women who had no previous contact with employment services, and who lacked information about local job opportunities.

This organisation also demonstrates the importance of ensuring that courses raise women's confidence high enough for them to enter work. Sometimes confidence was at a very low level, and much intensive work was needed for them to recognise their own potential. *Women Like Us*, also offers one-to-one career counselling and extensive advice and guidance to women about engaging with the labour market. The service they offer also includes group sessions in which women can share experiences and rebuild their confidence.

Our study found some criticism of mainstream employment service provision as too heavily 'programme driven', with a focus on limited and rigid 'categories' of people. This had led to the most funding being focused on a narrow range of people, neglecting the large numbers of economically inactive women who are not claiming benefits.

Funding drives you towards the women who are saturated with services they don't want. It's saying, we must deal with the most excluded women - but I think exclusion is on a scale.

It was felt that a 'programme-driven' approach also made it difficult for the complexity of the lives and circumstances of those included within a target category to be appreciated. The same generic service was delivered, regardless of the unique circumstances of the person.

Big organisations doing this kind of work - they are chasing the money. They don't understand who the women are. Some organisations don't talk to people.

As a consequence, these programmes were less successful than they might be.

There was, then, a range of views about the detailed approach to employment projects. But there were also concerns about the wider context in which employment projects developed.

Some important issues were raised about the strategic overview of employment and training service provision. The development of *Camden Working* was broadly welcomed as an important step in linking local provision.

Before, there were lots of people doing their own thing. It wasn't strategic, it wasn't co-ordinated.

However, concern was expressed that there was still considerable fragmentation of provision, with no clear strategy as to how the various providers were collectively tackling the issue of economic inactivity and unemployment. There was a case for allocating responsibility for this, and a potential role for the local authority.

We need someone occupying a sophisticated role - someone with a brief to manage economically inactive people, to think about the steps they need to access employment. You need somebody to make it happen and take the holistic view. It's about having an overview, identifying gaps, joining up.

Service providers were frequently competing with each other for clients in an effort to meet their targets of 'people into jobs'. This could lead to organisations 'holding on' to clients who might be placed in employment by another organisation, clearly detrimental to the interests of the client.

We are all set up to compete with each other - and so if I refer somebody to you, and you get them a job, that means I don't get a job output, and that

can jeopardise my funding. People are reluctant to let a person get a job somewhere else, because that means they don't achieve their targets and they lose their own job.

It was suggested that this could be overcome through the strategic overview, alongside an understanding of these problems by funders. This might involve reviewing existing projects and approaches, allocating responsibility for addressing unemployment and economic inactivity in the locality, and considering whether some re-focusing of future funding, is called for.

Finally, we have found that some of the key principles associated with good Intermediate Labour Market (ILM)-type projects, in particular personal support and guidance, and training linked to real job vacancies, and to jobs with progression opportunities, would be beneficial to unemployed and economically inactive women. But the idea of establishing ILM projects, offering 6 months or more of paid work experience, in para-professional occupations, was not widely supported. Service providers were concerned about the high cost of such projects, and the limited funding sources available. They also argued that the particular nature of the Camden labour market, and the ready supply of labour available, made it unlikely that employers would commit resources to such projects.

They can draw on a much wider supply of labour, so why bother with someone who isn't very skilled and needs a lot of support. There's no real problem of getting people into these jobs at the moment.

They also noted that while many local women were interested in para-professional jobs, such as teaching assistant or health care assistant posts, which could be stepping stones to professional positions, most did not require a long period of work experience to prepare them for job entry. These women already possessed sufficient skills and knowledge to make this transition, and they needed short, job-focused courses and personal support to prepare them for job entry. Other, less skilled, women interested in this kind of work would however require much longer term support and training to reach the standard required. In addition, women's ambitions in the labour market were wider ranging. Some women were accessing support and studying for qualifications which would enable them to access the higher paid jobs they were seeking.

Building successful employment projects: recommendations

This research 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. We have also 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.

