

# Women's Career Development in the Local Authority Sector Synthesis Report

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## Preface

Between 2003 and 2006, the *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets (GELLM) Programme*<sup>1</sup> explored an extensive range of factors affecting the labour market situation of women in 11 local labour markets in England.

This unique and extensive programme of research, perhaps the most extensive study and analysis ever undertaken of the local labour market situation of women in England, was developed in a close and active partnership with 11 local authorities, and with support, guidance and additional investment from two national agencies, the *Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC)* and the *Trade Union Congress (TUC)*. Working closely with its 13 external partners, the GELLM project team, comprising an experienced and diverse team of social scientists (with expertise in sociology, social policy, urban and regional studies, social statistics, and gender studies) produced 12 *Gender Profiles of Local Labour Markets* (Buckner et al 2004, 2005), each presenting a comprehensive picture of gender-disaggregated local labour market statistics<sup>2</sup>. The team then went on to develop, in 2004-5, six new *Local Research Studies*, each carried out in parallel fashion in up to six of the local labour markets which had been profiled, and designed and implemented in close collaboration with local policy-makers. The evidence from these studies was reported at the local level in 31 *Locality Reports* published (in spring 2006) with the support of the local authorities concerned, and disseminated in each of the English regions in a series of successful local events<sup>3</sup>.

Carrying out this research in partnership with a wide range of local authorities over a three year period was important in a number of ways:

**First**, it enabled us to focus our studies on topics which were of interest not only as subjects for academic study, but also as issues of major policy relevance and current concern to our partners. We debated the topics we should explore (and the precise focus of each study) with each of our partners in meetings of the *GELLM Regional Project Groups* (established by each local authority partner to support the project at local level), in consultations with the *GELLM National Advisory Group* (which comprised all our local and national partners, and also had the benefit of three external academic advisers with relevant expertise<sup>4</sup>), and within the research team. This led to the decision to develop 6 multi-method *Local Research Studies*, with each local authority partner able to participate in up to three of the studies.

**Second**, it enabled us to design the studies so that they would draw on local intelligence and expertise about the issues involved. This was particularly important in those studies where there was thought to be existing research or a body of knowledge about our topic which had not previously been drawn together into a single report (and most notably in our study of ethnic minority women and their local labour markets).

**Third**, our partnerships made the process of securing research access (to organisations, documentation, agencies and individuals) both efficient and effective. Our various partners thus assisted in identifying suitable venues for focus groups, in contacting agencies and individuals who could provide a practitioner or policy-maker perspective at the local level, and supported us in accessing interviewees, workshop facilitators and the additional resources needed to support this type of research.

**Finally**, the partnership ensured that this body of research was not merely 'policy relevant', but achieved our wider aims for the GELLM programme. These were: to produce an *evidence base fit for the purposes of local authorities* and their partners; to deliver the research in a way which was '*policy engaged*' and recognised the realities and challenges of addressing the entrenched local labour market problems which underpin women's employment disadvantage; and to conclude the partnership, at the end of the three year period, by supporting our local authority partners to *mainstream gender equality* in their planning,

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<sup>1</sup> The programme was based in the *Centre for Social Inclusion* at Sheffield Hallam University, and directed by Professor Sue Yeandle. It was made possible by a large core grant from the *European Social Fund*.

<sup>2</sup> The *Gender Profiles* were launched at events hosted in each locality by our local authority partners in 2004-5, and were attended by a total of approximately 800 people.

<sup>3</sup> A list of the 31 *Locality Reports* and details of the local dissemination events can be found at [www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi](http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi).

<sup>4</sup> Prof. Ed Fieldhouse and Prof. Damian Grimshaw, both of the University of Manchester, and Prof. Irene Hardill of Nottingham Trent University.

operations and strategic policy-making in relation to local labour market issues. Our Locality Reports were presented at well-attended conferences and workshops organised by our local authority partners in spring/summer 2006. These events were used to launch the reports, to debate the new evidence and recommendations, and to consider what actions should follow. Across the country, over 800 people attended these events, and at most of these meetings clear commitments were made to give further detailed consideration to the research findings, and to explore ways of addressing the issues identified at the local level.

This **Synthesis Report**, draws together the findings from the local research study of *Women's Career Development in the Local Authority Sector in England: Opportunities and Constraints* which was carried out in the following localities: Leicester City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Southwark London Borough and Wakefield District Borough Council. It provides a comparative analysis of women's experience of paid employment and career development at different stages in their lives in their local labour markets, and draws on the wider body of GELLM research of which it forms a part. It is one of six GELLM 'Synthesis Reports' published in summer 2006, and completes the study output as funded under the original research award.

In the 6 **Synthesis Reports**, we show how both gender and locality play out in the way local labour markets operate, and identify features which affect women's labour market situation in similar ways across 11 very different local labour markets. We also show that in some cases, particular local labour market circumstances act as quite locally specific constraints and opportunities for the women living and working within them. In each case we explore the diversity of the female working age population, and take account of changes and developments which have affected the structure of the local labour market. In our analysis we have tried to tease out those factors which are within the sphere of influence of local authorities and their local partners - employers, trade unions, voluntary sector organisations and publicly funded agencies – as well as to identify those policy issues which require attention at the national level if local agencies are to achieve their objectives.

Because they offer a comparative analysis of data relating to different local labour markets, our **Synthesis Reports** present the research findings in ways which will be of particular interest to national and regional agencies with responsibilities for developing effective labour market policy, and for ensuring that the labour market operates in an inclusive manner, making full and fair use of the talents of both women and men across the whole economy. The research therefore contains messages of crucial importance to:

- those charged with seeking effective ways of **tackling local pockets of 'worklessness'**
- those responsible for achieving a high level of **productivity** and making effective use of national **investments in education, skills and training**
- employers and trade unions seeking to create **modern workplaces** which can attract and retain staff and support employees to **achieve their full potential**
- employers and service providers concerned about **labour and skills shortages**

We developed the **GELLM programme** in a partnership in which all parties shared the view that local labour markets should aim to offer women (and men) equitable access to employment opportunities and a fair chance to realise their full potential as labour force participants - and that they should assist those who desire to enter the labour market to do so. Across the entire programme we have therefore:

- i) explored the **situation of women outside the labour market** who wished to enter it (Grant et al 2006a; Escott et al 2006)
- ii) examined the particular situation of **women from minority ethnic groups** (Yeandle et al 2006c)
- iii) looked in detail at **women's employment in the local authority sector** (Bennett et al 2006)

- iv) studied the **situation of women in low-paid jobs** and examined why so many part-time women workers are **employed 'below their potential'** (Escott et al 2006; Grant et al 2006b)
- v) explored the **recruitment, retention and workforce development** policies of employers in the highly feminised domiciliary care sector (Yeandle et al 2006b)
- vi) through the **Gender Profiles** (Buckner et al 2004, 2005), provided the fullest possible **statistical evidence** for our topic of enquiry, making extensive use of the 2001 Census and other official statistics.

### Box 1 Policy Relevance of the GELLM Research Programme

When we began the study, we could not know quite how close the fit between our research and new developments in public policy would be.

During the research period:

- The **Women and Work Commission** reported its findings (in 2006).
- The Prime Minister commissioned two major **Equality Reviews** (reporting in 2006).
- The **Equality Act 2006**, setting up the *Commission for Equality and Human Rights* and placing a new duty on public bodies to promote gender equality (from 2007), achieved the royal assent.
- The *Equal Opportunities Commission* conducted **new GFIs**<sup>5</sup> into:
  - ♦ **occupational segregation**
  - ♦ **pregnancy discrimination**
  - ♦ **flexible and part-time working**
  - ♦ **ethnic minority women at work**
- Important new developments occurred at the national level, affecting policy on:
  - ♦ skills and productivity - **The Leitch Review of Skills 2005**
  - ♦ access to the labour market - DWP Green Paper 2006 **A New Deal for Welfare: empowering people to work**
  - ♦ the delivery of health and social care - DoH White Paper **Our Health, our Care, our Say: a new direction for community services**
  - ♦ work and family life - **Work and Families Act 2006**

<sup>5</sup> GFIs are the 'General Formal Investigations' which the *Equal Opportunities Commission* has statutory powers to conduct under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1975*.

## 1 Introduction

As we pointed out in the introduction to the *Gender Profiles*, given the importance of two critical factors - the **gendered nature of labour force participation** and the **local nature of most employment** - it is remarkable that previously so little attention has been given in analysis of labour force participation and behaviour to gender-disaggregated data at the sub-regional level. We believe the output from the GELLM Programme represents a major step forward in developing evidence-based policy in this field, makes it quite clear that such data is available, and shows that new evidence-based understanding of entrenched labour market problems and how to tackle them can be secured through a gender-sensitive approach to labour market analysis.

### *Women's career development*

The study<sup>6</sup> on which this report is based was designed to explore women's career development in the local government sector, through the experience of women with educational qualifications, in jobs with career development prospects, employed by four local authorities: Leicester City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan District Council, London Borough of Southwark and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council. To date, most theoretical debates about women's work orientations and preferences have been based on research at national or international levels, or on studies of specific categories of women, such as mothers, returners, or those on career breaks. This study has made a different contribution by examining: women's career development patterns within the framework of a local labour market; the relationship between those constraints which are internal (e.g. women's views of their own roles) and external (structural factors); changes in women's aspirations, experiences and choices across their life course; and workplace cultures at managerial level in the local authorities studied. Our aims were:

- To examine women's experiences of employment and career development in the local authority sector.
- To explore the factors which impede or support the career development of women employees.
- To identify policies and practices which encourage and support women's career progression.
- To make relevant recommendations to promote effective workforce development and efficient career management in local authorities.

Understanding women's choices about their career development in the context of internal preferences and external factors has important implications for the participating local authorities and the sector as whole in making effective human resources decisions to develop the potential of every employee, and in evaluating and implementing options for enhancing work-life balance to become an 'employer of choice'<sup>7</sup>.

## Policy Context

### *Women's engagement with the labour market*

Women's engagement with the labour market and their productivity within it has been actively addressed by the New Labour government, in policy-making and research, since it came to power in 1997 (Anderson et al 2001; Grimshaw and Rubery 2001; Kingsmill 2001, Rake 2001, Walby and Olsen 2002). To encourage women with children to make a greater commitment to employment, and to support them in doing so, a variety of legislative and other measures have been put in place. The *National Childcare Strategy* was introduced in 1998 to extend the quantity of childcare provision and to improve its quality, in part to give parents more options to engage with paid work. A package of tax credits and benefits for parents was introduced in 2001, again designed to make employment more financially attractive for parents, including lone parents. The New Deal for Lone Parents set ambitious targets for encouraging this group of mothers to join the paid labour force. In a parallel move, the government tried to encourage employers to change the way work is structured to better suit individuals' diverse needs, and to address issues of 'work-life balance'. The *Employment Relations Act 1999* provided for employees to take (unpaid) leave to deal with family emergencies, and the *Employment Act 2002* gave some parents the right to request flexible working arrangements, a right due to be extended to other groups through the *Work and Families Act 2006*. In

<sup>6</sup> Career Development in the Local Authority Sector in England: Opportunities and Constraints, Local Research Study 4

<sup>7</sup> Detailed recommendations for each participating local authority can be found in the Locality Reports of this study, (Bennett, Tang and Yeandle 2006a,b,c, and d)

partnership with employers, the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) launched a *Work-Life Balance Campaign* in 2000, offering Challenge funding to selected organisations which identified relevant issues to help them introduce more flexible working and better leave arrangements.

Celebrating 30 years of the *Equal Pay Act 1975* in 2005, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) again called on employers to address the underlying causes of the gender pay gap. The Equal Pay Task Force it set up in 2000, chaired by Bob Mason of BT with the participation of other experts and major businesses, had previously reported its detailed findings and made recommendations to government (EOC, 2001). The EOC has also promoted positive action to break down occupational segregation (Fuller et al 2005), and has promoted pay audits as a way of driving out discriminatory pay differentials. It has also highlighted the business benefits of making the connection between effective human resources management and equal opportunities (Humphries and Rubery 1995). *The Women and Work Commission* led by Baroness Prosser, which reported to the Prime Minister in February 2006, endorsed these approaches, and emphasised the importance of extending flexible working arrangements to positions at all levels in workplace hierarchies (Women and Work Commission 2006).

Following the lead of the European Union in calling for action to bring about greater inclusivity, and a share in economic benefits for all of Europe's citizens, the UK Government has also undertaken a reform of equality legislation. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*, the *Race Relations Amendment Act 2000* and the *Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004* all attempt to improve employment opportunities and fair treatment of their respective target groups. Harmonising aspects of these separate legislative approaches, the *Equality Act* received the royal assent in March 2006. This will set up a single *Commission for Equality and Human Rights* (CEHR), which will oversee public sector employment practice in line with the advances made in the area of race and ethnicity and in the field of disability. A new duty to promote gender equality will come into force in April 2007, requiring all public bodies to promote gender equality in their provision of services, and as employers. Thus public bodies will, for the first time in England, have to demonstrate that their employment practices meet the needs of women and of men, and that any inequalities of opportunity and of treatment are addressed. The final 'plank' of equality legislation is expected to be put in place when the reform of state pensions has been completed<sup>8</sup>. The Ministers for Women in the current cabinet have both emphasised the importance of changing paid work to fit women's real lives, in order to maximise women's contribution to the nation's productivity and to ensure that the UK has the workforce it needs to meet the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>9</sup>.

*While the employment rate for women has increased, the gender pay gap – particularly for part-time work – has remained stubbornly high. We now need to combine allowing more women to work when they choose to, with measures to improve the quality of that work; the chances women have to progress and get on, and the rewards they receive.* (Ruth Kelly MP, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Minister for Women, speech to the Fawcett Society, Smith Institute Seminar 24 May 2006)

### **Women's leadership**

Since the 1990s, there have been a number of drivers which have focused national governments' attention on women's traditional absence from decision-making processes. Through development work in the world's poorest nations, non-governmental organisations have become increasingly vocal about the difference women's involvement can make to the success of their programmes. This message was first captured at the 4<sup>th</sup> United Nations World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), and has been incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals, agreed at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 by the world's leaders. These include a goal 'to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women'. The UK Government has pledged that this principle should contribute strategically and substantially to the achievement of all the other goals, including reducing child mortality, and promoting universal primary education<sup>10</sup>.

*Without leadership to involve women in completing the Goals then the developing world is effectively tying one hand behind its back and, as 23 African countries will fail to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 on current trends, none of us can afford to do that.* (Baroness Amos, May 2004)

<sup>8</sup> The White Paper issued by the Pensions Commission (2006) headed by Lord Turner, contains proposals which address gender equality. The aim is that by 2010 70% of women will be eligible for a state pension, as opposed to 30% now.

<sup>9</sup> Meg Munn MP, Minister for Women, speech to 'The Workplace of the Future' PriceWaterhouseCoopers Event, 15 June 2006

<sup>10</sup> Baroness Amos, Leader of the House of Lords, speaking at the Annual Vice-Chancellors' Lecture, City University London 26<sup>th</sup> May 2004 on 'Women, Development and Leadership'.

The adoption of 'gender mainstreaming' by the Council of Europe (1995), followed by its implementation through the European Union's main funding mechanism, the Structural Funds Programmes (2000), represents another driver closer to home<sup>11</sup>. Gender mainstreaming has been underpinned by arguments that sustainable democracies and economies be will not possible without women's involvement at senior levels in politics and business. These arguments run parallel to member states' consensus on the need for greater inclusivity in European labour markets, and the importance of maximising every citizen's productivity through their participation in the future workforce.

The Labour Government has taken steps to increase the numbers of standing women Labour MPs, using unpopular all women shortlists to achieve a higher number of female candidates in the 1997 election, an approach recently adopted by parties in opposition. In 2002, the Ministers for Women led a national outreach campaign which toured the country attracting an audience of over 3,000 women. It aimed to increase the numbers of women (from one third) who sit on the boards of public bodies.<sup>12</sup>

*Many women are working day-in, day-out far below their abilities and this waste of talent is an outrage at a time when the UK is facing increasing competition in the global market place and an outrage for those women personally.*  
(Baroness Margaret Prosser, Women and Work Commission Chair, 27 February 2006)

The continuing gender pay gap of 13% between women and men<sup>13</sup> in the UK, and the finding that 53% of women in part time positions are working below their potential (Grant et al 2005; EOC 2005) has raised difficult questions for the government about how to help women to move forward in their careers at times in their lives when they need to, without sacrificing their earnings potential and financial security in the future. Along with its initiatives to support parents and carers, described in the section above, the Government has presented a strong case to private sector business that it is vital - if the UK economy is to operate at its productive potential - to get women into senior roles, and ultimately into top executive positions<sup>14</sup>. Ministers have hosted round table discussions with FTSE 100 companies' chief executives to tackle the issue of diversity in the boardroom, and have also supported a mentoring scheme to encourage more women to apply for directorships. Currently, 78 FTSE 100 companies have female directors, and 10.5% of directors of all FTSE listed companies are women (99 women including 1 female chief executive and 1 female chair).<sup>15</sup>

*Don't tell me that's because women aren't as able as men. And don't tell me that these inequalities are not harming Britain's economy as well as those individuals directly affected by discrimination. Last year's Female FTSE 100 Index showed that firms with women directors were stronger and more independent - giving more attention to conflict of interest guidelines, ethics and codes of conduct.*  
(Baroness Amos, May 2004)

The 'Shaping a Fairer Future' report describing the findings of the Women and Work Commission 2006 highlighted the lack of flexibility in working arrangements at senior level as a significant barrier to women attaining senior level positions, denoted by the lack of quality part-time employment. Its recommendations on this point are reproduced in full below and indicate that the Commission found the lack of flexibility to be endemic at all levels of management.