The key starting point is to accept that many women 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, practical help and guidance.

We know from our research in other localities that 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 takes childcare costs beyond their reach, even if they qualify for Childcare Tax Credit. And good quality part-time jobs with school hours are very hard to find in Camden.

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

Some existing projects are helping local women to access employment, but more could 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.

Providing job-focused training

Although many women outside paid employment engage with training courses offered in their communities, often these courses do not equip women with the skills essential for specific jobs.

Job-focused training, developed in collaboration with employers, and geared to specific job vacancies, can prepare women for successful job interviews.

Making education and training accessible

Women who are trying to find work often lack either up-to-date qualifications or sufficient qualifications. Yet women returners' access to free courses leading to qualifications appears to be limited. Women also lack knowledge about the courses open to them.

Women returners need financial support to access education leading to qualifications. There also needs to be a well-signposted and single point of access where women can receive comprehensive information on course provision.

Providing support, guidance and practical help

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 and practical help 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 different 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 first aid. 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 enable training to be linked not only to job requirements in the current labour market, but also to those jobs which will develop in the future labour market. 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 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.

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

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, with a particular emphasis on the public sector, willing to liaise with training providers and willing to offer suitable local women new opportunities for job interviews.

The partnership approach could be developed with the help of a project co-ordinator who would also ensure trainees receive 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

Some key local stakeholders emphasised the vital importance of a strategic overview and of allocating responsibility for raising local employment levels and ensuring local people are equipped with the skills and knowledge to engage with the changing labour market.

At present there are a range of employment projects, alongside statutory employment services for people claiming working age benefits. Regardless of the effectiveness of these projects and services, it is important that they are located within a wider employment strategy which seeks to elevate employment levels and engage all working age people locally, including those women who are not claiming benefits who want to work. There is a view that local authorities could assume this strategic responsibility, within the context of a wider partnership.

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 2005b) 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.

Extending flexible working opportunities

The availability of part-time and flexible work is limited in Camden. As long as this situation persists, many women will find it difficult to engage with the labour market.

The local authority could work with its employer partners to emphasise the importance of increasing the availability of flexible working for the prosperity of the local economy and of local people.

Review childcare provision

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.

Raising young women's aspirations and opportunities

Young women sometimes set themselves low horizons in the labour market, and they can lack knowledge of the full range of jobs that might be open to them. Some women complain that employment services are not listening when they express their real choices in the labour market. Because of this they are often drawn into, or forced into, some of the lowest paid jobs in the labour market, as these are jobs typically held by women.

Schools should seek to extend girls' labour market horizons, and encourage girls to pursue careers in a much wider range of jobs. Employment services should ensure that they listen to women's choices.

Better access to work-focused ESOL

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 can be 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.

The local authority could review the scope and frequency of language courses, and encourage greater provision of job-focused ESOL courses. It is also important to ensure a single and accessible point where women and training providers can access information about all ESOL courses in the Borough.

Conclusions

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, even when they hold qualifications or have work experience.

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 job-focused 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.

Women are searching for a range of jobs. Some of the women expressed an interest in jobs such as classroom assistants, but others wanted higher paid work and more flexible working patterns. 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 a wider local employment strategy, aimed at raising levels of skill and employment in the local labour market.

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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/research/csi
- 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/research/csi. 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 Professor 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; both groups of women were aged 25 - 49

7 women participated in the first group. Their characteristics were as follows:

- 2 were aged 25 - 30; 1 was aged 35- 40; 4 were aged 40+
- 6 of the women had dependent children, with family size ranging from: 1 family with 5 children; 1 family with 4 children; 1 family with 2 children; and 2 families with 1 child
- 5 of the women described themselves as of African origin, 1 as White British, and 1 as African Caribbean
- 3 of the women had worked in the past
- 4 were currently looking for work
- 4 of the women were educated to GCSE level

7 women participated in the second group. Their characteristics were as follows:

- 1 was aged 31 – 35; 6 were aged 36 -39
- 7 of the women had dependent children, with family size ranging from: 1 family with 4 children; 1 family with 3 children; 1 family with 2 children; and 4 families with 1 child
- 2 of the women described themselves as of African origin, 2 as White British; 1 as 'White Other'; 1 as Pakistani; 1 did not indicate ethnic origin
- All 7 of the women had worked in the past
- All 7 women were looking for work
- All 7 women had qualifications: 6 of the women had a Degree, 1 was educated to 'A' Level

Appendix A3 Ward profile for Gospel Oak, Haverstock and Kentish Town in Camden

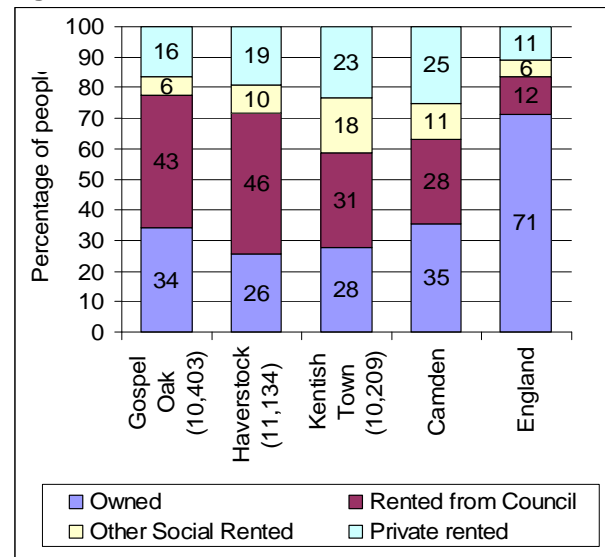
General information

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

	Gospel Oak	Haverstock	Kentish Town	Camden	England
All males (numbers)	4,937	5,266	5,525	95,398	23,922,144
0-15	21	23	20	17	19
16-24	12	12	12	13	13
25-49	44	42	47	46	36
50-64	14	12	13	13	18
65-74	6	6	5	6	8
75+	4	4	3	4	6
All females (numbers)	5,521	5,951	5,936	102,624	25,216,687
0-15	18	19	18	16	18
16-24	12	13	12	15	12
25-49	42	43	47	44	35
50-64	18	19	18	16	17
65-74	7	6	5	6	9
75+	7	6	4	6	9

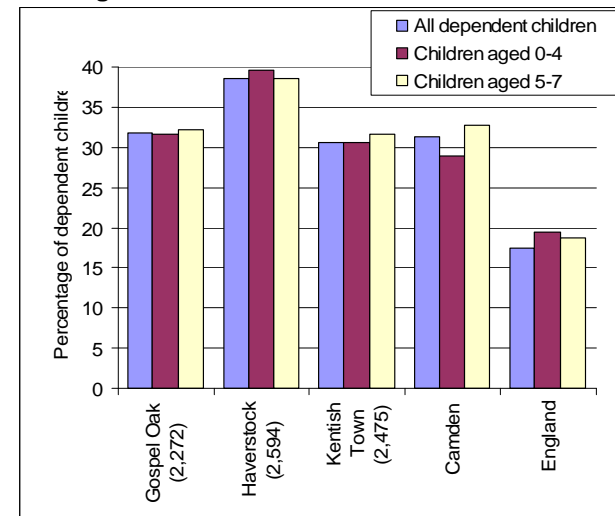
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure A2 Tenure