*DTI should establish a UK-wide Quality Part-Time Work Change Initiative of £5 million to support new initiatives aimed at achieving a culture change, so that more senior jobs – particularly in the skilled occupations and the professions – are more open to part-time and flexible working. This should start from junior management level upwards, and include the roles considered "stepping stones" to senior management. Eligible projects might be:*

- *identifying senior role models, working part time or job sharing, who will champion the spread of best practice among managers;*
- *web-based job matching of those wanting to work part time with those offering quality jobs on a part-time or job share basis;*
- *job share services to put potential job share partners in touch and aimed at high quality occupations;*
- *specialist consultancy services to embed quality part-time work;*
- *e-networks for senior and professional women;*
- *other initiatives to spread best practice and achieve culture change.*

<sup>11</sup> Guidance on the criteria for successful gender mainstreaming, stressed the importance of achieving gender balance at every stage and level of the decision-making progress (Bennett 2000).

<sup>12</sup> 'Get a (Public) Life Campaign [http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/public\\_life/get\\_life.htm](http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/public_life/get_life.htm)

<sup>13</sup> Getting Women on to UK Boards, [http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/boardroom\\_diversity/index.htm](http://www.womenandequalityunit.gov.uk/boardroom_diversity/index.htm)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> The 2005 Female FTSE Index, Cranfield University [www.cranfield.ac.uk/som/research/centres/cdwbl/news.asp](http://www.cranfield.ac.uk/som/research/centres/cdwbl/news.asp).

The report identifies the negative impact of workplace cultures on women's career progression. Academics have described the culture at senior levels as 'the agency effect': An organisation's chairman and appointing committee, as agents, act to minimise risk and hence appoint those with whom they are comfortable, and those similar to themselves. This results in the persistence of the 'think director, think male phenomenon'<sup>16</sup>. Diversity is only embraced in appointments processes when there is a need to fill a strategic gap, or there is a tight labour market (Humphries and Rubery 1995). Research on women working at senior levels in the public sector reported that these women experienced tensions in taking on what they saw as highly masculine professional identities (Whitehead and Moodley 1999).

The need to redesign senior level jobs has received support from trade unions and some employers who are not only motivated by the benefits of greater diversity at senior level but also the very high penalty that employees can pay in terms of their levels of stress and general health when they work intensively, and the costs of absence and sickness to their organisation. Annual absence levels in the public sector were higher than those in the private sector (10.3 days per employee, compared with 6.8 days) with stress identified as the leading cause of long-term absence for non-manual workers<sup>17</sup>. In June 2006 the Chartered Management Institute revealed that 63% of managers failed to use their full annual holiday entitlement. They found differences between how male and female managers use their holiday, which indicates the sacrifices which some women make in terms of their health and wellbeing when working at this level, and the support which men may expect to receive at home from female partners:

*What female and male managers said they do when they take holiday:*

- 27% of women visit the doctor or dentist, compared with 16% of men
- 31% of women use it to catch up on sleep, compared with 16% of men
- 86% of women catch up with domestic chores compared with 14% of men.

*Britain continues to operate a long-hours culture. It is clear from numerous studies that employees are not afraid to work at this level providing they feel valued and are allowed to work flexibly. Companies need to sit up and address this because rigid policies may produce a culture of 'presenteeism' but do not guarantee high levels of performance.*  
(Jo Causon, Director, Chartered Management Institute, 15 June 2006)<sup>18</sup>

Over the last decade the popular media have highlighted the career 'superwoman' who chooses to 'have it all'. Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, admitted that the stereotype was an alluring one. Speaking in November 2005, she said:

*When my children were little I used to work through the night twice a week, in order that I could have three days at the weekend with them. I used to start work at 10pm and work through until 4am. I did feel at times that the balance was very precarious. I would hope that [my daughter] would be able to just be as ambitious as she wants to be, with a bit less juggling stress.*<sup>19</sup>

The proposition that by working hard women can thrive as role-model mothers and as competent executives in demanding and interesting roles has been loudly challenged by commentators, feminist academics and senior women themselves. Research has shown that one result of the difficulties of juggling two sets of competing and often conflicting demands is that many women delay the point at which they choose to start a family (Whitehead and Moodley 1999).

This study makes a contribution to this policy area by providing in-depth empirical data about the experiences of women in positions of employment with the potential to progress. Much of the debate about women's lack of advancement to senior level in the labour market has been conducted at a very high level of abstraction. Here we present the voices of real women who work in comparable employment within the local government sector, speaking about their career decisions and the choices, constraints and opportunities they perceived were available to them during course of their working lives.

<sup>16</sup> Val Singh and Susan Vinnicombe, Cranfield School of Management 'Why we need women bosses' weekly series BBC News September 2002.

<sup>17</sup> Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) survey of member 2005. Results published in The Guardian 'Public Sector Managers Hit by Stress Epidemic', 11 July 2005

<sup>18</sup> 550 sample of managers representative of their membership. Results published in The Guardian. 'Workaholic Managers sacrifice 19m days of holiday each year', 15 June 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Tessa Jowell MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, quoted in 'Why the have-it-all woman has decided she doesn't want it all', The Observer, 27 November 2005

## About the study of women's employment

This study focused on women with educational qualifications and already in jobs with career development potential. We identified women research participants via the salary structure (rather than the grading structure which varied between the authorities we studied). The main research questions we hoped to answer through the study related to these women's perceptions of: their opportunities for promotion and advancement within their organisation, including training opportunities; their job role and its demands; and their aspirations and attitudes about their career in the sector. To explore these issues we adopted the following study design and research methods, conducting the work in 2005-2006.

- A **statistical analysis** of local authority employment, using the Labour Force Survey, Census of Population and other relevant sources to describe the wider context of women's employment in the public sector.
- Mapping of women's and men's employment within the local authorities concerned, using **local authority HR data**. We identified the departments and occupations in which women and men worked, the level at which they were employed and their working time patterns, and studied records used for monitoring equalities, where data was available in an appropriate format. Analysis of relevant documentation was undertaken. This covered documents relating to: organisational commitments, structures and initiatives to promote gender equality; training and career development; policies to promote work life balance; and organisational monitoring including staff satisfaction surveys and committee reports.
- A structured **self-completion questionnaire** was distributed to selected employees, to gather information on age, caring/childcare responsibilities, family situation, and to secure agreement to participate in the focus group discussions. Distribution was through paper copies and an e-survey via email.
- **Focus groups** were held with women employees identified via the survey questionnaire. In each local authority, these brought together groups of 8-10 women in the categories below:
  - Women in middle-ranking/more senior positions, aged approximately 45-59 (focussing on how far their working lives had met their youthful expectations and were perceived as satisfactory). This included some women who had been at the top of their grade for a number of years.
  - Women in the 16-24 and 25-34 age group (focussing on their aspirations and where they expected to be in employment terms in their 40s and 50s).
  - Women aged 35-44 who had caring / childcare responsibilities.
  - Women aged 35-44 who had *not* had caring / childcare responsibilities.

Each focus group attendee was also invited to return written comments in a simple open-ended questionnaire at the end of the focus group.

- **Face-to-face interviews** were also conducted with senior managers in each organisation to gain an understanding of the organisational context.
- **Interviews** with trade union representatives and an examination of relevant documentation was undertaken to gain a trade union perspective.

Appendix 2 gives a more detailed description of our research methods and participants.

## 2 Women's Public Sector Employment

### Women's employment in the public sector at national and local level

Over a quarter of all people employed in the UK work in the public sector, two thirds of them women. Nationally local government alone employs about 1.2 million women, three quarters of its total workforce (Employers' Organisation 2004)<sup>20</sup>, and in most districts the local authority is one of the major local employers.

The 2001 Census Sample of Anonymised Records (SAR) can be analysed to show, at national level, a number of features of women's employment in the Public Administration, Defence and Social Security sector, of which local government is a part:

- 56% of female employees in the sector are aged 25-44, slightly higher than in the wider economy (51%).
- White British women make up 88% of the total female workforce. Some ethnic minority groups are over represented, most notably Black Caribbean women (2.2%) and Black African women (1.2%), compared with 1.4% and 0.9% respectively working in all industries. Of these groups of ethnic minority women there are greater numbers employed from older age groups.
- In this sector, a lower proportion of women work as managers, senior officials and professionals (across all age groups) than in the economy as a whole. For example, 15% of women aged 25-44 and 16% of women aged 45-59 were in jobs at this level, compared with 22% and 21% respectively in the overall economy.
- In the sector, a higher proportion of women work in associate professional and technical occupations (21%) and in administrative and secretarial positions (51%), with far fewer women in elementary (unskilled) positions (6%) than in the economy as a whole (where the parallel figures are 13%, 22% and 14% respectively).
- The proportion of employees in the sector who are mothers of dependent children (48%) is very similar to the average across all industrial sectors (53%). However, among women in the 25-44 age group, fewer women have dependent children; 66%, compared with 71% of their counterparts in the economy as a whole.
- Despite the large numbers of mothers in the sector's workforce, and the sector's long-standing commitment to family friendly employment, the percentage of women working part-time is lower than for women in the economy as a whole. 27% of female employees in the sector work less than 30 hours per week, compared with 41% of their counterparts across all industrial sectors. Rather surprisingly, 42% of female employees working in this sector work 31-37 hours (50% of all 16-24 year olds, 40% of all 25-44 year olds and 42% of 45-59 year olds).

**Figure 1 Employee jobs in local government in England as of June 2005**

	Male		Female		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
England	414,865	120,664	616,157	925,512	2,077,197
Counties	14%	5%	27%	54%	762,966
Metropolitan districts	21%	5%	32%	42%	544,014
Unitaries	20%	6%	28%	46%	376,952
London boroughs	24%	5%	36%	35%	250,622
	59,583	12,763	89,813	88,463	

Source: Adapted from the provisional key results of the Employers Organisation's Local Government Employment Survey (LGES) for June 2005 - Local Government Digest May 2006

<sup>20</sup> These data exclude teachers.

Figures released by the Local Government Employers (LGE) Organisation for England and Wales show that some of these trends in women's employment are especially pronounced in local government. Local government accounts for 9% of the workforce in the whole economy (with other public sector agencies accounting for a further 11% of employees).<sup>21</sup>

- Almost 75% of local government employees are women.
- Data from the Local Government Employers Organisation's survey of members also suggest that more women employed in local government work part-time hours than in the Public Administration, defence and social security sector as a whole. As Figure 3 below shows, 60% of women employees (n=925,512) in English authorities were contracted to work part-time hours in June 2005.
- Part time working among women is more prevalent in County Councils (54% of the CC workforce) and lowest in the London Boroughs (35% of the LB workforce) (Figure 1).
- Women dominate in the education and social care segments of local authority employment, and also in corporate functions (with the exception of planning, public protection services and refuse and recycling).
- The highest incidence of part time working among women employees was in the education function (non-teaching) (82%); the lowest was found among teachers (32%) and those working in corporate functions (39%) (Figure 2).
- Although women represent 75% of all employees, only 12% of the 407 chief executives in English and Welsh local authorities, and 14% of the 7,187 chief officers, are women. Women make up just over a quarter of local government's top 5% of earners. Only 2.6% of all male and female senior managers are from ethnic minority backgrounds<sup>22</sup>.
- 90% of these senior officers had been recruited from within the local government sector. Recruitment and retention difficulties for professional and managerial occupations were most acute in London (with authorities experiencing difficulties in an average of 19.6 % of occupational categories), followed by the South West (17%). For non-professional/non-managerial occupations, differences between regions were less marked<sup>23</sup>.
- A survey<sup>24</sup> carried out on behalf of the Local Government Employers Organisation in May 2006, reported that staff in 43% of authorities had taken up flexi-time, job share (41% of authorities) working from home (38% of authorities), compressed hours - over a week or fortnight (34% of authorities), annualised hours (20% of authorities) and term-time working (13% of authorities). The survey concluded that there was a wide variation in progress towards implementation of flexible working arrangements across authorities in the sector and that the main barrier to implementation was the attitudes and skills of managers.
- Local government officers, senior civil servants, directors and CEOs topped the TUC Managers Top 2006 Long Hours League Table. 45% of these managers were working unpaid overtime, averaging 12 hours per week. (Their average unpaid overtime in 2005 was 9 hours and 48 minutes)<sup>25</sup>.
- The public administration, defence and social security sector was a stable employer over the last decade for women and men, both in terms of full-time and part-time employment. Figures for England show that between 1991 and 2002 the proportion of women employed in this sector remained stable at about 34-36%.<sup>26</sup>
- Stability in the total number of jobs in the public sector as a whole masks extensive reorganisation of the local government workforce, which took place mainly in response to central government guidance

<sup>21</sup> 'The local government workforce England and Wales 2005 - Key Facts' [www.lg.employers.gov.uk](http://www.lg.employers.gov.uk)

<sup>22</sup> Local Government Employers [www.lge.gov.uk/conditions/chief\\_officers\\_and\\_executives/content/](http://www.lge.gov.uk/conditions/chief_officers_and_executives/content/)

<sup>23</sup> 'Local Government Pay and Workforce Strategy 2005', Department of Communities and Local Government, [www.communities.gov.uk](http://www.communities.gov.uk)

<sup>24</sup> 'Report of a survey into Flexible Working within Local Authorities in England, Northern Ireland and Wales', Work Wise, March 2006 - survey of 45 authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, included Shire Districts (a representative sample by type and geography).

<sup>25</sup> [www.tuc.org.uk/work\\_life/tuc-11427-f0.cfm](http://www.tuc.org.uk/work_life/tuc-11427-f0.cfm)

<sup>26</sup> 1991 Census of Employment, ABI 2002, Crown Copyright

and policy, and moves to outsource direct services. There has also been considerable restructuring of the jobs within local government, involving large increases in some areas and losses in others (Figure 3).

- In 2005 there was a higher proportion of temporary positions in the local government sector than in the whole economy. Many of these jobs were linked to finite funding regimes focused on specific national initiatives. 8% of all local government jobs were temporary in autumn 2005, compared with 6% in the whole economy.<sup>27</sup> 4.6% were described as 'of fixed contract or task'.

**Figure 2 Female employee jobs in local government in England by function, June 2005**

Function	% Full-time	% Part-time
Education – teachers	68	32
Education – other employees	18	82
Services direct to the public	42	58
Social services	44	56
Corporate functions	61	39
All functions	40	60

Source: Adapted from the provisional key results of the Employers Organisation's Local Government Employment Survey (LGES) for June 2005 - Local Government Digest May 2006

**Figure 3 Change in numbers of local government employees, in England and Wales employed by function, June 2004 – 2005**

	Male		Female		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Education – teachers	-1000	-3000	-3000	-7000	-14000
Education – other employees	+2000	-2000	-7000	+5000	-1000
Social services	0	0	-3000	0	-3000
Services direct to the public	-7000	+1000	-3000	-1000	-11000
Corporate functions	+2000	0	+1000	+4000	+7000
<b>Total</b>	<b>-5000</b>	<b>-3000</b>	<b>-15000</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-22000</b>

Source: Provisional key results of the Employers Organisation's Local Government Employment Survey (LGES) for June 2005 - Local Government Digest May 2006<sup>28</sup>

### Future workforce development across the sector

The *Local Government Pay and Workforce Strategy 2005*, led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), has noted that the changing demand for, and levels of sub-contracted delivery, of education, children's and adults' care services will be the most important influence on the future size and nature of the directly employed local government workforce<sup>29</sup>. The development of Local Strategic Partnerships has already resulted in many local authority positions being paid for out of central or regional funds. This trend is set to continue and may involve a reduction in the size of corporate services in the future. Local authorities' role as commissioners of services is likely to increase, and will require staff with high levels of skills in law, procurement, client management and monitoring. In meeting its future needs the sector must grapple with the demographic and social changes which are having profound effects on the available supply of labour. Questions are being asked at national level about how the sector will attract younger employees of all ethnicities, given its older age profile and the predominance of White British employees. This study has examined these issues at the local level, contextualizing its findings in evidence about the skills and characteristics of the workforce locally (see Bennett et al 2006a,b,c, and d). Some of the detail of this analysis is presented below.

<sup>27</sup> Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2005 presented in 'Profiles of local government workforce and the wider economy' Local Government Digest May 2006.

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.lge.gov.uk/pay\\_systems\\_and\\_structures/content/statistical\\_bulletin.html](http://www.lge.gov.uk/pay_systems_and_structures/content/statistical_bulletin.html)

<sup>29</sup> Initiated by 'Releasing Resources for the Frontline: Independent Review of Public Sector Efficiency' (July 2004) Sir Peter Gershon's review of public sector efficiency, in particular, within back office, procurement, transaction service and policy-making functions. The report also identifies opportunities for increasing the productive time of professionals working in schools, hospitals and other frontline public services.

Figure 4 compares and contrasts selected characteristics of the female workforce in the 4 localities we have studied<sup>30</sup>. It shows very marked differences between the working hours, qualifications and travel to work patterns of the female workforce in London and in the other localities we have studied. In Southwark, only 27% of women work part-time and 40% of female employees work between 38 and 47 hours, implying a normalisation of full-time and long hours. Fewer women employees in Southwark live within 2 km of their workplace which has implications for the length of their working day. Also a higher proportion of them rely on buses to get to work (27% compared with 22% Leicester, 21% Sandwell, and 14% in Wakefield). In Leicester, Sandwell and Wakefield car use is women's dominant mode of transport. Almost half of all employed women living in Southwark are in one of the three top occupational categories (48%), and 50% of women aged 25-34 are graduates. In contrast, human resource professionals in Sandwell advising managers on recruitment strategies are faced with a low female qualification base, and with far fewer women with management or professional skills.