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

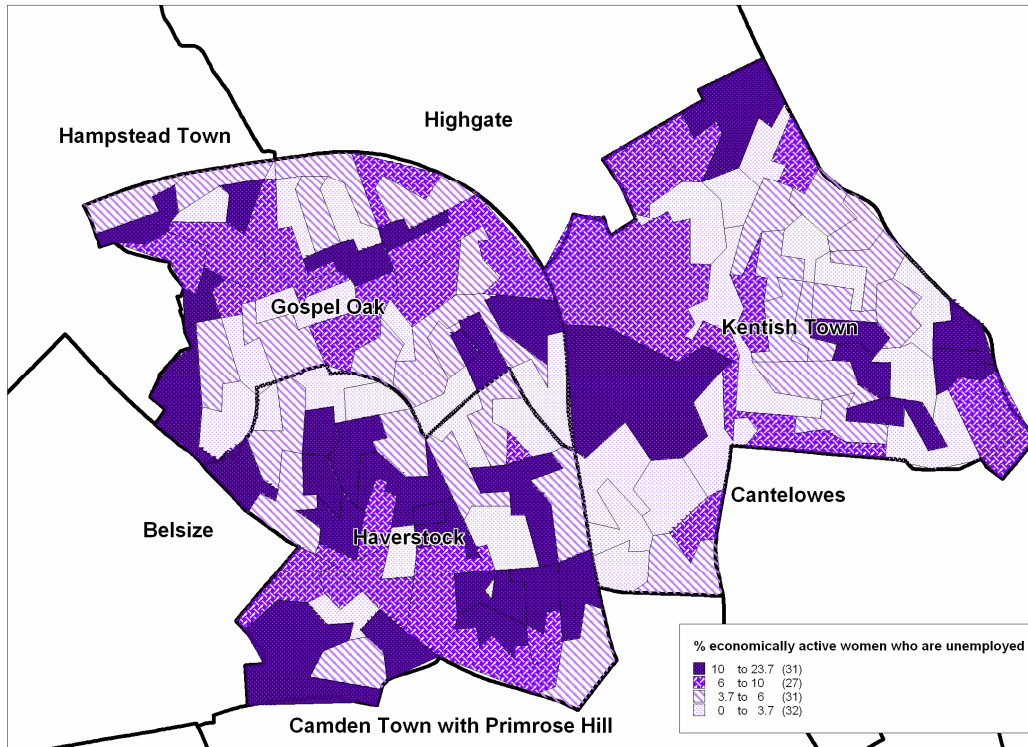
Economic inactivity and unemployment

Figure A4 Economic inactivity and unemployment in the wards

	Gospel Oak		Haverstock		Kentish Town		Camden		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Working age population (16-64/59)										
Employment rate										
Proportion of WA	62	57	62	53	67	59	65	56	74	64
Proportion of EA	85	88	85	87	86	88	87	87	91	91
Unemployment rate										
Proportion of WA	8	4	8	4	7	4	7	4	5	3
Proportion of EA	11	6	12	7	9	6	9	6	6	4
Economic inactivity rate										
Proportion of WA	27	35	27	39	22	33	25	36	18	29
Economic inactivity by reason										
Proportion of WA										
Retired	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	3	1
Student	9	10	9	11	8	9	11	13	5	6
Looking after home/ family	1	12	2	16	1	12	1	12	1	14
Permanently sick/ disabled	10	7	9	6	7	6	7	5	6	5
Other	5	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	3	4
Economic inactivity by reason										
Proportion of economically inactive										
Retired	7	2	5	1	6	3	6	2	16	5
Student	35	27	35	28	35	27	44	36	29	19
Looking after home/ family	5	35	6	42	5	35	4	34	6	48
Permanently sick/ disabled	36	20	33	14	33	18	27	12	33	16
Other	17	16	21	15	22	17	19	16	16	12
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

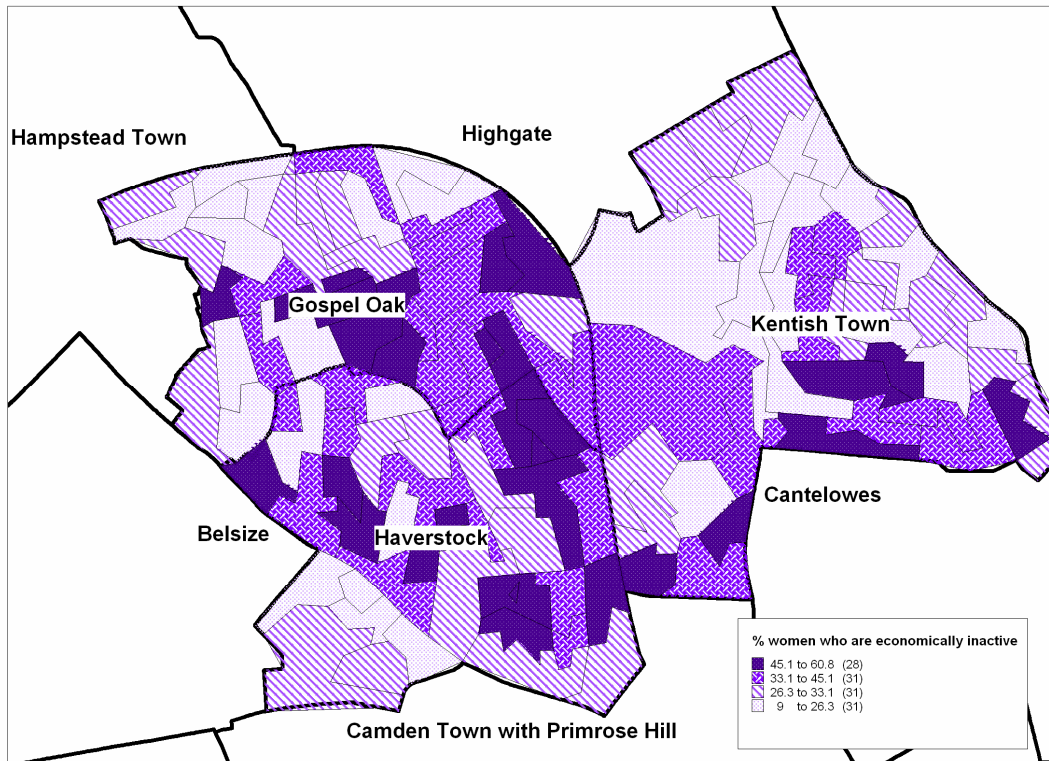
Source: 2001 Census Standard Statistics, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure A5 Percentage of women of working age who were unemployed



Source: 2001 Census Standard Theme Tables, Crown Copyright 2003. 2001 Census Output Area boundaries, Crown Copyright 2003.

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.

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

Unemployment rate	Gospel Oak		Haverstock		Kentish Town		Camden		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>Proportion of people aged 16-74</i>										
All	7	4	8	4	7	3	6	4	4	2
White British	7	3	7	3	5	3	6	3	4	2
Indian	0	4	4	0	6	9	3	3	5	4
Bangladeshi	7	6	5	6	10	0	10	3	10	4
Black Caribbean	6	6	11	6	9	3	11	6	10	5
Black African	19	6	13	7	15	6	12	8	10	7
<i>Proportion of economically active people aged 16-74</i>										
All	11	6	11	7	9	5	9	6	6	4
White British	9	5	10	6	7	5	7	5	5	4
Indian	0	7	6	0	7	13	5	6	6	6
Bangladeshi	11	6	9	21	14	0	17	14	16	17
Black Caribbean	7	6	17	11	14	5	17	9	15	8
Black African	30	6	22	16	24	14	20	17	14	12

Source: 2001 Census Standard Statistics, Crown Copyright 2003

Note ** Missing values are due to the small size of the Bangladeshi population in Soho and Victoria

Figure A8 Qualifications by age and employment

	Gospel Oak		Haverstock		Kentish Town		Camden		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<i>People with no qualifications (%)</i>										
16-24	16	15	20	16	15	17	13	11	19	16
25-34	12	11	14	12	12	12	10	11	17	14
35-49	26	25	30	29	26	24	22	21	29	26
50-64/59	40	36	48	46	47	40	36	32	56	52
<i>People of working age in employment (%)</i>										
No qualifications	46	32	43	27	43	32	45	31	65	50
Lower level	53	51	57	46	56	55	53	45	76	66
Higher level	78	74	77	74	79	74	80	72	85	79