**Figure 4 Selected characteristics of female employees (all industrial sectors) (%s)**

Characteristics	Leicester		Sandwell		Southwark		Wakefield		England	
Long hours working:										
38-47 hours per week	31		28		38		26		29	
48+ hours per week	5		5		11		5		7	
Working part-time (less than 30 hours)	39		40		27		46		41	
Employed as managers, professionals, associate professionals or in technical occupations	28		25		48		28		36	
Qualified to degree level or higher										
Aged 25-34	26		16		17		50		29	
Aged 35-49	17		11		15		35		23	
Access to flexible working*	FT PT		FT PT		FT PT		FT PT		FT PT	
Flexi-time (FT/PT)	14 15		9 11		8 7		11 16		13 9	
Term-time only contracts	4 9		3 2		7 9		3 7		5 11	
Travelling distance between work and home										
<2km	32		26		19		27		25	
>5km	21		34		39		43		42	

Source: 2001 Census Standard Tables, Crown Copyright 2003 (Buckner et al 2004, 2005) \* Source: LFS 2002, Crown Copyright.

As a comparison of the *Gender Profiles* of these 4 localities shows (Buckner et al 2004, 2005), there is considerable variation in the economic growth of these labour markets over the 1990s. Leicester and Sandwell did not share in the significant job growth experienced in the wider economy. Wakefield's and Southwark's job growth was higher but still did not match that in their region or in England as a whole (19%). These districts experienced 3.2%, 0.8%, 10.9% and 15.8% job growth respectively. In Southwark, 15.8% growth represented an increase of 19,442 jobs of which the majority (11,451 jobs) were part-time positions. Job growth in the other localities was also greater in part-time employment.<sup>31</sup>

Behind these figures lay important structural changes in these local labour markets. These changes included the loss of women's jobs in the manufacturing sector; 7,500 jobs in Leicester, 5,000 in Sandwell and 4,000 in Wakefield. In Southwark 4,000 manufacturing jobs lost primarily affected men. The largest increase in jobs for women was in the public administration, education and health sector in Leicester (6,000

<sup>30</sup> All Crown Copyright material is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO.

<sup>31</sup> There were important gender differences:

Percentage change in number of full-time and part-time jobs 1991-2002: selected districts	%s				
Job Type	Leicester	Sandwell	Southwark	Wakefield	England
Female full-time	-1.5	+5.2	+16	-3.1	+12.7
Male full-time	-6.7	-7.5	+3	+5.8	+9.3
Female part-time	+13.2	+6.0	+44	+20.4	+30.8
Net increase in female PT jobs	3,900	1,358	6,412	5,368	
Male part-time	+101.8	+89.1	+105.9	+116.3	+103.1
Net increase in male PT jobs	6,370	3,638	5,039	4,601	
All part-time jobs	+28.9	+18.7	+59.2	+32.9	+43.6
All jobs	+3.2	+0.8	+15.8	+10.9	+19.2

Source: Census of Employment 1991, ABI 2002 from NOMIS, Crown Copyright (Buckner et al 2004, 2005)

jobs) Sandwell (5,000 jobs) and Wakefield (6,000 jobs). Southwark women benefited from 4,000 additional jobs in this sector but they gained most jobs in banking and finance (Buckner et al 2004, 2005). These developments underscore the importance of the local authorities in each of these localities as a key source of employment for local women.

### ***The local authority sector's approach to gender equality and the workforce***

Many public sector organisations, including the local government sector, have historically developed employment practices that support employees' work/life balance: opportunities for job sharing, part-time work, and maximum/flexible working hours. As providers of public services, they have an obligation and a longstanding commitment to ensure their workforce reflects the population it serves, and some services have been at the forefront of ensuring ethnic and cultural diversity among their employees (Bennett 2000).

The workforces from which our participants were drawn were based in organisations which had already made a commitment to equality of opportunity for their male and female employees, and which had introduced, over a number of years, a variety of measures to enable women to balance work and other aspects of their lives and to access training and development opportunities. At the time of the research, these included:

- Corporate development strategies which prioritised managers' development, and include programmes targeting women and ethnic minority employees.
- Clear structures of corporate responsibility for equality for example Equality Scrutiny Panels (made up of elected members and senior executive officers), Gender Champions at senior executive level acting as proactive advocates for the interests of female staff.
- All offered a wide range of flexible working arrangements and family friendly policies, with accompanying guidance for employees and managers. Policies covered emergency caring situations, planned caring situations such as adoption and parental leave, flexi-time, changes to working hours such as term-time working, and options to apply for extended leave in order to deal with major family changes or to fulfil lifetime ambitions.
- All offered special leave provision for employees who are carers of people who are sick, disabled or frail, and equal opportunities policies outlining the rights and treatment of employees with disabilities.
- All were at level 2 or above in the Equality Standard for Local Government at the time the research was concluded.
- All had Investors in People (IiP) status<sup>32</sup>.
- The authorities' Best Value Performance Indicator 11a relating to the gender break down of the top 5% of earners employed by the authority, ranged from 34% to 46.98%.
- All had experience of targeting women to join management training initiatives.
- All had experience of running other initiatives to support women's career development (e.g. women's staff networks, women-only personal development programmes and in one case a programme to support the recruitment of more women councillors).

Evidence presented in the locality report for each local authority (Bennett, Tang and Yeandle 2006a,b,c, and d) provides insights into women's experience of how effectively their authority's policies were being implemented and of the benefits of targeted training provision, as well as their perception of the importance which their organisation attached to women's career development and the challenges which remained in making opportunities available to all. The three sections which follow present this data, turning first to explore women's attitudes to paid employment and their career development. This is followed by sections on hours of work and career development and on organisational culture; the main factors we identified which influence women's orientation to work and progression within their organisations.

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<sup>32</sup> The Investors in People Standard is a business improvement tool designed to advance an organisation's performance through its people management. It was developed in 1990 by a partnership of leading businesses and national organisations.  
<http://www.iipuk.co.uk/IIP/Web/default.htm>

### 3 Women, work and life

#### Women's attitudes to paid work and career development

Theories used to explain the existence and persistence of gender differences in employment patterns, and the sometimes downward nature of women's careers, include those which focus on women's own characteristics and employment decisions. These question women's ability and desire to consistently supply their labour in a way which is appropriate to labour market needs (Hakim 1996, 2000, 2002).

#### *Preference Theory*

Hakim's *preference theory* (1996, 2000) has claimed that it is women's own choices about employment and lifestyles which is the key source of their under-achievement in the labour market and which accounts for most of the differences between women's and men's labour market outcomes. This theory suggests that different groups of women do not all share the same preferences and priorities about work and family life, and that women's lifestyle choices have become a more important constraint than wider structures, such as social class or other macro-level influences (Hakim 2000). This theory classified women in three groups: home-centred women, for whom children and family life are the main priorities throughout life; adaptive, non-career oriented women who wish to combine work and family or who have unplanned careers; and work-centred women, for whom employment (or the equivalent) is the main priority in life.

Preference theory has been fiercely debated in the academic literature, and criticised for conceptualising women's preferences in a simplified way. Critiques include:

- It downplays the effect of structural constraints and differences in opportunities, and suggests that women are voluntarily giving up the opportunity to work to their full potential in the labour market.
- It fails to recognise women's changing domestic circumstances and the stages of their life course which produce temporary changes in women's commitment to paid employment (Crompton 1996; Crompton and Harris 1998; Fagan and Rubery 1996; Fagan 2001; Ginn et al. 1996; Proctor and Padfield 1999; Warren and Walters 1998, McRae 2003, Charles and James 2003).
- It overlooks the ways in which women's 'choices' are also shaped by their perception of their options, which are in turn structured by:
  - their local labour market context, including the cost and availability of necessary services such as childcare (McRae 2003);
  - the impact of government policies (relating to tax and benefits, for example);
  - other social institutions, such as their family background, cultural and religious membership and the practical support or pressure these provide (Rose, 1994; Smithson et al. 2004);
  - the national working-time regime and local variations which dictate the nature of flexible working options and hours of work, both paid and unpaid (Fagan 2001);
  - each woman's unique work history, which may be coloured by experiences of job insecurity or difficult working environments.

Critics of preference theory have argued that women's choices and preferences in relation to paid work are an outcome of the interplay between many of these factors. Our research supports this contention, and provides a rich empirical evidence base to support the debate. As we show, an assumption that women's flexible approach to paid employment is underpinned by ambivalence about paid work and career, ignores the very great effort which many women invest in employment, and the enjoyment, satisfaction and importance they attach to it.

#### *Attitudes to paid work*

Our evidence has shown that the large majority of women in this study, all of whom are in jobs which are, or could be, part of a career, value their employment highly. For them, their paid work is an important source of satisfaction and income security, and provides a context for fulfilling their personal values. Women in the focus groups in all authorities told a similar story, emphasising that:

- They are committed to their work because it serves local communities, improving the lives and circumstances of local people;

- Paid work represents important ‘personal’ time; women value the autonomy to make decisions about how to deliver their work, and can enjoy the stimulation of working with colleagues to achieve a goal;
- A meaningful working life, in which they enjoy what they do, and in some cases can leave ‘a legacy’, is important to them.

*I made a definite decision to work for the public sector because for me is about being able to help the people of Wakefield.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I like the interaction and dealing with other people in the council and knowing that you’re able to provide a good service and that I do the best job that I can.*  
(Leicester aged 45-59)

*Hopefully we’re making a difference to people, to the environment, to places where people live and work and for future generations, because we do lots of work with schools.*  
(Southwark aged 25-34)

For these women, being ‘work-oriented’ does not preclude being committed to family or having interests outside work. These other commitments stand alongside work, and are of equal importance. Women in this study described making enormous efforts to ensure that neither work nor ‘life’ was compromised. This is not always achieved, but it is not necessarily productivity at work which suffers; home life and their own health sometimes bear the brunt of competing demands.

The commitment these women make to their work is also suggested by the hours they put in. In our survey 74% of respondents with dependent children and 85% of those with unpaid caring roles were contracted to work 31 hours or more hours per week (Figure 5).

**Figure 5 Female respondents working 31+ hours / week with caring responsibilities**

Local authority surveyed	Contracted to work 31+ hours / week	With dependent children contracted to work 31+ hours	Providing unpaid care <sup>33</sup> contracted to work 31+hours
Leicester	77	66	80
Sandwell	88	81	89
Southwark	88	85	96
Wakefield	89	68	81
ALL	82	74	85

Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

Across all the women who participated in this study it was possible to identify key moments in their lives when work-life balance questions were most pertinent. There were clear differences between women aged 34-44 and 45-59 with dependent children, and women aged 45+ whose caring responsibilities had ‘come full circle’ to the care of grandchildren and parents.

**The life course: motherhood**

75% of all 25-34 year olds and 69% of women aged 35-44 in our survey were living with dependent children. Whilst motherhood had a profound effect on their lives and the way they organised themselves, it had not lessened women’s attachment to their jobs and careers - only made this more difficult to achieve.

*I didn’t want to come back to work at all up until he was 6 months, and then I just went all career in my head. So the barriers for me are work ones I would say.*  
(Wakefield aged 25-34)

*In a previous job I did a management role, but I deliberately took a slight step down because of becoming a mum for the first time - but now two years on - I’m ready, and the opportunities are there in terms of people are moving on.*  
(Southwark aged 25-34)

Some women explained that in response they had temporarily switched their priorities away from their career, until the time when their children were older and less dependent. Their reasons were not exclusively about their children’s welfare and best interests, but were mixed up with practical considerations about levels of family support and concerns about their own ability to perform at work.

<sup>33</sup> Describes women providing unpaid care to a relative, friend or neighbour who is sick, frail or has a disability, from 0-50+ hours per week.

### **Returning to work after maternity leave**

Women described returning to work after having a baby as difficult. As well as having to adjust to a new daily caring routine, and leaving their child in the care of others, many women described being faced with a demanding transition, as their job remits were complex and in some cases, located in environments which were constantly changing.

*I was off for seven months and there was a massive project introduced whilst I was off, and people were talking acronyms and I had no idea what they were talking about when I came back.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

### **Older mothers**

Some of those who first became mothers in their late 30s felt they had discovered 'a wonderful secret', and were keen to fulfil their new family role. They included women who were satisfied with what they had already achieved at work, and who felt able to 'ease off' in a way which would not have been possible in their twenties. By contrast, other women of a similar age, who had their children when younger, still felt they had more to achieve at work.

*Before the little one I was very focused. Clear goals of where I wanted to go. I didn't have her until I was 37, quite late really, that motivation that was there, I don't know where it's gone. I get great pleasure out of helping others, I do career development as part of my job, and I love it.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

The birth of a second child was another key moment in shaping attitudes to work for some women. Often this was when many had decided to reduce their hours at work, but stressed that they remained committed:

*After having a second child I thought, there is more to life than work, I'm going to reduce my hours. Those are kind of key points in your life when you begin to make those decisions. But then when you're back at work - you're still bringing work home.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

### **Work-family tensions**

Many mothers in our study described the pressure and guilt they felt when trying to sustain family activities, spend time with friends, and perform at work in a way which satisfied their own need for mental stimulation and sense of fulfilment.

*I still want to see the kids at some point. For an 8 o'clock meeting I have to get up an hour earlier, my husband does a lot of the childcare, but there's things I like to sort out, like their clothes, whatever. It just eats into to your personal time ... there's just not enough hours in the day.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*If I'm out monitoring, I'm there at 7am. I know my children are feeling it, my daughter especially. But you then try to reward them, because I've worked longer hours. But I need that job, for me, because I know they're going to grow up and find their own way.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

Women described complex timetables designed to meet both sets of commitments. Their arrangements were finely tuned, and relied on routinised working arrangements, car use, and in some cases a high degree of paid help with cleaning and out-of-hours childcare.

*When the meetings are overrun, and you're looking at 5.30pm and going into 5.45pm - when you know you have to be at home to pick up the children, but you feel you can't leave because there is somebody there at the top level talking, and you just can't get up and say, 'Actually we were supposed to finish at 5.00. I'm really sorry, I have commitments, I've got to go.' So you're frantically texting.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

*I try and fit my work hours around childcare and my husband's shifts, I couldn't possibly go [to work] on a train, it needs to be easy to get back [home]. I worry about getting to the children.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

Some explained that family commitments meant not just 'being there', but also holding in their head plans and household-related tasks whilst at work. They joked that they regularly 'saved the family from starvation' by placing the weekly food shopping order over the internet in their half hour lunch break.

### **Becoming the main earner**

Changes in their personal lives and relationships had reinforced some women's commitment to their career. They were motivated by additional financial pressures.

*I'm lucky because when we had our first child my husband had just been made redundant - so he made the choice, and said, 'You go back to work, and I'll look after our son.'* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

*As a single parent I have to go out to work, but I would prefer to have a career that I'm planning and actually developing. I've had to take charge of my career development.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

Others wanted to set a good example for their children, particularly in families where there was no other earner.

*It was only a couple of months after my husband died, but I knew if I did get the job it would be good for me and my self esteem and good confidence for the children as well, you know if mum can do this and get over this.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

*I've got one of each, a son and a daughter. I have to be a different role model for each one, and I want them to be professionals. If you look at some pockets of this borough, you've got generations and generations that sit in the house unemployed - I don't want that for my children.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

### Caring for older, sick or disabled relatives

In addition to their paid jobs, a significant minority of our survey respondents had unpaid caring responsibilities for an old, frail or disabled relative or friend. A few women in the older age groups were providing more than 20 hours of unpaid care each week (Figure 6). These commitments affected them for varying lengths of time, and in some cases had arisen without warning. Unpaid caring is experienced by 3 out of 5 employees<sup>34</sup>.

**Figure 6 Female employees who provide unpaid care in the survey and from the 2001 Census**

Local Authority	Percent providing up to 20 hours (from survey)	Percent providing over 20 hours (from survey)	Percent of employed women in local district providing up to 20 hours *	Percent of employed women in local district providing 20+*
Leicester	16	2	10	3
Sandwell	18	2	11	4
Southwark	10	3	7	2
Wakefield	15	2	12	4
ALL	15	2	England = 11	England = 3

Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006.

\* 2001 Census Commissioned Tables, Crown Copyright 2003.

Women in the focus groups had put in place different strategies to enable them to continue working whilst caring; for example, by moving house or changing their working hours. They recognised that this dual role was especially draining, and impacted on their levels of energy whilst at work.

*I chose to move house. I am still 30 miles from work, but I'm closer to my elderly parents now.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

*I work for Southwark Council because I live 5 minutes drive away and my husband is disabled and it enables me, if he locks himself out or something silly, I can go rushing off home.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

*Over the last couple of years my son has had a serious health problem and my 80 year old mother is descending into Alzheimer's and the problems that brings. I haven't had the emotional energy to consider my professional needs.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

*I care for my elderly mother - I get up at 6.30, leave at 7.30 for work until 5.30. Go and cook mum's tea, do the housework- then I've got to take her washing home. I get home at 9 o'clock at night, and I've got to put the washing machine on - and I am doing that four days a week. It's exhausting.* (Sandwell aged 45-59)

As we have discussed elsewhere (Yeandle et al 2006), people's experience of caring is unique in each case, but is often of a finite duration, and can be accommodated alongside work where flexible working practices are in place. In this study, some women noted that the flexible working arrangements offered by their authority had enabled them to fulfil their caring role and then return to a normal working pattern when their responsibility ended.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.carersuk.org/Employersforcarers/Thebusinesscase/Thefacts>

## Retirement

For women aged 45+ their pension entitlement was an important reason why they had continued to work in their organisation.

*At some point, I can bank my pension, knowing that I'm going to be OK. I'm not going to impact on the children in any way, like not having enough money for them to go to university.* (Sandwell aged 45-49)

*I've been working here for about eight years now and I thought to myself - I want to make sure I have ten years of decent pension contributions. I wouldn't mind doing a change, but not right now for me.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

*Well, the biggest reason I work here is the pension, I would have left the council two years ago I think if I'd not been locked into a pension.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

For some the prospect of a higher retirement age and reduced pension return was an added motivation to advance their career while they could.

*When I got on to this course I wondered - would I want to go for promotion? I'm going to be 45 when I finish it - is too late? But what convinced me was when you look at how long you are going to have work now.* (Wakefield age 35-44)

Some women who were closer to retirement age still had personal goals that they wished to fulfil, and were clear about the time needed to achieve them. Others had reached the limit of their ambitions.

*I shall be extremely busy until 2008. But I am basically hoping to go at 60, leaving an extremely tidy ship with a lot of very good people in it. And that's what I see as my aim, to produce something that I can hand over. And I shall walk away, close the door, and start another thing.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

*I don't want to progress any further. I feel as if I've clawed my way to where I am now, and I haven't got the strength or motivation to go any higher.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

A common aspiration among older women was to 'ease out' of the world of work by reducing their working hours. A few women mentioned their involvement in caring for grandchildren, which had prompted them to explore changes to their working arrangements.

*I'd like to do compressed hours so that way I get the pleasure of spoiling my grandson one day a week and childcare for my daughter will only cost her three days.* (Leicester aged 45-59)

As some of the quotations above suggest, most of these women desired to remain 'work orientated' across the different stages of their lives, and this had influenced their choice of employment in the local authority sector. The most important reason given for the sector being their 'employer of choice' was an appreciation that the working patterns and arrangements on offer could accommodate 'real lives'.

*Flexibility is important - 14 years ago it was because of childcare responsibilities, it's now because of elderly relative responsibilities... and I know that a lot of private sector employers have developed their flexible working arrangements, but at the time that I wanted to go back to work, 14 years ago, Wakefield MDC was the best option and that was it really - I didn't look beyond that.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

## Summary

The study data provides evidence of women's commitment to paid employment and their determination to develop and progress in the workplace. It allows us to understand what motivates women to move between phases in their employment history when they are 'work orientated' (Hakim's term), to phases where they chose to prioritise family commitments. However, even when prioritising family and caring, these women in jobs with career potential continue to aspire to perform well at the level they have achieved, to enjoy their work and to derive personal satisfaction from it. As qualitative data in the next section show, it is very demotivating and frustrating if they find that this is not possible because of structural constraints which limit their progression, or cultural expectations which undermine their status when they become 'working mothers'. Far from voluntarily giving up the competition to advance, women are fighting hard to maintain their credibility and to remain in contention.

## 4 Working Hours

### Factors influencing women's career decisions

In this section, we show it is not only women's personal preferences which can act barriers to their progression, but also the nature of work-time regimes and the promotion ceilings which are upheld through the daily practices and managerial cultures embedded in each organisation.

#### *Organisational theory*

Important structural factors explaining women's absence from senior level jobs include how work is organised, and the practicalities of combining career and family responsibilities (Grimshaw and Rubery 2001). Across the labour market, flexible working has struck a chord with business needs. More and more organisations have created part-time jobs and adopted part-time working arrangements as a way of responding to fluctuations in their output schedules, of providing services 24/7, and of competing for local labour (Tam 1997). Some employers have deliberately structured these jobs as low wage opportunities which will appeal to women with caring responsibilities, offering term-time working or part-time employment which reflects school times. Employer recognition of the costs of failing to retain trained and experienced staff has also encouraged employers to extend flexibility to full-time employees, in some cases offering compressed working weeks, annualised hours and flexi time (Kersley et al 2005). These arrangements are also becoming an important incentive when recruiting new employees, particularly when there is pressure on employers to keep wages down (Yeandle, Bennett et al 2006).

This trend, favouring women's retention within and entry to the labour market, has occurred against a backdrop of historical developments in which organisational practice has tended to privilege paid work and its demands on individuals over the unpaid work performed in the domestic sphere and at home. As others have shown, this 'elevation' of paid work over other forms of labour contributed in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the normalisation of 'full-time' hours – in effect a complete (day-time) commitment to paid employment:

*Part-time, as its name implied, was only part of a whole. To work part-time was to renege on an agreement to do a whole, complete job.*  
(Hochschild 1997:93)

The various ways in which organisational systems and processes (including reward systems, promotion criteria, training opportunities, and pay scales) uphold and reinforce the 'privileged' status of full-time work as the *normal* working-time regime have been demonstrated elsewhere (Crompton 1997). It has been shown that organisations tend to give preference to full-time employees and to privilege male employees, who are less likely to have both paid and unpaid work to attend to (Halford et al 1997). The resulting 'gendered substructure' of such organisations undervalues the contributions of many women, who have in any case traditionally been less involved in the labour market than men (Beechey and Perkins 1987:9).

A traditional site of male power, and in some cases of male exclusionary practice, management level jobs have for some time been identified as expressing organisational gendered relations in a marked and particularly visible form (Cockburn 1991). More recently, it has been argued that these senior jobs have been almost completely unaffected by the increasing use of flexible working arrangements, and in terms of the demands they make of postholders, remain largely unchanged (Junor 1998). The position often taken is that the tasks and roles associated with them make management jobs 'too important' to be performed on a part-time, flexible basis. Most organisations do not advertise any of their senior jobs on a part-time basis, and it is rare for organisations to encourage senior post holders to work part-time, as evidence in this study and in our other GELLM studies confirms (Grant et al 2006 and below in this report), and others have shown (Fried 1998). Furthermore, there is often an organisational cultural expectation that those who hold these posts should work 'whatever hours it takes' to complete the tasks.

These problems are particularly acute in the UK, where full-timers work the longest hours in Europe (Kodz et al 1998; Grimshaw and Rubery 2001; Cousins and Tang 2004), and where management roles often include extensive unpaid overtime (Harkness 1999). Men and women in management level jobs elsewhere have reported that this 'long hours' culture has increased in recent years (Heiler 1998) comprising the following dimensions:

- a preoccupation with 'face time' in the office, which is treated as evidence of 'commitment' and feeds into individual performance measures (Simpson 1998), although recent studies challenge a connection between long hours and productivity (Cooper 2005);
- a 'language' of management, which marks work effort beyond the working day as 'heroic' (Sheridan 2004);
- blurred boundaries between work and life, as technology allows the office to transfer to the home;
- the only time available to think/plan is outside of standard full-time hours (Worrall and Cooper 2000).<sup>35</sup>

In the public sector, new statutory requirements, in-sector restructuring and a focus on resource savings have brought important changes to local government employees. Participants in this study report increased workloads alongside static or reduced staffing levels, leading to even longer hours for senior level staff as they struggle to fulfil their job remits. Thus some managers report they can no longer control when and where they work in case they are needed by more senior managers. This issue has been highlighted by the columnist Madeleine Bunting (2004) as:

*It's not just about how long you are in the office - but the degree of pressure and stress while you are there. Work intensification, it's called, and Britain topped the European league in the 90s. It was a decade that saw a marked deterioration in Britain's quality of working life. The pace of work, pressure to perform and insecurity are contributing to a work culture that is exhausting, physically and emotionally.*

Acker (1998) has emphasised the difficulty of changing organisational practices and cultures, arguing that within large organisations, each team is situated in a larger web consisting of the local gendered practices of the organisation and its partner agencies, all of which, in turn, reflect the traditional gender relations of the local labour market through which organisations achieve their goals.

In this study, the four key factors which women identified as important to them when they were considering their next upward career move, describe the precise nature of the structural constraints they have perceived or experienced at first hand. They are:-

- Intensity / volume of work
- Long hours of work
- Qualification requirements
- Organisational culture and the conduct of staff at senior levels within the organisation

Here they drew on their observations of how managers in the tier above them behaved, and on their experiences of their current workload / pace of work and its fit with the rest of life.

## Intensity of work

### *Reasons for working intensively*

One important factor was the work pressure arising from heavier workloads, increasingly demanding performance targets, fewer staff and tighter budgets. Here pressure was exacerbated by considerable uncertainty about staffing and resources caused by organisational restructuring.

*We often struggle with the faster pace of change that's dictated by a central government - it's not about local politics. Procedures have changed every year for the last three years. This year it's been particularly bad. We've had four major releases in about four months, whereas we normally have two a year. (Leicester aged 35-44)*

Women described spending much of their time being drawn into other tasks that were not originally part of their remit.

*As a result of the last review, we all became managers of our buildings - but what was hidden was that we were also health and safety officers and premises officers, which was added on to your other job. You say, 'I don't want to spend my time checking out the building every day and reporting if somebody breaks the window etc, because*

<sup>35</sup> This was the reason most often given by managers in response to the question, 'Why do you work long hours?' *Quality of Life 2000 Survey of Managers' Changing Experiences*, UK Institute of Management and UMIST.

*the thing that I'm really good at is encouraging adults and children into using the services.' But all of these other things take over.* (Leicester aged 45-59)

More senior women, in the older age group, testified to the high intensity of work at their level, which produced situations where, as the officers ultimately responsible for service delivery, they had to step in to cover front-line counters when they were short staffed. As a result some women felt that the value they could bring to their roles and the overall potential performance of their team suffered.

*My job isn't structured round long and unsociable hours; it's structured round me being absolutely exhausted, and having done nothing but operational work during the day, instead of thinking strategically about the service. You only need a couple of people to be ill long term -holiday - training - whatever, and suddenly because the operation has to keep going you're doing their jobs as well as yours.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

A second set of comments concerned the way work was organised: The design and distribution of responsibilities across management positions meant work and work pressures were concentrated at particular levels in the organisation. Although a few participants felt that they could reduce the pressure of their workloads by managing their time better, in some organisations our participants raised concerns about a lack of organisational vision and prioritisation. Women felt that middle management positions were worst affected. Those in these roles described their 'balancing act' between undertaking strategic planning, delivering on operational targets and managing a team of people.

*We had a middle tier. The managers got rid of the section head tier and put in a management strata tier. So that one manager - first on the rung - is doing the jobs of the section head and the management, so that's a stressful position to be in.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

They pointed out that managers 'normalised' high workloads for themselves and passed this expectation down to their staff.

*Very often what happens is that if you're good at something they just pile on the work on you and then when you say, 'Well I think my job needs to be re-graded.' then it's, 'Go away' and it's not giving you any kind of real support to help you.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

*If I was to say to my manager, 'I've taken work home', I think he would respond by saying, 'Well, that's quite normal,' because he's always saying how he's 'up to here' with things, that things never stop. And I know he feels under pressure and he's got a huge workload.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

### **Impact on individuals**

A further concern related to the impact on families, personal relationships, social lives and community activities: the constant pressure on women at work left them feeling drained. Those with families stressed the negative impact on their home situation.

*I want to be able to give my children my love, time and support but also give my job my all and sometimes end up exhausted as a result.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*My parents-in-law are old and ill, needing more support. It's coming to the point where I have started to consider whether I need to reduce my working hours as I cannot deal with this extra pressure.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I work very well at a high stress level, but that's not good, obviously, for a family life. So that commute [home] actually enables me to wind down and get into family mode. Because there's only myself and my daughter, so there's nobody else there to take a backlash.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

They were also worried about their health. Although only a few women in this study attributed periods of ill health to the pressures they experienced at work, there is much supporting research and attention at national level on this issue<sup>36</sup>.

*Your expertise and the value you add is just getting squeezed up more and more. There's a list of things to do and you do it. At times I feel so demotivated that I started to come down sick now and I just don't want to come in to*

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<sup>36</sup> Health and Safety Executive, DTI and ACAS (undated) Work related Stress: A Guide. Implementing a European Social Partner Agreement.

*work. I used to be incredibly driven and seriously achievement orientated but I just feel like a cog in the wheel.*  
(Leicester aged 45-59)

Working up against the clock reduced the women's enjoyment of being at work and affected their motivation and job satisfaction. They explained that they felt unable to spend time on creative thinking and communication with colleagues. The social interaction at work was an important reason why some women continued in their jobs.

*I very rarely get the opportunity to do anything proactive, this recent piece of work I've done was the first proactive piece of work that I've done for several months. Most of my job is fire fighting or maintaining what we've got*  
(Leicester aged 45-59)

*Look at our Heads of Service, the things they have to put up with. There's just all this hassle from elected members, from service managers. It's not just about the number of hours that you are working, it's about actually being able to enjoy those hours and not spending them in a permanent argument.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

Intense workloads can act as a trigger for women to look for alternative employment within the local authority sector at a similar level that is better resourced and hence less pressured.

*The reason for going for another job is because I've got to that point where I said - no more! They can't keep giving me more and more. This job came up I looked at it I thought it's actually easier - it's a whole team delivering what I'm delivering on my own at the moment, that's it, I'm going.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

### **Disproportionate impact of pressure on part time employees**

Women working part time hours, who also tended to be those with children, were particularly affected by the pressure brought about by the size of their workload. They often felt no action was taken to align their workloads with their shorter hours, and that deadlines for work and meetings were set on the assumption that everyone works full-time, leaving part-time employees having to catch up in their non-work time.

*I got an e-mail two days before I was going on holiday about a report, asking 'Can I have it in two days?' I got it done, but I'm actually supposed to work 5 hours a day and I had to work longer hours to get it completed. They don't take into consideration if you're part time.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

Women put in this position felt very reluctant to refuse a senior person's request because of the damage they felt it could do to their career. They also felt they had to work harder to demonstrate their commitment.

*I don't like to say no - perhaps that's my fault. But then I don't want it to hinder me. Because they might think - she's part time, she can't deliver what she's supposed to deliver.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

*I don't get to do flexi, because I only work Monday to Thursday, but I've always been asked to come in on a Friday for team leader meetings, and you say, 'Well I don't actually work Fridays' - 'Well you are a team leader now, you have to come in, if you don't come in, I'll expect that you don't want the job.'* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*What really frustrates me is that everyone can go on conferences, day trips and have smoking breaks and tea and coffee breaks, and yet when colleagues occasionally, once every two months, come over just for a chat at my desk, my manager is like, 'Don't you think you better be getting on with some work?' I feel I'm being treated differently.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

Other research (Yeandle et al 2006) has shown those working part time may increase their productivity as they become more task focused; they are unable to extend the working day if tasks are left undone.

*I know when I dropped my hours I shocked myself. I look back and think, 'What did I do before? I do the same now, and I don't work as long.'* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

Perversely, although a number of women in this study had reduced their hours and halted their career development to give priority to other parts of their lives, they had subsequently discovered that this had increased the pressure they felt at work.

*You actually have got to have your head down constantly and be getting on with it - and you'll look around, and there's people in the office who are there full time who can afford to go off and have tea breaks - so that's the downside of working part time.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

### **Impact of work intensity on women's career choices**

Some women had decided to reduce their level of responsibility to allow them to function effectively at work, albeit in a job which challenged them less and was a backward step in career terms.

*I realised that the pace I was operating at before my child was a pace I couldn't keep up with a baby. She's 3 now, but I've taken that choice to stand back. I know I felt grateful when my boss said that I could go job share.*  
(Sandwell aged 35-44)

Many women indicated that when considering an upward career move, they weighed up the likely impact of the anticipated workload on the quality of their work life against other parts of their lives, and made a decision about what they would gain.

*Before [having children] I wanted to get as high as possible. Now I just want reasonable pay, but I will not take on excessive pressure.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

The amount of support women received from family was important in how confident they were about being able to cope when taking on a higher level job.

*Work takes up a huge amount of my time. I wouldn't have it any other way; I like to work - but I don't want serious grief, my partner has serious grief, and we couldn't both be in that position.*  
(Leicester aged 35-44)

### **Hours of work**

#### **Traditional working patterns**

In each organisation we studied, the local working-time patterns and the associated culture were other key factors in women's choices about whether to advance their careers. There was widespread agreement, across all age groups, that the more senior you become, the greater the expectation that you would work full time contractual hours. This was underpinned by an assumption that to successfully manage the output of other staff, or service delivery, required officers to be present and available each day of the week for the length of the normal working day – the traditional 9-5 working pattern.

Organisations which have moved their emphasis from hours of labour paid for, to outputs achieved, are much more likely to have also rejected the traditional 9-5 model of working<sup>37</sup>. Rather than a culture in which individuals have to be watched and checked, an output-focused culture works on the basis of trust between employee and manager at all levels, and invokes an attitude that any working arrangement is possible as long as the organisation's delivery is not negatively affected or even improves.

In these authorities, despite having the policies on paper, and many women accessing part time work in lower grades, there is a 'cut off point' for middle and senior managers.

*I think part time working in this authority is quite easy up to a certain grade. It's almost seen as acceptable at a lower grade, but the more senior you get the more there is this expectation that you will be there every day and you will put in the hours. 8.00 until 8.00.*  
(Leicester aged 35-44)

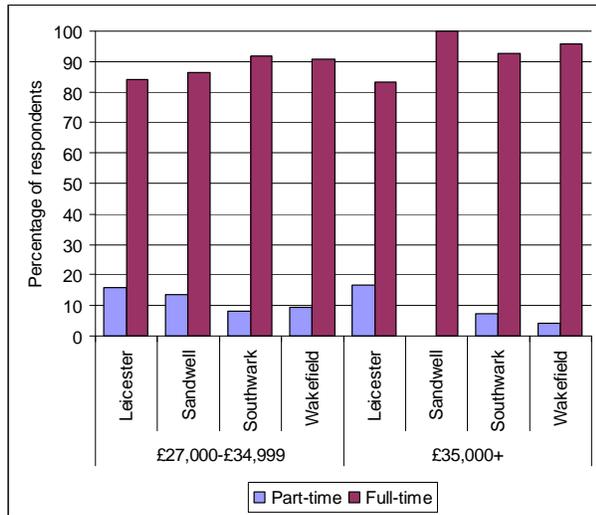
As Figure 7 shows, in our study fewer than 17% of women earning above £27,000 were contracted to work 30 hours or less a week. This illustrates very clearly that as women progress to higher grades (earning higher salaries) their level of part-time working decreases. The normalisation of full-time work at senior levels leaves women with constrained but clear choices. Women whose personal circumstances allowed continued to work as many hours as they were able. Those who could not realise that, in choosing part time hours, they were also choosing to halt their career progression, and some regretted the loss of status this entailed.

*It's almost like you're not a proper planner, you're only part time. And it's one of the reasons why I've never gone part time, because you'd worry that once you go part time, it's very difficult then to come back full time and get that respect from your colleagues.*  
(Sandwell aged 25-34)

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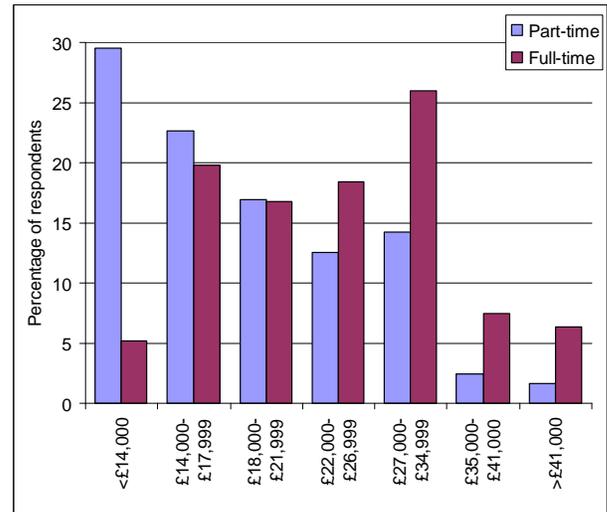
<sup>37</sup> See Employers and Work Life Balance, employer case studies <http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/>

**Figure 7 Women in upper salary bands by part-time/full-time contractual hours**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

**Figure 8 Women's FTE salary by part-time/full-time contractual hours: all local authorities**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

*I'm just about to go on maternity leave and I'm not clear at all about how things will change. I imagine that coming back part time will block me immediately in terms of career, because service managers don't work part time or job share, so that will be it.*  
(Leicester aged 35-44)

*I was pregnant for the second time and it was, it was getting stressful, so I chose to move. Now, looking back, I made a big mistake, because when I moved, I was moved in with a manager who then started to treat me like an admin person.*  
(Sandwell aged 35-44)

**Disproportional impact on women with care responsibilities**

Women's choice of working hours is closely related to their different life stages. Our survey shows the impact of the presence of children on women's working hours (Figure 9). Very few women up to the age of 45 without children work part-time hours. The increase in part-time work of older women without children may be explained by caring responsibilities or a desire to gradually 'ease out' of employment.

Adherence to the traditional working day of 9am to 5pm affected women with children who were working full-time. They were fearful of losing the flexibility that they currently enjoyed at a lower grade, if they were successful in getting a more senior position.

*It depends on flexibility. My biggest worry at the moment - before I accept [a higher level job], is I have to say, 'Will you let me drop my daughter off at school at 9 o'clock? Which means that I won't start with you until quarter to 10, but I will work through into the early evening etc - that's fine - but I need to start at quarter to 10 rather than at half past 8.'*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I would worry that if I progressed to a senior level I couldn't come in at 9.30, I'd have to be there at 9.00 on the dot every day, and that would obviously affect my personal life and how I could sort that out.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

As Figure 10 shows, a much higher proportion of women with children have accessed their authority's flexible working arrangements (compressed working hours, flexi time, annualised hours, home working). Those who had negotiated flexibility about when they delivered their full-time hours appreciated this arrangement and stressed that it had been achieved against normal policies, and with their line manager's exceptional support.

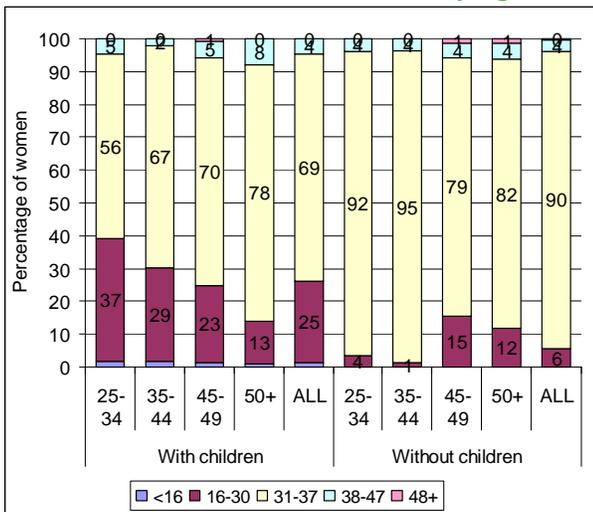
*I'm very fortunate, my manager allows me not to follow the flexi scheme to the letter. For example, on Friday I work late but because I usually pick up my daughter from school and take her to my mum to look after her. I'm a single parent too. I'm allowed leave and have my lunch break between 3.45pm and 4.45pm. That wouldn't be the case corporately, but I don't see why it can't be. I don't see why we have to have lunch between 12.00 and 2.00*

for example there's a lot more scope for flexibility and I think the authority could do a lot more in that area.  
 (Leicester aged 45-59)

Whilst feeling fortunate to have been allowed flexible full time hours, a few women highlighted that there could also be a hidden price to pay.

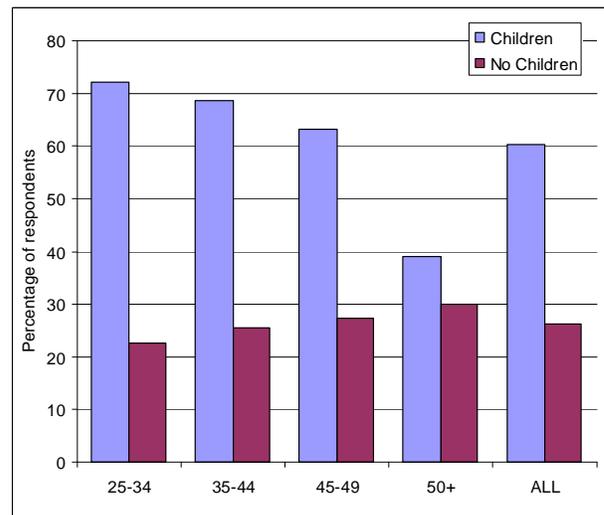
I do full time over four days and it works very well and my manager's been very supportive. I don't know if it's in payback, but certainly in terms of general career opportunities, there's actually disparities between grades... there are other people who have the same job description but are on a different grade and that can be quite frustrating  
 (Southwark aged 25-34)

**Figure 9 Distribution of contracted hours for women with and without children by age**



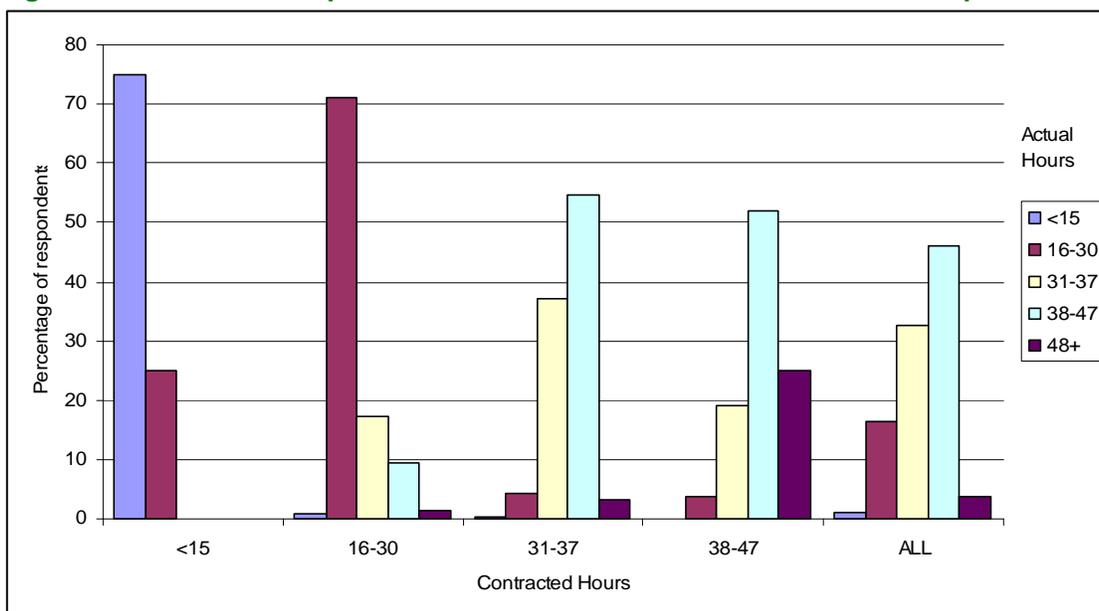
Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

**Figure 10 Women with access to flexible working, by age and by children in the household**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

**Figure 11 Women respondents' contracted hours versus actual hours per week**

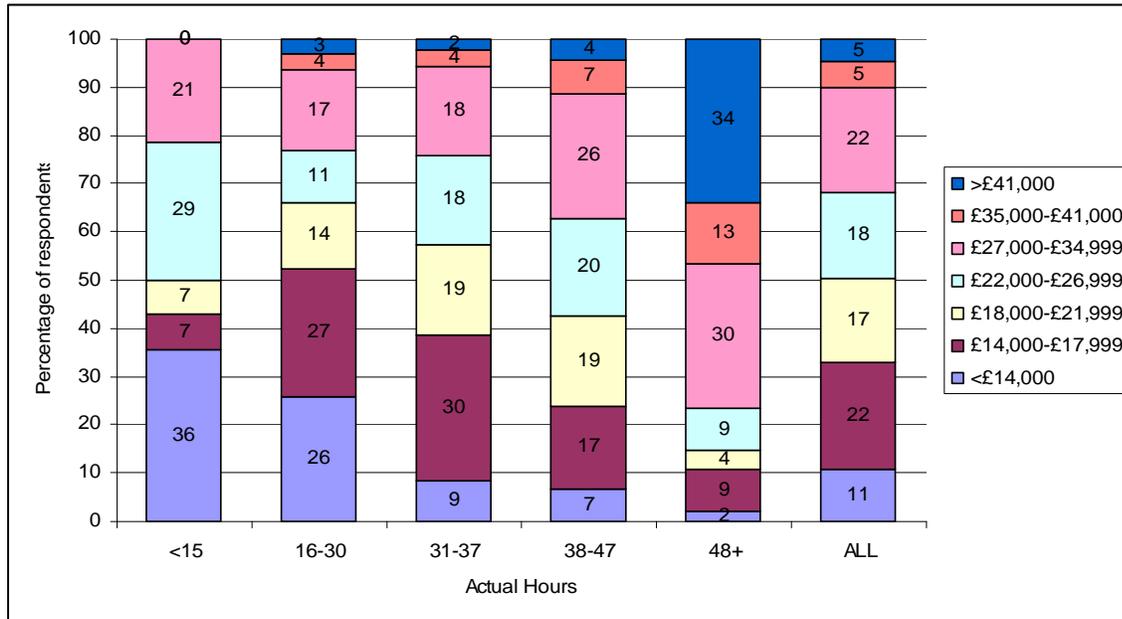


Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

### Long Hours

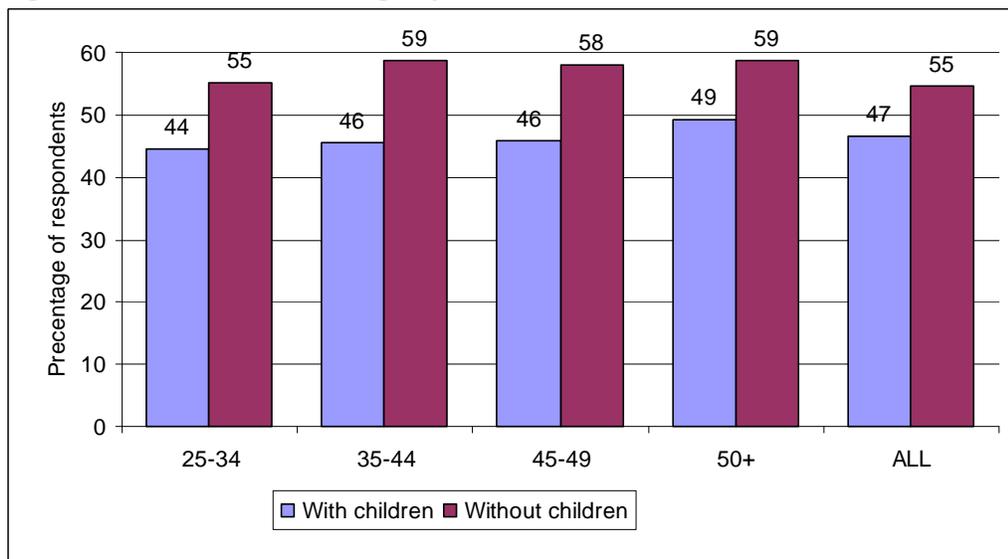
In our study a significant proportion of female employees were working unpaid overtime. Over 800 women who replied to the survey had a contract of 31-37 hours per week, and, of these, 55% reported that they routinely work 38-47 hours per week, while 3% work more than 48 hours per week (Figure 11). This finding is consistent with the TUC's research (2006) which found that in 2004/05, the percentage of public sector employees working unpaid overtime was 25% - around 300,000 women. 65% of the employees working unpaid overtime were women, in line with the share of women in the public sector workforce as a whole.

**Figure 12 Women respondents' actual hours per week, by salary**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

**Figure 13 Women working beyond contracted hours with or without children by age**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

Women working the longest hours are concentrated in the higher salary bands. Of those working over 48 hours a week 30% earn £27,000-34,999, 13% earn £35,000-41,000, and 34% earn over £41,000 (Figure 12).

*It seems like there's a level of management where work has to be your life. It's that mid level manager that does hours and hours of work and then you get past that and suddenly you get to cruise again. (Leicester aged 25-34)*

More detailed examination of these data (Figure 13) for women who work beyond their contractual hours, with and without children, shows that both these groups routinely work substantial amounts of unpaid overtime. Women without children are about 10% more likely than women with children to work beyond contract, in all age groups.

Women in senior positions (often working very long hours), had not made use of flexible employment policies, although this was given as one of the most important reasons for working in the local authority sector by women in the focus groups. Among those earning £27,000-34,999 and working 38-47 hours a week, over 60% had not used any of their organisation's flexible employment policies. Of those earning £35,000-40,999 working these hours, 63% had not used any of these policies, and this was also true of over 10% of those who worked more than 48 hours a week.

### **Reasons for working long hours**

Women in our study told us about their strong commitments - to local people, their colleagues and their organisation - which prompted them to work beyond their contracted hours. They gained great satisfaction from serving the public, in some cases contributing to change over many years. For other women, their commitment arose out of a desire to enhance their career prospects by impressing their managers.

Many senior women felt responsible, as managers, for shielding the more junior women in their team from long hours, often at the expense of their own work life balance. Commitment to 'keep the service going' in a context of inadequate resource or staff shortages was also mentioned.

*I am committed to doing extra hours when required to, but actually then I'm not allowed to take it back, because it is not allowed to affect the service.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

Some women described putting in longer hours as a way of proving their commitment to their managers, especially when employed part-time.

*I do sometimes think that women have to over compensate. I feel this personally sometimes - because I've got children - and that if I'm not staying late when there's a major deadline to hit, I do have feelings of guilt, and this isn't fair.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

Women described an informal understanding that, above a certain grade, people were '*paid to do the job rather than paid by the hour*'. This involved working over and above full time contracted hours. This organisational expectation was exerted at more senior levels - women felt that part of the deal in accepting a senior job was agreeing to sign up to ownership and to constant vigilance about the business. This meant accepting any hours, without dissent. In other words, that there was no longer any flexibility; work would always come first. In reporting her experience of deputising for her manager, one woman described this unspoken agreement as intimidating. This kind of experience reinforced the perception among our participants that senior jobs cannot be done part-time.

*Flexible working policies for me are important for everyone else wrapped round me, and I do encourage people to go home early, spend time with their children. But I don't apply the same policy to me... I don't see how I can - the expectation above me [is for me] to be there constantly is I think worrying, really, because if you have a normal life you just couldn't possibly do that.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*The main frustration for me is that senior managers don't benefit from work life balance, we don't do flexi, we're expected to go to evening meetings in our own time - and we go to a lot of them - and I find that exhausting. I understand that at a senior level you need to be flexible, but they are long hours and we could benefit from a little bit of work life balance and they'd probably end up with a healthier lot.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

### **Impact on women's career decisions**

In reviewing their options and prospects women tried to gauge whether the workload of a more senior post could be contained within the designated working hours, and how far it would spill over into non-work time, this was true of women with and without dependent children:

*If I took on something else [higher position] I would barely see the children, so you have to say - well I'm not going to do it until they get to an age where they are more independent.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*Frankly I don't want to get any higher in this organisation because it's bad enough at my level - I'm PO2<sup>38</sup> and when I look at my manager and his role, things like attending committee meetings, I don't want to be attending committee meetings at 5.00pm to 8.00pm, I'm just not interested in that.* (Leicester aged 45-59)

Consequently, some women had 'ruled out' the option of further progression, even though they believed themselves capable of it:

*I've considered the hours sometimes. I look at it and think, 'Oh god, no, I'm going to have to do loads more hours!'* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I see a lot of heads of service who are working 12 hours every day. I mean, do you want that kind of life? I think you've got to choose. And it's so unfair, because some people may want to do that level of responsibility, but they can't commit all those hours.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

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<sup>38</sup> Principal Officer Grade 2

## 5 Career development and organisational culture

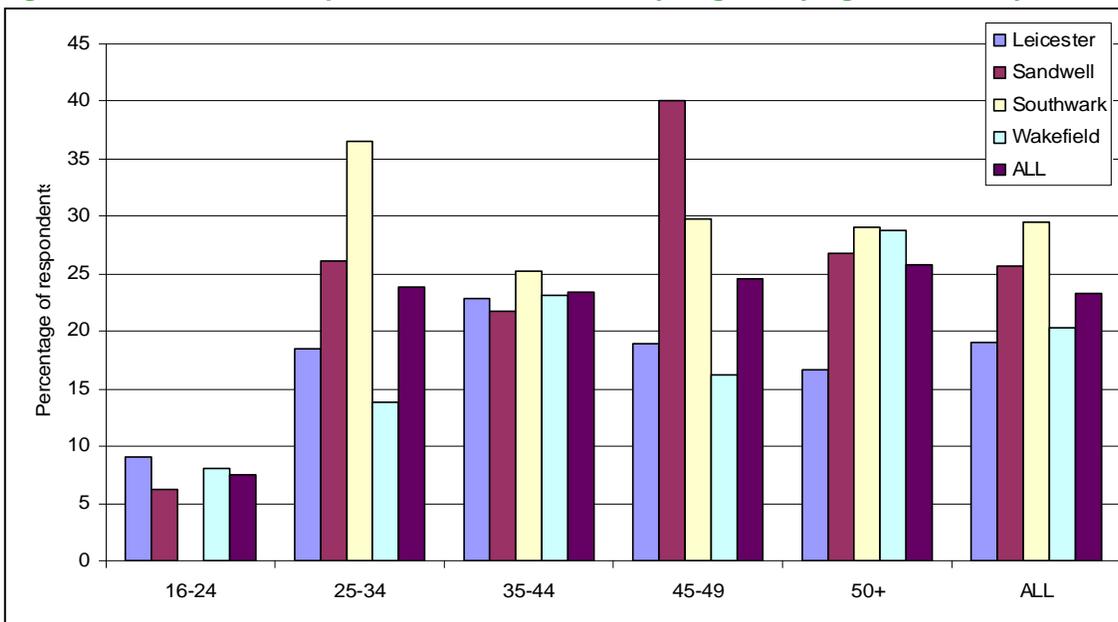
### Study and Training

Finding time to prepare for the 'next jump up' was a significant barrier for many younger women in some of the authorities we studied. The effort and processes involved in acquiring the qualifications and skills needed to work at the next level was another important factor in their decisions about progression.

#### Qualifications

When it came to promotion or career development, there was a strong view that having a university degree was the only robust 'proof' of ability to work at managerial level which mattered within these organisations. Women aged 25-34 employed by the London Borough of Southwark were the highest qualified of those in this age group in our sample (Figure 14). Consequently they were also the least dissatisfied by the 'degree bar' discussed below. The comparatively lower proportions of women graduates in each age group in Leicester City Council's workforce may be explained by the low skill base of Leicester's local labour market in general (Buckner et al 2004, 2005).

**Figure 14 Women respondents with a university degree, by age and locality**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

Many of the women who took part in the research felt very frustrated by the degree requirement, and many questioned it as a valid basis for judging progression potential, especially in the context of delivering and planning front-line services.

*I haven't got a degree, I've got 16 years' experience in the childcare sector and the early years sector - and I still think now, every time I have an appraisal, it's pushed. 'You need to do a degree, you're not going to get any further unless you do a degree', and I find that quite unfair.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

*I think I've got the skills that they want on a day to day basis. What is a degree going to prove? It's not like social work, where you've got to have particular qualifications to be able to legally do the job.* (Wakefield aged 25-34)

Older women felt that the changing emphasis on qualifications discriminated against their work histories.

*An older woman, we may not necessarily have had the opportunity to have the type of qualification that Southwark is now stipulating that we need to have, in order to have an advancement in your career. They negate the years and wealth of experience that we have - they don't recognise that.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

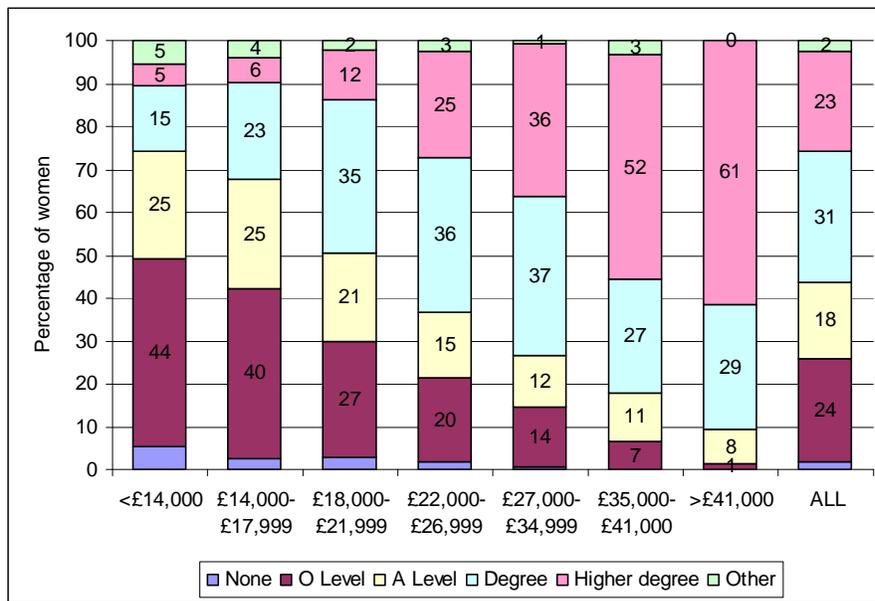
Others felt that being a graduate was less about proving ability as about restricting access to professional or senior level positions. Hence it was a ‘cultural’ requirement, needed to ‘fit in’ with colleagues working at a certain level or field.

*It was perceptions, people think, ‘Well, if she’s got a degree, she must be good.’ I am exactly the same person as before, just [different] on paper. There is this little club, like the old boys’ network, there’s a degree network, and that was the reason I did it. And it opened doors.*  
(Sandwell aged 35-44)

*I was the only training officer who wasn’t qualified. My background is in [a different area], so I had that particular qualification. All the training officers were qualified, and they were real snobby about the fact that they’d got this degree. So, if you know the rules of the game, you can play any game, and I believe that about educational attainment as well.*  
(Sandwell aged 35-44)

Figure 15 suggests the point at which the ‘degree bar’ comes into operation. Over half of all women in our survey earning £22,000-26,999 had a degree or a higher degree, increasing to 73% of women earning £27,000-£34,999, and 79% of women in the salary band above (52% of these with a higher degree).

**Figure 15 Women respondents' salary by level of highest qualification**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

Some women felt de-motivated by the requirement for specific qualifications to attain higher level jobs, especially when it was the sole criterion which prevented them from progressing:

*It can knock confidence when you know you could do the job, but that without a degree certificate you will be rejected at the first hurdle.*  
(Sandwell aged 35-44)

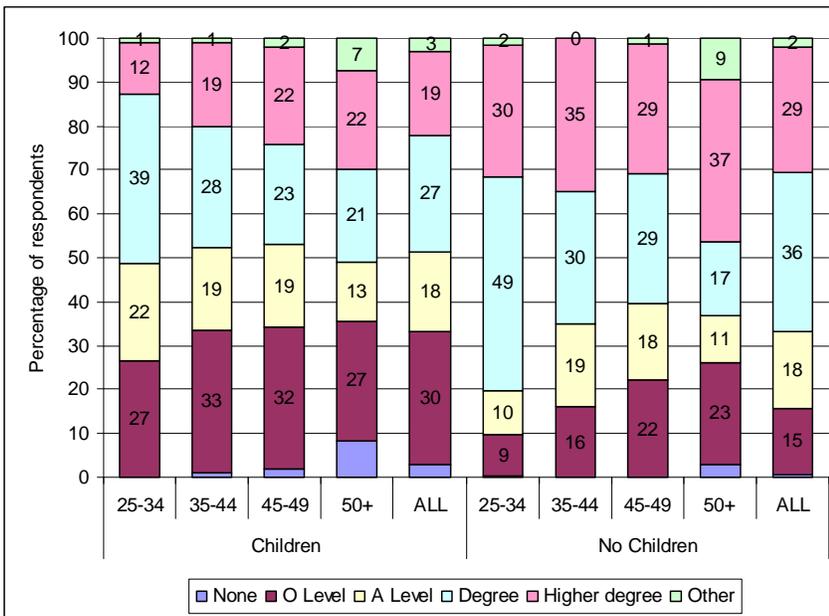
*When my own manager left a couple of years ago I knew I could do that job. I’d been performing 90% of the functions, but I was not allowed to apply for it because they put in a specific qualification that I did not have.*  
(Leicester aged 45-59)

**Disproportionate impact on women with childcare/caring responsibilities**

Obtaining a qualification while working represents a significant challenge, and can be a barrier to progress. As women’s experiences in the study demonstrated, a high level of commitment was needed, and many women had made considerable personal sacrifices to achieve their goal. Commitment centred in part on the time they needed to spend to obtain a degree qualification, in terms of the years needed to complete the course, and the consequent delay they faced in moving up within the organisation. They also commented on the time taken out of each day to study. Data from our survey shows that women with children aged 25-34 were less likely to have a degree or higher degree than their counterparts without

children. Women aged 35 and above with children were less likely than their counterparts to have a higher degree (Figure 16).

**Figure 16 Women’s respondents highest level of qualification by age and with/without children**



Source: GELLM survey of women employed in local authorities, 2005-2006

Making the decision to study was difficult, and especially problematic for women with caring responsibilities, whose daily ‘free’ time was already in very short supply.

*A lot of jobs further up are asking for management qualifications, and I think in Wakefield that it disadvantages women, especially those of us with children, because I keep looking at doing a MA etc. - and with the hours I work, the amount of unsociable hours I work, plus having 2 young daughters, then I cannot do the studying on top, it's just too much. But that's then limiting my progression.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

The difficulty of finding time to study did not only affect those with children; women with older relatives in need of care also highlighted the impossibility of fitting in study outside of work time. Those who had not ruled out study felt the only solution was to sacrifice their personal time – sometimes damaging their own health and wellbeing as they tried to continue to juggle many competing demands.

*The final year [of my degree] was the hardest, because any leave I took was to study. So I never had any time for myself or for my family. I became so run down because I was only getting 3-4 hours sleep each night that I just kind of collapsed, and the doctor said, 'Well, you're going to have some time off now'.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

Women in the older age groups working at more senior levels were less likely to share these concerns about a ‘degree bar’. It was also easier for some of them to fit study in with work commitments, as their caring responsibilities were not as demanding. For a few older women, any form of training presented a difficulty, due to the intensity of their workloads which involved more pressing priorities, so that they postponed training organised in work time. Some women had tried to deal with the pressures of the working week by choosing distance learning courses which they hoped would fit into spare time at the weekend. But distance learning presented its own challenge; that of maintaining momentum and interest in the study.

*I wonder just how many people have had to cancel training sessions because somebody was off work and you've got to cover - it happens all the time.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

*I am still studying for my final professional qualification as we speak, which is ridiculous. And I am finding, in my present job, I get home exhausted because it's very pressurised, and because I have like nearly an hour's drive backwards and forwards each day.* (Sandwell aged 45-59)

Women who had achieved a degree level qualification supported by their organisations reported that it had increased their confidence in their own ability, even if the degree subject did not relate very closely to their daily work. Many women admitted to having little confidence in their skills and were easily deterred from applying for senior jobs by job criteria which they could not quite fulfil.

### **Proven experience**

The survey showed a high proportion of respondents in each authority had received training provided or paid for by their organisation (91% of the total sample). 46% overall felt that this training had enabled them to advance their career. Many women in the focus groups felt that their authority had a better track record of investing in its staff than other local employers, contributing to it being their employer of choice. However, many women aged under 45 were frustrated that their development and training opportunities tended to focus on improving performance in their current job, rather than offering the scope to discuss ways in which they could prepare for the next step up.

*Although we do have appraisals the focus is mainly on delivering what there is in the work programme, and although there is a little bit at the end which is your personal development plan, it just seems to be, it doesn't take very long to cover that area.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I've had mainly IT training here and most of its been almost like ticking the box thing, so it's not really made a difference career wise*  
(Leicester aged 25-34)

Women spoke very positively of the career progression opportunities which secondments or the opportunity to 'act up' to a higher position could offer. These opportunities acted as a bridge to develop the skill set needed for management jobs. Drawing on survey about changes in respondents' salaries, may give an indication of the extent to which women have accessed 'acting up' positions in our sample. This was highest in Leicester at 11% (8% in Sandwell, 7% in both Southwark and Wakefield)

*If you start to think about moving to service director level you'd be looking at taking over a whole range of services, some of which I know very little about and some of which I know absolutely nothing about, so how do you make that step from being a specialist to being a manager.*  
(Leicester aged 35-44)

*I think there's a real sort of feeling here that you're just expected to know how to manage when you get to a certain level, even if you've not had any experience or training, nobody actually trains you to be a manager.*  
(Leicester aged 35-44)

The only negative aspect of secondments which women identified was that they did not guarantee long term benefit; some women had returned to their previous position and faced uncomfortable relationships with colleagues and managers who felt threatened by their new skills and knowledge.

*I did that secondment and gained a lot of respect through that, a lot of contacts etc., and I went back to my own job - and that has been part of the frustration, in that people still see me as being part of the strategy team. Externally people still come to me. Now the problem I face then was, I feel as if I've been seen as a threat to the men above me.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

## **Organisational Cultures**

### **Managers as gate keepers**

Women tended to see managers as the gatekeepers to training and career development opportunities and promotion. They gave the following reasons for what in some cases they saw as managers' constraining behaviour.

In the context of resource limitations, they thought that some managers were reluctant to develop people, fearing a detrimental effect on the service and the rest of the team during their release, and if they were promoted. A few of the women, who themselves were managers, admitted to feeling this way.

*We don't train people to progress, because if I train staff to progress they're going to leave and then I'd be short staffed.*  
(Leicester aged 45-59)

*You have to look at prioritising training that is appropriate to the post that people presently hold. We've actually written a training policy now saying that's what we'll do. Anybody who is looking at their future career development, we cannot afford to support them.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

Women on temporary contracts or in departments under threat of reorganisation felt particularly overlooked for training opportunities. Uncertainty about management arrangements affected decisions being taken about training requests.

*It's difficult when you're on a temporary contract because you're not quite sure how far to push it when asking for training because I felt I don't really know the boundaries.* (Southwark aged 25-34)

*We just sit there in the crossfire thinking, 'Who is my manager?' I have a formal manager and an informal manager and a project manager and another manager who used to be my manager but isn't really now.* (Leicester aged 25-34)

A few women acknowledged that their managers with very heavy workloads did not have time to support staff adequately.

*Not all managers are willing to push you and even pinpoint your main abilities. I think a lot of the time they don't have time. They leave it down to supervisors who haven't got as much vision.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

Younger women tended to see higher level culture as bound by rank and notions of seniority. They felt their age put them at a double disadvantage. They were angered by the lack of respect afforded to them, and were ready to challenge ageist stereotypes.

*I've covered meetings at a strategic level in the past and have gone into the meeting and actually been quite intimidated, not just by the men, but there at that level. I have actually been virtually ignored or not acknowledged at all.* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

*In meetings [male senior managers] give you assuring smiles like - it must be so overwhelming for us support officers, all these little women being there in the room with all these senior men.* (Leicester aged 25-34)

These women described a 'dead man's shoes' situation, where the status quo was preserved by the low turnover of staff. Many felt they did not have anywhere to progress to, and that the prevailing culture discouraged change.

*People have been in the positions here for so long, people have not moved around. When I got the job last year with the team, they just saw me as a threat. It was like two males in there seeing me as a threat. They're sort of fixed in the way they do things; 'We don't change, we've always done it historically this way.' terms like that, and new ideas are not taken on board.* (Leicester aged 34-44)

*There's always the wise person in the corner who's seen it all and done it all and tells you. And you think, 'Oh no I am going change it!' I think we must all go through that process of your energy being zapped and motivation going and then you turn into that person in the corner.* (Leicester aged 25-34)

Some women felt that training opportunities and progression depended on the quality of their relationship with a manager, which might or might not be to their advantage. They described the process by which a manager sponsored a more junior colleague's progression as 'grooming'.

*The training I've asked my manager for, they've always said 'Yes', and at the same time I've been approached by my manager saying, 'Do you think you'd be interested in doing this training?' So it's been a two way thing.* (Southwark aged 25-34)

*Unless your face fits that job you can be stuck for years, and it has nothing to do with talent, or your potential, what you can offer or anything, it's just you're stuck* (Leicester aged 45-59)

*It's about grooming. It makes a huge difference and people are chosen and are groomed to go on - but if you're not chosen, then there are walls there and barriers.* (Southwark aged 35-44)

They were not confident that equal opportunities policies were sufficient to ensure fair treatment, and in some cases considered that they provided the means to shut off opportunities to an open field of candidates

*The manager will write the job description to favour a particular person as much as possible. There are ways to follow the [equal opportunities] policy but actually make it so that no-one else has got a chance anyway, and that does happen.* (Leicester aged 25-34)

### **Male attitudes**

The difficulties women reported about the ways they were managed were compounded in different degrees in all the authorities studied by an overarching culture which 'favoured' men. Some women described it as the 'instant effect of being a male,' which opened access to knowledge and improved men's ability to do well and get noticed.

*Walking into meetings, I feel like I do get treated slightly different to the male colleague who is doing the same job. I had to cover one of his meetings once - I felt like I was being treated like the admin assistant taking the minutes, whereas I think when he goes in there, they respect his opinion a bit more.* (Wakefield aged 25-34)

*If you're a new [male] employee... you got almost this kind of instant access to this club - and you got this mentoring and all this background information. So you knew where things were and how things ticked. But I think it's taken me all this time to settle into the department.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

The women's descriptions of their managers' behaviour suggested a lack of understanding about family lives and commitments in some, and, in others, discriminatory attitudes towards female employees. Women reported that these attitudes were very rarely expressed openly. For example in the area of training:

*It wasn't until having a child that these issues came up. Now I don't have the same access to training, although that's not explicitly said. It's things that are said like, 'Your time is very precious now and we need to think very carefully about what training you do.' and 'That's on a day that you're not at work, so perhaps it will come up again.'* (Leicester aged 35-44)

*They would only do the advanced course one day a fortnight, but my manager said 'I can't afford you out of the office one day a fortnight at this particular time, go and find something else'. Having young children, you can't go and find something else, because I don't have enough hours in the day as it is.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

On matters of promotion and women's ambition:

*We've got a member of staff on maternity leave at the moment, and I feel that he has said things to me that he shouldn't have said to anybody, never mind about one of my colleagues. It would make me extremely nervous about going and telling him I was pregnant. He doesn't believe that her job is a job that can be done part time, but because of all the schemes that are running within the council he is going to have to accept it, so he doesn't portray those attitudes, but you know he's got them. I think there is quite a lot of that here.* (Wakefield aged 25-34)

*If they've got children it's almost like it's perceived that their work is a job, and not a career because they've got something more important in their lives. I do feel that for a lot of women who have children, it's perceived that they are not taking this seriously. It's always assumed that they're not ambitious, and I find it really offensive.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

Women had different ways of coping with these sexist attitudes. Some challenged them openly, others downplayed or even hid their family responsibilities.

*They know that I'm a single parent and that I haven't got a partner, and one guy turns around to me and says, 'So who's looking after your child tonight then?' and I said, 'Don't worry, I'll make my arrangements. Who's looking after your kids anyway?'* (Southwark aged 45-59)

*I've got a child and there were certain sort of comments from quite senior members of staff. I'm now pregnant again and I just don't want to tell my managers at all, because there are opportunities over the next few months in the department and I just think as soon as I say something [I] be ruled out.* (Southwark aged 25-34)

### **Senior women's experience of male attitudes**

Senior women had developed strategies to deal with the male dominated environments they were working in. They did not lack the confidence to challenge the 'boys club' culture, but felt weary from having to do so. Some described occasions when they had felt patronised by male colleagues, and explained the strategies they had devised to 'face down' comments.

*We were coming back from a meeting with a particular department. It went well, and as we were walking back, one of my colleagues patted me on the shoulder and said, 'Good girl you shone the socks off them.'* (Southwark aged 45-59)

*You sit in a meeting with senior managers and you will be the only woman in the room, and they will turn to you and say something like 'who is going to be mother and serve tea?' Now I don't do that, I always go - 'I don't drink tea or coffee, you'll get a crap cup of tea from me'... and now they know not to ask.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

Some believed that their contribution would never be properly valued, as male colleagues had different criteria for judging members of the team.

*I manage processes and large budgets. I have quality technical skills, but that's not as important as managing a few blokes sat in the bars.* (Wakefield aged 45-59)

In some organisations the 'senior boys club' spilled out into non-work settings. The senior women we spoke to felt excluded from or repelled by this, or could not find time to participate in a set of social relationships which they knew were a necessary part of 'getting on'.

*I know a lot of the men go to the pub on Friday and they're meeting people from different departments and that's how they get themselves known - but if you not into that kind of thing, or golfing, then it's difficult to network.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

*If I were to move up higher up in the service ... there are a number of people who are part of who appear to be part of a club, like a network. They pat each other on the back. It's mostly male as well, so I would be expected to become part of that ....I can take that or leave it really. I don't want to be a sheep that follows the Director around just to look good, and I know there are a lot of people who do that.* (Southwark aged 35-44)

### **Role models**

Women of all ages said there was a lack of female role models. They felt that some women in senior positions copied the behaviour of their male colleagues and could be the least supportive line managers.

*People who have reached high levels, director level or business manager level, most of them have been in the council a long time and are a certain type of female, hippyified...There is a lack of female role models in higher places who have come in because they're dynamic and excellent at their job.* (Southwark aged 25-34)

*Women in senior positions some of them seem to be figureheads and others... have discovered that to get ahead in Southwark requires you to act in a certain way and acting in that certain way tends to be sort of male orientated because 95% of the meetings that I go into are full of middle aged men.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

Black women spoke tellingly of a 'concrete ceiling'- they could not even look up and see successful black women operating at the highest levels of the authority. They were aware that their organisations had tried to address this with targeted initiatives, but were disappointed by a lack of results.

*In the department it's all white... There's this meeting that they have every single week and I'm the black woman there. It makes you think, 'Well where is the kind of succession planning around getting more representation around the table?' and it is like a little network and I've never felt part of it.* (Southwark aged 35-44)

*I worked in a very male dominated area and I was the only female and an Asian woman. I think I had my education there basically. But you learn to know your rights and you can stand up to it. But then if you do, you're treated as the problem and you're not supported by managers, then you will be the one who's ostracised - and it's really difficult.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

### **What maintains the organisational culture?**

Women with longer lengths of service suggested that these attitudes persisted because of the relatively static nature of the workforce, which allowed men who had worked for the organisation since leaving school at the age of 15 to rise 'inexorably' to senior positions. Others believed the departmentalised nature of their authority allowed inappropriate behaviour to go unchecked.

*I have a lot of respect for a lot of the female managers in the authority, there's very few I would go - 'God how did they get their job, they're crap!' But the amount of men that I could say that about. There was this traditional culture within Wakefield years ago - we appointed managers for their technical knowledge, not for their management ability.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I'm OK if I keep my blinkers on. But when I look round and see the incompetence - mainly men who've been here since 1900 on huge salaries with no output. There's no way they would survive outside the sector.* (Sandwell aged 34-44)

*I think 15 years ago there was a tokenism towards women and they got to different parts of the organisation, we've had a male corporate directors board for years and I was amazed when I walked into that office the first time, this sea of white men sitting around whereas you walk into any other meeting in this council and you've got a mixed group of people.* (Leicester aged 45-59)

*In reorganisation, it's like moving dead chairs on the titanic, they just take away some chairs but the attitudes of the staff and the ingrained perspective remains* (Leicester aged 45-59)

They also considered that patriarchal attitudes in the wider local community were sometimes reflected in the democratic and public bodies and boards associated with their authority.

*There are, in some parts of the council, still those very traditional hierarchical cultures existing ...the new [senior management] team that came on to the council tried very much to change that management culture. There are some bits that hide in there, and just aren't affected by what's been going on.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*Male attitudes and patronage is a big one for me, trying to push things forward is a real battle ground because the chair partnership is a man, vice chair is a man. You look round the table at each of the senior groups and meetings and they're all men bar one or two women.* (Leicester aged 25-34)

### **Impact on women's career decisions**

Young women who placed greater reliance than any other age group on their manager's sponsorship and guidance were frustrated. Many believed that their potential had not be recognised by their managers or developed in a structured way. Older women spoke of being 'lucky' - appropriate opportunities had arisen for them in their section, at a point when they were ready to move on. Only a small number of more senior women felt that once you reach a certain level it is possible to create your own opportunities. Women remembered managers who had developed and supported them and tried to stick with them.

Some women feared the pressure to conform to the senior management style, and questioned whether they wanted to join the 'boys club' culture they saw in more senior positions:

*Fair play, the senior managers all do a sound job, but at the end of the day, when you walk into that situation you think, 'Actually, do I want to be here?'* (Sandwell aged 25-34)

*I think as a female, when you get to that level ... you take on that persona and then you do tend to then manage in a male style.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

*It's about how people behave when they are in a senior management positions, and the compromises they have to make on their own values and their own judgement. That's what stops me from looking at something at that particular level of jobs because I wouldn't be interested in that.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

### **Summary**

Women's perceptions and experiences of senior level jobs indicate that there are expectations they find difficult to fulfil (in practical and social terms) and which deter them from seeking promotion or prevent them from progressing. These expectations are unwritten 'rules' which govern managerial behaviour and are upheld by organisational practices. They do not operate at all levels of the organisation, but start to apply at senior and principal officer grades.

These cultural rules seem to dictate managers':

- working-time regime (full time, long hours, constant responsibility and no flexibility),
- level of qualification and proven work experience (higher level degree, experience of managing people),
- behaviour towards more senior and more junior colleagues.

These expectations are justified and intensified by the resource-limited, performance-focused context in which services are being delivered. Together they represent a 'macho' style of working.

They are upheld in a variety of ways:

- the design of senior level jobs as full time 'any hours' positions
- the description of posts, listing certain qualifications and skills as essential

- systems of recognition and reward: procedures outlining appraisal, internal promotions and training allocation which allow managerial discretion
- pressure to conform from senior managers
- a lack of corporate leadership which allows inconsistencies to occur

We do not suggest that these cultural expectations disadvantage only women. They also hinder the career development of many men. However, it is likely that more men than women continue to be able to meet these expectations, as they have their origin in the historical experience of male employees who, when supported and freed from domestic responsibilities by wives or mothers, are able to work full time work patterns. The use of a degree as a proxy for a person's ability to work at a higher level (for older employees) favours men more than women. Although university attendance is currently balanced between the sexes, in some of the labour markets we have studied here, this is not the case. Women starting from a lower qualifications base and wishing to progress may struggle more than male counterparts to 'make up the ground', owing to the heavier share of domestic responsibilities which they shoulder. These cultural rules apparently remain unquestioned by the white male majority of senior managers. Women at this level are put under extreme pressure to join in with the 'boys club' and feel they may be ostracised if they challenge the status quo. Women in the grades below are struck by the lack of female role models, and the unattractiveness and difficulty of learning how to 'play the game' as a woman.

As this study has shown, there are many 'ceilings' preventing women's upward progression within these local authorities. Each woman responds uniquely to these 'ceilings' according to her personal circumstances, characteristics, stage in life and orientation to her career. Figure 17 describes the nature of the progression ceilings which women come up against when they are attempting to move up in their organisations. These are maintained by the practices and procedures of the organisations which formalise progression requirements for senior jobs: The job design, its essential and desirable characteristics and the way it is advertised normalises full-time work and the level of managerial qualification. These requirements may be compounded by cultural expectations dictated by occupational groups. Resource constraints are very tangible in the organisations we studied, however they may also be used to justify a cultural practice where unpaid overtime is 'part of the job' for public servants. In a similar way the responsibilities vested in local government officers at senior level may serve to hide an organisational reluctance to change the status quo in order to rethink the ways accountability is delegated, and operations are managed in a 24/7 environment of service delivery. The persistence of white male dominated cultures at highest levels of these organisations in part rests on the actual composition of senior management teams, however weak corporate leadership and corporate structures fail to prevent inappropriate 'boys club' behaviour in some parts of these organisations.

**Figure 17 The upward progression ceilings perceived by female employees**

<b>Position of the ceiling</b>	<b>Description of the ceiling</b>	<b>How is this organisational expectation upheld in practice?</b>
<b>Grade at which ceiling is experienced by women – varies between organisation</b>	White male dominated senior management team	Historical legacy of advancing through seniority, individual grooming, exclusive culture of senior management team
	Long hours constant availability	Culture of senior management team, decision making concentrated on a small number of positions
	Long hours: non recoverable	Limited resources, tight staffing, managerial discretion, culture
	Full-time work with no flexibility	Organisational culture, lack of alternative examples or precedent
	Full-time work	Job adverts, job descriptions, inflexibility of weekly meeting schedules, culture
	Intensity produced by conflictual relationships with colleagues and elected members	External statutory requirements, limited resources, performance pressures, 'macho' management style
	Intensity caused by large workloads	External statutory requirements, limited resources, tight staffing, job remits, design of middle management tiers
	Proven experience	Essential criteria on job descriptions
	Degree or high degree qualification	Essential criteria on job descriptions, culture

## 6 Effective practices

This section of the report considers the factors women felt ‘made a difference’ when they were trying to advance their careers, and what else they thought their organisation could do to help them.

### **Managers as enablers**

The importance of managerial support for women’s career development has already been mentioned. The women in the focus groups described various ways their managers had helped them to advance their careers. These included:

- giving them access to work experiences or training related to the next job level;
- building their confidence;
- sharing professional or cultural information;
- creating flexible opportunities which fitted with caring responsibilities.

*She raised my level of self esteem and self belief to enable me to move on ...and I perhaps wouldn't have got there this quickly without her backing.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

*One of the main reasons I come to work is my manager. She will let you get on with your work, she will give you a challenge, and she will push you that little bit further, and take you out of your comfort zone, which is sometimes a bit daunting, but you're pleased she's made you do that.* (Wakefield aged 25-34)

*She was a person who encouraged her staff to train and develop and move on, and would encourage you to apply for positions if they became vacant and give you the support to do that. It wasn't just 'Here, why don't you go for that.' It was more like 'I think you've got the skills to do that job let's just go through the criteria.'* (Southwark aged 35-44)

*I value the flexibility of my work, and my manager is very flexible. I'm allowed to get on with my own work and do my own job, I don't think that's necessarily true across the whole authority.* (Leicester aged 45-59)

### **Mentoring**

Women praised and valued managers who made the time to mentor them in their development. These senior women had gained much useful experience which they could offer younger colleagues and were willing to contribute to succession planning.

*I'd be happy to have somebody to shadow me for succession planning. I think that would be sensible to the organisation as well. We could help them not to fall into some of the pitfalls we've fallen into over the years.* (Southwark aged 45-59)

### **Women’s networking – Wakefield District Borough Council**

The *Stepping Forward Initiative* was launched in 1996 as ‘Stepping Up’, by officers from the Equal Opportunities and Strategic Human Resources Team. Over time, as a network developed, it has grown to include women from all departments who are organised into operational groups and given one day a month to develop activities, events and resources for female employees. The initiative is led by a steering group consisting of senior officers from each directorate, and is responsible for promoting gender equality and diversity across the whole organisation, including increasing the proportion of women at senior levels. Positive action, women-only, events are regularly programmed to provide women with the opportunity to reflect on their careers and to build skills to allow them to reach their potential. Officers also organise campaigns to tackle wider gender equality issues, for example, celebrations marking International Women’s Day, a conference to promote public appointment opportunities for women and a ‘Bring your daughter to work day’ aimed at challenging gender stereotypes and encouraging the aspirations of girls and young women. The Stepping Forward Initiative has won national awards.

Other relationships which assisted women to progress included mentors and networks external to their organisation (including professional contacts and colleagues working for different organisations) who shared professional information to help women perform better in their roles, intelligence about vacancies and ways of building a ‘profile’ to advance. In most cases women had sought out these contacts themselves and worked hard to maintain them.

*There is a user group for this particular insurance database with other companies. I have met a lot of people from other authorities or other companies who use the same thing, and it can be useful, and it could be an opening for the future if I wanted it to be.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

*I'm mentored now, and I'm mentored from somebody external to the authority and it really, really supports me. I asked somebody if they would mentor me and what they are doing is actually helping my profile be built externally, which is helpful.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*For black women - there's just nothing there, but I have cultivated my own network, and that's really important to do internally and externally for your own sanity.* (Southwark aged 35-44)

*We had a really good e-mail network of officers all around the country. It was really useful for swapping information. You felt like you had a team of people there that understood totally what you were going through - because I don't know anybody in the authority who can understand exactly what sort of pressure I'm under.* (Leicester aged 35-44)

A few women held voluntary roles, such as school governors, and felt that these opportunities had given them skills which they could not have gained working as an employee.

### **Secondments**

Women in their 20s and 30s said their careers had benefited from secondment opportunities. These 'sideways' moves allowed them to build their skills and knowledge in preparation for a career move, and to profitably mark time waiting for senior vacancies to arise. These secondments provided some of the same benefits as managerial support: exposure to alternative or un-thought of career paths; new challenges and opportunities to build skills; and increased confidence.

*I've done the secondment now, and I know that if I can move somewhere and be a manager in an area which I didn't know anything about, then I can do anything, so that's really helped me.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

Some women felt their careers had benefited from personal development training. It had given them skills to 'sell' themselves more effectively, and to know their own worth.

*I did an assertiveness course - and I suddenly realised that it's OK to say no. It gave me that confidence to choose things and to be me.* (Wakefield aged 35-44)

*I did the presentation skills, but about the image that you present. I learned way back then that there's a certain image under the cultural bias that's acceptable, but when you know the rules of the game, you can play.* (Sandwell aged 35-44)

Women felt secondments were a way of bringing about better communication between different parts of their organisation, and suggested that they should be formalised as a career development tool aiming to benefit departments and individuals.

*It could be really useful if there was some kind of secondment where you find out what happens in other departments in terms of what you can bring from your experience, and from your department - a fresh way of looking at things* (Southwark aged 25-34)

### **Implementation of flexible working by changing organisational culture**

Many of women's difficulties and reservations about advancing their career were rooted in the work-time regimes of their organisation. Despite having exemplary work life balance policies, there is evidence that the implementation of these policies is inconsistent and open to each manager's own interpretation, which in turn allows expectations about long hours to remain unchallenged.

Large organisations in the private sector have begun to champion the advantages of a flexible workforce for their entire workforce, joining with government in trying to increase the competition and productivity of UK business<sup>39</sup>. Some of the messages coming from the private sector in relation to flexibility and in some cases flexibility at senior level are discussed below. The benefits of flexibility include:

- **Reduced estates costs** through home working (especially in London)

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<sup>39</sup> Employers and Work Life Balance, BT employer case study <http://www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk/>

- **Environmental benefits** through home working: reduced traffic nuisance and fuel consumption, more parking for those that do need to come to the office'
- **Improved recruitment:** demographic trends - listening to working parents and the attitudes of graduates - show how unsustainable extended commuting times and long inflexible working hours are in relation to family and personal life. Flexibility will remain attraction to potential employees,
- **Healthier more motivated workforce:** flexible employees are happier than other colleagues with lower rates of stress related absence,
- **Retention:** a high proportion of women return from maternity (which is significant if women are delaying the time at which they have their first child and have reached more senior positions),
- **Promotes social inclusion** by opening access to employment which fits the lives of those with caring responsibilities and disabled people.

Challenges for senior managers:

- Give up the illusion that managers 'control' staff when they are in the office – technology removes the need for many senior staff and team members to be present for a full day, everyday of the week.
- Move to from managerial control to managerial trust. This requires managers to be very clear with staff about *what* outputs are expected, *when* they are required and what *quality* is needed. Measure output rather than attendance or overtime.
- Mixed messages jeopardise organisational commitments to work life balance - lead from the top, ensure knowledge of entitlement throughout the organisation and apply policies to everyone.
- The organisation does not need to know *why* its people want to work flexibly - the only thing that is important is - Is it operationally possible?
- *Every* job has a component that can be done in a different way, including those at senior level.

### Engaging all managers and employees about WLB – Wakefield District Borough Council

In response to an employee survey which showed limited awareness of Wakefield's employment policies, a *Work Life Balance Group* has been created to run a campaign about the benefits of work life balance and of conducting a review of implementation practices. This group comprises members of the Human Resources Department and representatives from each department.

The council's policies under the heading of work-life balance are numerous, and at the forefront of good employment practice. Employees can assess them easily via the staff intranet or the booklet *Working Choices*. A manager's pack is also available which details employees' rights and the extent of managers' discretion in agreeing any change in working arrangements. The investment in implementing work life balance effectively was reflected in what women said in our focus groups:

*It's being able to go out for childcare or whatever reason - something crops up. You know that your manager or your team aren't going to be saying, 'Oh, look at her swanning off'- because that's defined as what you are allowed to do.*  
(Wakefield aged 25-34)

*I cannot fault it [Wakefield MDC]. If my children have been ill, I have been able to drop things at a moment's notice, because they have known that I will take it back up afterwards, and that they don't lose out. I don't think you can put a high enough value on that.*  
(Wakefield aged 35-44)

The local government sector has traditionally led the way on equal opportunities. As well as sharing examples of effective practice within the sector, there are increasingly examples outside the public sector which it can draw on to meet the challenges of recruitment, retention and progression of qualified women in its workforce.

## 7 Key Policy Messages

This study has shown that, irrespective of family situation or age, many women working within the local authority sector are highly committed to their jobs, enthusiastic about training and development, and aspire to have successful careers. They value the investment the local authority has made in making training available to them, although most also view their own career development as a personal responsibility. 46% of women in our study had received training from their organisation which they considered had made a difference in advancing them in their career. The Local Government Employers organisation survey of members confirms that the sector's level of training remains high and is likely to be an attraction to potential recruits<sup>40</sup>.

The women in this study appreciate the policies which their organisations have put in place to support their employees in achieving a good work-life balance. Some women felt that the equal opportunities policies used in recruitment have been crucial for their own success in joining the organisation. However, they considered that communication and implementation of these policies was not consistent across the authority – it depended on the approach of individual managers, and was undermined by cultural expectations at senior manager level<sup>41</sup>. Given the long standing availability of these policies, there was a surprisingly low take-up of flexible options, despite a significant number of women who lived with dependent children or cared for relatives, friends and neighbours.

Evidence from the survey and focus groups in this study showed that there was a lack of part-time working arrangements in jobs commanding £27,000 and above a year. Only around 17% of women at this level worked part-time (30 hours or less). These women feel guilty about their 'partial' commitment to their employment, as the culture at this level is to work full-time hours. They felt that their workloads had not been adjusted when they reduced their working hours, and consequently they had sometimes to work longer hours to meet deadlines over which they had no control. Their line managers did not always respect their working hours, and sometimes expected them to attend meetings on their days off.

None of the authorities in this study routinely advertised senior jobs as possible part-time opportunities. Women in this study working part-time had previously been working full-time, and had negotiated their reduced hours individually. Many had been apprehensive that this would not be permitted by their line managers. When managers had agreed, these women were reluctant to look for advancement or to consider vacancies in other sections in case they were not able to negotiate the same working pattern. Some reported that their line managers were more reluctant to release them for training once they changed to part-time hours, as their time was seen as 'more precious'. Some were sure that their pay grade was lower than that of colleagues working in comparable roles.

To have a better chance of progressing within their organisation, and of maintaining the status and reputation they had built up during their working life, women mostly saw it as inevitable that they had to work full-time hours. Most were resigned to the fact that senior roles had to be covered from 9am to 5pm and beyond. Evidence from the focus groups confirmed that women who could work full-time hours still felt unable to consider more senior positions, as there was insufficient organisational flexibility about when those hours could be delivered.

Many women in our study were working hours well beyond those they were contracted to work because of pressures in the sector. They were also driven to work overtime by their own commitment and by their organisation's obligation to deliver public services. This affected senior managers most. Women reported that elected members and senior officers expected them to 'always be available'. Other reasons for working additional hours included 'finding time to think and to plan' before they were overtaken by operational and management tasks during core hours of the day.

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<sup>40</sup> 'Provisional key results of the Employers Organisation's Local Government Employment Survey (LGES) for June 2005' - Local Government Digest May 2006

<sup>41</sup> 'Report of a survey into Flexible Working within Local Authorities in England, Northern Ireland and Wales', Work Wise, March 2006 - survey of 45 authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, included Shire Districts (a representative sample by type and geography).

Women acknowledged that the pressures and intensity of work they experienced in their jobs had a negative impact on their health, and on their personal relationships with family and friends. They described complex timetables designed to meet their work and outside-work commitments. These arrangements were finely tuned, and relied on routinised start and finish times, car use, and, for some, a high degree of paid help with cleaning and out-of-hours childcare. Senior women spoke of finding it hard to disengage from thinking about work even when they were at home. Some had technology provided to them by their organisation, which made work always accessible. For example, one woman spoke of checking her emails via a mobile phone while supervising her toddler in the playground on her day off.

The study aimed to explore the ways in which women's work orientations were affected by their life stage. The most marked differences related to younger women and women with caring responsibilities. Younger women expressed a greater desire than other age groups for training, opportunities to study for qualifications and work experience to allow them to attain the next grade. Some women with caring responsibilities had made difficult decisions before applying for more senior positions or undertaking degree study (required to progress), weighing up how much time and emotional energy they could commit after meeting the needs of their children, relatives and partners. Where their managers were not prepared to offer greater flexibility of working arrangements, or where family support was not available, they had put these options 'on hold' until their caring demands reduced. These decisions left many women feeling frustrated and de-motivated because they felt they were unable to fulfil their potential.

We also found evidence that organisational cultures hinder rather than support women's career progression. This was doubly true for Black women, who spoke of 'concrete ceilings'. Not only could they not progress - they saw no Black women who were more senior to them in their organisation. The persistence of a white, male-dominated culture in many departments had a number of negative effects for women, and perhaps some men. It deterred some women from wanting to work at senior level; it made it harder for them to gain recognition of their ability from senior managers; and on a day to day basis, it required women to 'face down' inappropriate treatment, 'play along with' social cultures which favour men; and 'work harder' to prove themselves. Women felt these cultures persist because of the static nature of the workforce where long lengths of service are common, and because historically individuals were promoted on seniority rather than management ability. Patriarchal cultures still prevalent among local authorities' partner organisations and among some elected members further reinforced the tendency to maintain the current status quo.

There are clear messages in this research for those at national, regional and local levels who are developing leadership programmes to prepare the sector for future workforce change and innovation<sup>42</sup>. If experienced and committed women feel unable to apply for senior jobs within their capability, it is likely that the sector is not getting the best it could from its female workforce, and that some women are employed in the local authority in positions working below their true potential. The *Gender and Employment in Local Labour Markets* research programme has already uncovered other important evidence of this problem, which is a key feature of part-time employment in the UK (Grant et al 2005, Darton and Hurrell 2005). It is now beginning to be widely recognised (Kingsmill 2001, EOC 2005) that organisations wishing to make good use of their investments in human capital must do more to create more flexible and more part-time jobs at senior levels. For the authorities in this study, the forthcoming duty to promote gender equality, a statutory obligation for public bodies, including in their capacity as employers, offers an important and exciting opportunity. It can provide a rationale for revisiting existing efforts to tackle these issues (as already required to meet the Equality Standard for Local Government, and Best Value Performance Indicators), and to move work-life balance up a gear, so that it is part of the experience of leaders, understood by all managers, and capable of contributing to further organisation cultural change<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> The Government launched 'Vibrant Local Leadership' in January 2005 setting out the challenges facing the sector. Investment in leadership includes the Local Government Capacity Building Fund, which can support local authorities to develop leadership training programmes targeting specific sections of their workforces, for example graduates or middle managers. It also established the Local Government Leadership Centre (LGLC) to focus on building the skills and competencies of top teams. [www.communicaties.gov.uk](http://www.communicaties.gov.uk) – Local Government Pay and Workforce strategy 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Detailed recommendations on actions to promote greater gender equality in the workforce for qualified women with career prospects have been made in each authority's locality report.

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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](http://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](http://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<sup>44</sup>

### New study data

The survey asked questions about women's current post and salary, their employment history with the organisation (including experience of training), and their caring responsibilities now and in the past. Altogether 1,871 employees from the 4 local authorities (Leicester, Sandwell, Southwark and Wakefield) participated in the e-survey of employees' career development in the local authority sector<sup>45</sup>. By sending the majority of questionnaire requests via email we aimed to reach women who had an office base and IT literacy, in order to over-sample those who had experienced some degree of 'success' in their careers.

Of the respondents, 73% were female employees (n=1,370), 27% were from ethnic minority backgrounds (n=512), and 5% stated that they had a disability (n=97). Almost one quarter (24%) of participants were aged 25-34 at the time of the survey, and one third (34%) were aged 35-44. We stress that those who took part in our study were not fully representative of women workers in their organisations, although we were able to obtain a sample which was broadly similar in terms of the sector's overall age structure (29% aged 25-39 and 32% aged 40-49<sup>46</sup>), and an over-representation of women from ethnic minority groups (7.3% non White ethnicities overall<sup>47</sup> 26% ethnic minority employees London region authorities<sup>48</sup>).

74% of female participants had a salary above £18,000 per annum, in jobs with prospects for career progression, and about one quarter (26%) were in the £27,000-34,999 salary band. The survey also reflects the gender pay gap in the sector: 21% of all male participants had an annual income above £35,000, whereas this figure for all female participants was only 12%. On the contrary, 30% of female participants, compared to 17% of men, had a salary below £18,000 pa.

From women's responses to the e-survey we selected women for 4 focus groups<sup>49</sup> according to the characteristics described above. Each group selection included women of different ethnicities, departments and length of service. We invited up to 20 women to each group, aiming to achieve a group of between 8-10 women. Across all authorities, 106 women took part in these discussions (which lasted 1hr 30 minutes). 23% of participants were women from ethnic minority groups, 22% were aged 16-34, 41% were aged 35-44, and 37% were aged 45 or above. With each group we followed the same format, exploring:

- the reasons why they worked in the local authority sector and in their job in particular;
- the key moments in their career when they had been able to advance, and the factors which had made that possible (for younger women, what skills, training, support thought they would need to obtain the next step up);
- their major concerns about their future progression in their organisation;
- their experience of training in their organisation and what difference it had made;
- 'blue sky' thinking about what else their organisation could do to support them at their stage in their career, and could do to support women employees in general.

We were particularly interested in how far women's working lives were meeting their current expectations, and the extent to which their views were common to the group. These discussions gave us the opportunity

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<sup>44</sup> **We would like to thank our partners in Leicester City Council, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, the London Borough of Southwark and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council for their support in developing this study. We are especially grateful to the employees of these organisations who completed questionnaires, attended our focus groups and gave interviews.**

<sup>45</sup> 310 paper questionnaires were also returned, mainly from female employees on lower salary grades. These have not been included in our analysis here, and will be the subject of a separate paper.

<sup>46</sup> Labour Force Survey, Autumn 2005, presented in 'Profiles of local government workforce and the wider economy' Local Government Digest May 2006.

<sup>47</sup> op cit

<sup>48</sup> 'The local government workforce England and Wales 2005 - Key Facts' [www.lg.employers.gov.uk](http://www.lg.employers.gov.uk)

<sup>49</sup> In 3 authorities we held 5 focus groups to capture differences in the e-survey sample where there appeared to be distinct earnings ceilings within an age group: in Sandwell 2 focus of women aged 35-44 with children, one group earning £27,000 and above and one group earning below; in Leicester, 2 focus groups with women aged 45-59 one group earning above 27,000 and one group below; in Southwark an extra focus group with women aged 45-59 separating those earning above £41,000 from those earning below this level. In the final analysis, the differences between these groups were not found to be significant.

to examine the impact of age, generation and motherhood. They provide the main evidence about women's experiences, values, aspirations and needs, and of barriers to their progression.

To contextualise the data collected from employees we interviewed a small number of senior managers in each authority (total=11) about their organisation's approach, past and present, to gender equality and to women's career development. This was supplemented by documentary sources outlining the authority's commitments and any targeted initiatives.

### Research Participants

Participants	Wakefield	Sandwell	Leicester	Southwark
<b>E-survey participants</b>	477***	352	507	535
<b>Response rate</b>	20%****	6%	n/a*****	10%
<b>Female respondents</b>	477	226	321	346
<b>Age (%)</b>				
16-24	7.8	7.1	6.9	1.5
25-34	21.2	20.4	25.2	29.9
35-44	33.5	36.7	32.7	39.0
45-49	14.3	17.7	16.5	13.7
50-59	22.4	16.4	17.1	14.2
60+	.8	1.8	1.6	1.7
<b>Ethnic minorities (%)</b>	3.6	22.1	36.8	51.7
<b>Disability (%)</b>	3.4	3.5	6.9	4.1
<b>Salary grade (%)</b>				
Under £14,000	13.6	6.2	14.0	2.3
£14,000-17,999	26.0	19.5	30.5	3.2
£18,000-21,999	19.1	14.6	19.0	13.4
£22,000-26,999	14.3	24.8	15.9	18.3
£27,000-34,999	17.6	22.1	17.1	39.2
£35,000-40,999	5.2	7.1	1.9	12.5
Over £41,000	4.0	5.8	1.6	11.0
<b>Qualification (%)</b>				
1st degree or above	34.8	34.5	45.8	51.7
Higher degree	20.3	25.7	19.0	29.4
No qualification	1.0	.4	3.1	3.5
<b>Training (%)</b>	91.8	94.7	89.7	89.2
<b>Training to progress (%)</b>	43.0	55.3	42.1	46.2
<b>Length of service (%)</b>				
Less than 1 year	14.6	8.0	14.6	22.7
1-4 years	29.4	31.4	28.0	34.0
5-9 years	11.7	13.3	19.9	16.0
10-14 years	10.2	8.0	10.6	8.4
15-20 years	19.4	23.0	14.6	9.0
More than 20 years	14.6	16.4	12.1	9.9

Participants	Wakefield	Sandwell	Leicester	Southwark
<b>Focus groups</b>	4	5 *	5	5**
<b>Time of Focus Groups</b>	07/05	09/05	10-11/05	03/06
<b>No. of Focus Group participants</b>	34	25	26	21
<b>Age</b>				
16-24	2			
25-34	7	6	4	4
35-44	12	12	11	9
45-49	7	5	6	5
50-59	4	2	5	3
60+	2			
<b>Ethnic minorities</b>	1	10	8	5
<b>Manager interviews</b>	4	3	2	2

\* 1 participant for FG of women aged 35-44 without children, so the number of FGs in the locality report is 4

\*\* 1 participant for FG of women aged 35-44 without children, so the number of FGs in the locality report is 4

\*\*\* 310 paper questionnaires were returned from female employees mainly in lower salary grades, therefore not included in the survey data analysis.

\*\*\*\* Excluding paper questionnaires returned.

\*\*\*\*\* Not available at time of going to print.