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

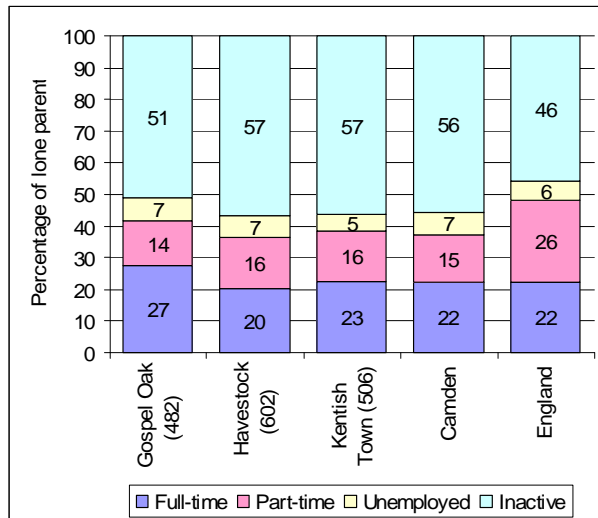
Note: Lower level qualifications were equivalent to 'A' level and below and higher level qualifications were equivalent to first degree and above

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

	Gospel Oak	Haverstock	Kentish Town	Camden	England
Occupation					
Managers, senior officials	7	9	7	9	7
Professionals	11	11	9	14	6
Associate professionals & technical occupations	17	18	20	18	9
Process, plant and machine operatives	1	1	1	1	5
Elementary occupations	13	13	15	13	21
Industry					
Manufacturing	4	6	8	6	11
Health and social work	16	15	10	12	16
Finance and real estate	21	21	21	24	15

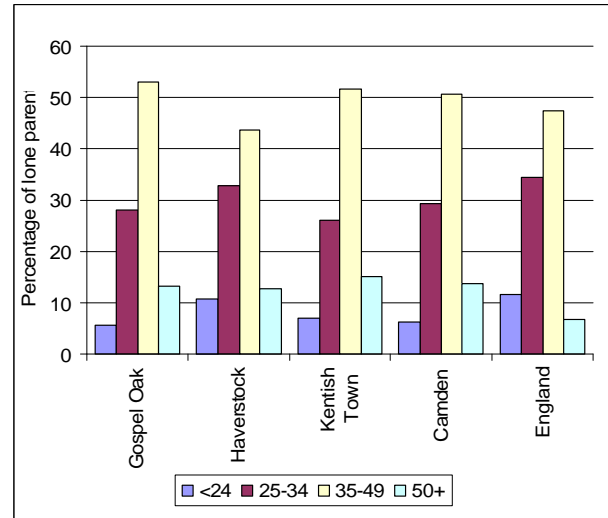
Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure A10 Female lone parents and economic activity



Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003

Figure A11 Female 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 (%)	Gospel Oak		Havestock		Kentish Town		Camden		England	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Method										
Work mainly at /from home	11	13	10	9	10	11	11	11	10	8
Underground, metro, tram	26	23	30	33	29	32	32	32	3	3
Train	6	5	6	4	7	6	6	5	5	4
Bus; minibus; coach	14	21	12	20	12	19	9	16	5	11
Driving a car or van	22	13	19	10	17	12	18	12	58	51
Passenger in a car or van	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	8
On foot	9	19	12	18	11	14	14	18	7	13
Other	11	4	10	5	12	6	9	4	7	3
Distance										
Home	11	13	10	9	10	11	11	11	10	8
0-2km	14	24	15	23	13	17	17	22	15	25
2-5km	24	27	31	35	36	37	26	28	18	23
5-20km	37	29	31	27	28	27	35	32	34	33
20-40km	3	2	3	1	2	1	2	2	9	6
40+km	2	2	3	1	2	2	2	2	7	3
Other	9	4	8	4	9	5	7	4	7	2

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright