Encouraging Women into Work: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment

Literature Review

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www.belfastcity.gov.uk
The WINS project was established in 2005 to deliver a programme of pre-employment training and mentoring and work placements for long term unemployed or economically inactive women in Belfast along with research into barriers facing women working in non traditional sectors. The project concludes in 2008.

WINS was developed and led by Belfast City Council. Other members of the WINS Development Partnership are:

Construction Industry Training Board/Construction Skills
Department for Employment & Learning
GEMS NI
Housing Executive
ICTU NI Committee
Queen’s University, Belfast.
Training for Women Network
Translink
Women’s TEC

The WINS project also works with similar projects in Germany (Futura Project); the Netherlands (the Glass Wall Project) and the EQUAL at Work initiative of the Dublin Employment Pact, Republic of Ireland. More information on this work is available on www.horizoncrossing.com and www.dep.ie.

The WINS Project is part financed by the Department for Employment & Learning and the European Social Fund under the Equal Opportunities theme of the EQUAL Community Initiative. The EQUAL Initiative is a laboratory for new ideas to the European Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion process. Its mission is to promote a more inclusive work life through fighting discrimination and exclusion based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. EQUAL is implemented in and between Member States of the European Union and is funded through the European Social Fund.

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OVERVIEW
The Women into Non-Traditional Sectors (WINS) Project

The Women into Non-Traditional Sectors (WINS) Project, part financed by the European Social Fund under the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme for NI, aims to encourage more women into areas that remain traditionally male and to generally widen the horizons of potential female employees by demonstrating that non-traditional employment is a possibility.

The WINS Model was developed in line with best practice in pre-employment and work experience training as identified through extensive research and in consultation with stakeholders. The WINS Model of pre-employment training and work experience has been benchmarked against the recommendations of the EOC Report ‘Action for change: How employers can break down gender segregation in vocational training and employment”. The participant employers have been recognised as ‘Exemplary Employers’ as a result of their work on the WINS Project. The Exemplary Employers initiative was established following the recommendations of the Women and Work Commission report ‘Shaping a Fairer Future’.

The WINS Project wishes to more fully understand where and how actions can be taken to reduce or overcome barriers to recruitment for those, specifically females, who may wish to take advantage of job opportunities within non-traditional sectors.

Wider Context

Access to Employment is a theme that has received increased policy attention over recent years. At the European level the European Commission identified ‘employability’ as one of four core pillars (alongside Developing entrepreneurship and job creation; Encouraging adaptability of businesses and their employees and Strengthening equal opportunity policies for women and men) when it announced a wide ranging European Employment Strategy in 1997. While a revised strategy (March 2003) saw a re-organisation of the approach and the now familiar term ‘employability’ largely removed from the terminology the underlying themes remained, now focussed more directly on supporting the EU Lisbon summit (2000) goals of sustained economic growth alongside ‘full employment’, ‘quality and productivity at work’ and ‘social cohesion via an inclusive labour market’.

The revised goals of the 2003 European Employment Strategy were particularly relevant in Northern Ireland where social cohesion is an important issue and long term unemployment and non-employment are still recognised as significant problems.

Importantly however, while it is recognised that ‘employability’ processes depend on the balance between ‘supply’ (e.g. individual knowledge, skills and household background) and ‘demand’ (e.g. the needs of employers; recruitment practices and the economic and social context within which work is being sought) much of the emphasis within the UK remained focussed specifically on the importance of individual (supply side) characteristics in influencing outcomes in the labour market (as is evidenced by programmes such as the New Deal) with little detailed focus on the important role that demand side characteristics and employers can play.

Further, and with particular relevance to this project, are issues of gender segregation in many industries and occupations with many of the sectors / occupations employing high proportions of females tending to be those where wages are less (e.g. administration) and where part-time working is more common (e.g. service sector).

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1 The NI Taskforce on Employability and Long Term Unemployment define Employability as “the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible employment”.

2 For example, 31% of employed males are in skilled trades, compared to a negligible percentage of women; but only 6% of males are in administrative/clerical occupations, compared to 26% of females (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (2005), Women in Northern Ireland: Statistics Bulletin, Belfast: DETI, p.14.)
The impact on employers of such gender segregation in labour supply or demand side recruitment approaches (which may serve to make employment less attractive to one group or another – unintentional or otherwise), is one of reduced access to a supply of appropriately skilled labour and a reduction in the available skills, experiences and abilities from which an employer may recruit.

**Rationale**

Ongoing work by the WINS partnership seeks to make employment opportunities more widely accessible to women via dedicated training programmes and by encouraging interaction between employers and sectoral / training organisations.

While anecdotal evidence from similar projects points to benefits for both potential jobseekers and participant employers, specific examples of best practice in overcoming recruitment barriers are under investigated both internationally and in a Northern Ireland context.

The rationale for the proposed study, developed from the above, is thus to examine perceptions of and recruitment practices within three WINS partnership employers and, by comparing these to best practice elsewhere and the experiences of those who have or might seek recruitment in non-traditional sectors, to establish recommendations that could be adopted by a range of employers to the benefit of both employers and those seeking work.

The objectives of the project are to:

1) Identify best practice of employers in recruitment & retention of women in non traditional jobs via a review of agreed literature

2) Summarise market place perceptions of WINS employers on the part of potential female applicants for non-traditional jobs

3) Review current recruitment practices considering potential barriers to recruitment

4) Summarise perceptions and views of working practices considering impacts on recruitment

5) Distil recommendations for the refinement of processes and practices

The specific focus of this report is on the first objective i.e. identifying good practice regarding the steps that employers can take to promote the recruitment of atypical employees – in this case women in non-traditional sectors.

Information on the remaining objectives is contained within the report Encouraging Women into Work: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment – Findings and Key Lessons.
Encouraging Women into Work: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment - Literature Review
Literature Review: Recruiting Atypical Workers
As noted above, the specific focus of this project is on the role of employers and the steps that they can take to promote the recruitment of women into non-traditional sectors.

In this context the focus of the literature review is not to explore the range of social, economic, structural and personal factors which promote or impede the access of atypical workers to employment and training but rather to focus specifically on the actions which employers can take with regard to improving recruitment and retention from atypical groups (including but not limited to females).

The literature review below reproduces the key focus and findings from a number of relevant reports in turn, drawing out key lessons where appropriate. The review is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to provide an easily accessible summary of key findings of relevance to the work of the WINS project and specifically to inform the development of a framework that could be used by employers to identify gaps and shape future actions.

The literature review is focussed on those steps that an employer can take or can have influence over to improve the accessibility of the employment they offer.

A Case Study in Successful Employability – Days Hotel, Belfast


In 2003, the construction of the £12 million Days Hotel (3 Star) on a derelict site adjacent to Sandy Row provided a potential opportunity for Community and Government organisations to work with a large local employer toward seeking enhanced access to employment for local jobseekers. The resulting Employer-Community collaboration process led to over 200 requests for further information from local residents, led to a dramatic uptake in community based capacity building programmes (e.g. CV services and interview assistance etc) and resulted, as part of the initial recruitment process in some 20 local residents gaining work, the vast majority of whom were still with the hotel at the time of the study (some 6 months later).

The report concluded with a number of detailed recommendations intended to be of utility in informing future similar Employer-Community interactions. In brief these can be summarised as follows:

**General Approach – actions for the employer:**

- Identify and work towards potential business benefits such as decreased turnover, a widened labour supply, a potential workforce balancing effect, enhanced public relations
- Recognise the potential for community organisations to assist in awareness raising and pre-employment preparation of potential candidates.
- Ensure that efforts to promote employer-focussed employability at the local level are balanced with wider considerations of fair participation.
- Establish an employability working group comprising local training providers and local communities to provide resources / expertise and where possible to act as a trusted source of information regarding opportunities with the employer.

**Pre-Recruitment Phase:**

- Schedule key dates with regard to any future potential recruitment exercises and proactively work with trainers and the local community to ensure capacity-building programmes can be sequenced accordingly.
- Seek to minimise any barriers to participation by encouraging the review entrance requirements and methods of application (e.g. Application Form versus CV) and selection.
- Encourage employer visits to local communities to promote opportunities and demonstrate commitment.
Recruitment Phase:

- Recognise the value of the collaborative (Employer-Community) process in persuading individuals to participate and the value of direct communication between employer and potential jobseekers.

- Encourage Community visits and open days accordingly alongside information and advice on the nature of employment available, flexibility in shifts, wages, available tax credits and personal/community development.

- Recognise the value of linking with partner organisations such as neighbouring communities, local training organisations and the Employment Service to provide resources and share expertise.

- Seek to increase local awareness of opportunities and provide capacity building/support in making employment applications.

- Both employer and community can benefit from the employer subsidising the cost of outreach efforts as a form of reputation building and community engagement.

- Consider the possibility of holding interviews locally to increase participation from those potentially intimidated by the interview process and unfamiliar spaces/locations.

Post-Recruitment Phase:

- **For those successful** – in the recruitment exercise provide further specific advice on available tax credits, payroll, contracts etc as well as facilitating an informal community information network where appointees can raise queries/issues that they might not otherwise raise (e.g. with the employer).

- Seek to use training organisations as an independent source of advice for atypical workers, asking that they (anonymously) relay key themes of concern/benefit to the employer toward improving conditions, particularly for those returning to work.

- Offer capacity building courses with regard to work-based skills and confidence building toward assisting with retention and promotion etc.

- **For those unsuccessful** – initiate a series of employer facilitated signposting measures, providing information on alternative avenues (option to reapply, other employment, community assistance, government training etc) helping to ensure those interested in employment opportunities remain engaged with the labour market.

- Obtain feedback from participants (employer/partner organisations/community) on costs/benefits experienced and if/how the process could be improved. Use this information to improve/promote future Employer-Community interaction measures.

**Employer Recruitment Practices: The Halifax Call Centre, Belfast.**


The Halifax Call Centre in Belfast was of particular interest in the context of employability, as the largest ever single job creation project in Northern Ireland at that time.

In this example, the scope of the research was limited to a consideration of actions taken with regard to recruitment and post-recruitment support and not with events leading to the establishment or development of the process itself.

A argument often promoted with regards to increasing accessibility of employment is the need for a ‘sustained momentum’ toward ensuring a permanent improvement in an individual’s employability – a sustained effort is seen as pivotal toward convincing the disenfranchised individual to invest in the process – to persuade them that they are not just completing another application and that there is a real, achievable and immediate job at the end of a finite process.
The actions of employers have an important role to play in facilitating a flexible and sustained approach and it is in this context that the following measures are introduced and discussed. The processes adopted as part of the Employers outreach can neatly be summarised into General Accessibility Measures (intended to assist all applicants) and Targeted Accessibility Measures (intended to widen recruitment and assist a broader range of applicants into employment).

**General Accessibility Measures**

**Flexibility** - Some of those seeking work, particularly those from deprived backgrounds, may have very specific conditions under which they may be able to take work – pay, conditions, hours etc. This employer identified this as an area where flexibility on their behalf could promote increased access to certain groups (e.g. working parents) and have implemented or are considering a number of processes. This employer had however gone further and developed a flexible approach to include a choice of possible start dates, hours and working patterns or indeed in the option to be placed on a waiting list until a suitable working pattern was available. Training was also matched to the working patterns required by the individual with evening training sessions run specifically in the event of a recruitment drive targeted at evening shift workers.

**Qualification / Entrance Requirements** - At the outset of recruitment the employer undertook a highly tailored review of skills needs and recruitment and selection procedures. As with Days Hotel they concluded that they do not require a minimum level of qualifications for customer service assistants. Additionally, and again as with Days Hotel, previous experience within the industry was another seemingly likely pre-requisite that has been dispensed with. In the case of this employer job advertisements were redesigned to make applicants aware of this.

“it's not about saying I've got to have [relevant or work-based] experience, the majority of people that work here don't have either… and it doesn't have to be in work even but just life experiences of dealing with people, working in an environment where they've had to handle change… where they've had to work with each other… and this stuff can come from college experience, life experience, home experience…” (Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

To ascertain employee suitability in the absence of these relatively common indicators, the employer’s interview process was tailored around two key areas – a standard aptitude test to evaluate literacy, numeracy and an ability to solve logical problems (important to the jobs on offer) and a ‘behavioural competency interview’ where interviewees were walked through problem solving scenarios and encouraged to retell relevant life experiences (a process mirrored by Days Hotel with regard to assisting individuals to identify work relevant experiences). Unlike qualifications, these ‘measures’ were seen as relating directly to the skills needed to operate successfully in the employer’s specific business environment.

**Enhanced Recruitment Packs** – this employer took an innovative step to assist those applicants with less recent in-work experience. Recruitment packs were expanded to include help sheets on completing the application form; preparing for interviews and undertaking aptitude tests. Additionally non-employed applicants were advised of the importance of including non-employment related experiences as an alternative to in-work experience – again representing an effort to remove barriers for those seeking work.

Clearly there are elements in all of the above that reinforce the actions of Days Hotel and the benefits available to employers. There are also additional areas and ways in which the work undertaken by Days Hotel can be expanded and refined for use with other employers. The benefits of these measures to jobseekers are clear – increased employer flexibility tailored to the needs of those moving into (new) employment, and the reduction of entrance requirements such as formal qualifications and previous experience, serve to widen the range of vacancies to which an individual may apply. Additionally, the positive attitude of this employer in providing help sheets with job application forms...
and in assisting individuals during interviews to identify relevant life experiences undoubtedly assisted applicants toward obtaining employment.

**Targeted Accessibility Measures**

Moving from general measures intended to assist all groups into employment we can now consider those actions intended to widen recruitment and encourage a broader range of individuals into employment.

For employers, particularly those operating in tight labour markets, benefits clearly exist in any widening of the available labour pool and hence there can be a strong desire to explore and actively engage diverse pools of labour – returners, those with few or no qualifications, older workers, disabled workers, the unemployed or those with minimal work experience.

"as far as recruitment’s concerned, it’s about trying to just sort of get people to think again… to perhaps prompt somebody to look twice and to think ‘That could be me… if they can do it, I can do it.’"  
(Halifax Call Centre, Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

As with Days Hotel a key factor in the employer’s ability to achieve this desire was the assistance of a local community forum (involving the employer, a range of local community groups, partnership boards and JobCentre staff). The Forum met to discuss accessibility measures and crucially how local jobseekers and the unemployed / returners could be afforded better access to employment within Halifax Call Centre. In both processes (Days Hotel and Halifax Call Centre) the involvement of an Employer-Community interaction process has been pivotal in encouraging local residents to consider and apply for work.

Additionally, the process resulted in the establishment of a number of important processes that are summarised below:

**Open Days** – In addition to the willingness of this employer to visit the local community and engage with local residents (a factor noted as highly important with regard to the Days Hotel experience) potential employees from local communities were taken by their local community representatives to visit this employer and view the working environment for themselves. Employees showcasing the work environment were carefully selected to come from a range of diverse backgrounds themselves - older workers, from unemployment, returnees etc – thereby illustrating how they were able to overcome similar barriers to gain employment at the site. JobCentre and Benefits Office staff were available to provide multi-faceted advice on benefits and moving back into employment. Overall, individuals benefit from direct experience of likely working conditions and the encouragement of workers while this employer benefits from both widening their labour supply and in receiving applications from individuals who now have an understanding of the work involved and therefore should be less likely to form part of any short term turnover.

**Sequencing of Employment Drives with training programmes** – This is one area in which community organisations felt there was much progress to be made toward maintaining ‘momentum’ for jobseekers i.e. if training programmes could be sequenced with employment drives so as to remove any intervening periods of non-activity then there was a significantly higher chance of getting non-employed jobseekers into the types of work for which they were being trained. Jobseekers would thus be provided with a direct employment goal (similar to Bridge to Employment) and intervening inactivity or non-optimal types of employment could be avoided (both which may serve to disenchant the individual and lead to a possible withdrawal from the labour market).

**Signposting for unsuccessful applicants** – An important process arising from the work with this employer was that of ‘signposting’ i.e. should an applicant be unsuccessful this employer would use the ‘rejection’ letter to not only thank the individual for their application but to provide pointers on how to perform better in the future (via the standard help sheets on application forms, aptitude testing or interview skills) and crucially to provide immediate alternatives for the jobseeker (a.k.a. ‘signposting’) – not only is the jobseeker invited to apply again at the next recruitment drive but is also given information regarding relevant community / government agencies and ongoing schemes for which they may be eligible.
“…it gave me a good impression of them …they’re looking for staff and they’re willing to let you know where you went wrong and they’re giving you a chance to reapply… nobody else ever did that.” (Halifax Call Centre: Worker C).

As with the sequenced training efforts (outlined above) the intent here is to capitalise on and maintain any momentum and to provide an accessible ‘next step’ for those seeking work. Analogous to the Post-Appointment Support, this area of ‘Post-Application Support’ is clearly one that could be developed.

**Employment Initiatives** – this employer was a keen advocate of schemes such as GEMS and Bridge to Employment.

“We’ve been really fortunate that we’ve been able to work very closely with the T&EA and the Bridge Schemes and have had some fantastic results and have got some very, very, very good people here through that route…” (Halifax Call Centre, Personnel & Training Manager July 2001)

Similar to that noted by Days Hotel, this employer regarded participation in such schemes as providing the following benefits:

Providing a source of pre-screened workers for whom training is not only tailored to company needs but is also subsidised.

Because such schemes largely target the non-employed, (effectively drawing less on those already in employment), they reduce within sector turnover; thereby growing and strengthening the sector as a whole.

As having a workforce balancing effect in that they provide access to a wider range of social groups than normally associated with the sector – be it on qualifications, gender, age, location or community background.
Women in Work: Shaping a Fairer Future


The Women and Work Commission report “Shaping a Fairer Future” sets out 40 practical recommendations to tackle job segregation and the gender pay gap.

The report noted that increasing women’s employment and ending the gender segregation (in which women are generally concentrated in the five ‘Cs’ – the caring, cashier, clerical, cleaning and catering sectors) would benefit the economy by as much as £23 billion, worth 2 per cent of GDP.

The report called on the Government to:

- fund a £20 million package to enable women to change direction and raise skill levels, including offering free skills coaching and training programmes focused on women returners
- introduce an initiative to promote quality part-time work
- promote a localised approach to matching jobs and skills using community centres, schools and children’s centres to recruit local women, to be piloted in five areas across the country
- provide support for the development and training of equality reps.

The report made recommendations in a number of areas:

- Skills and Training
- Education and Careers
- Occupational Segregation
- Labour Market Experience
- Organisational Practice

With specific relevance to Employer / organisational practice it was argued that:

- A UK-wide support package be established to raise awareness and capacity building to enable private sector companies to adopt solutions relevant to them, which will have the most impact on women’s pay and opportunity.
- £1 million funding for Investors in People (IIP) to support all firms (particularly small and the five ‘c’ sectors) to spread best practice on equality and diversity, fair pay and reward, and training.

A range of exemplar companies be recruited to develop and deliver programmes to promote quality part-time jobs, progress women employees, as well as attract women to non-traditional occupations and school subjects less favoured by girls. Pilot projects could include:

- a new offer to schools to give girls work experience, in particular in non-traditional jobs;
- setting up a new women’s network in senior or traditionally male jobs within the company;
- actively promoting quality part-time jobs;
- a recruitment round which supports women returners’ development needs including confidence building and other support mechanisms;
- developing career pathways for women working in lower-paid jobs;
- providing paid time off, support and facilities to a network of equality reps;
- undertaking an equal pay review.

The Minister for Women, Ruth Kelly, announced on 30 January 2007 progress on the ‘Exemplar Employer Initiative’ which had been created to stimulate cultural change among employers.

By January 2007, more than 100 companies and organisations had signed up to the Exemplar Employer initiative which would seek to develop programmes such as helping women returning from work access quality part-time work; flexible working for women and setting up job share registers; working with schools to inform girls about careers in their sector, supporting mothers returning from work.

For example, 65% of Tesco’s in store workforce is female. Each year they run academies for women identified as having the potential to progress into senior roles within the organisation. All managers in store (over 20,000) will now also receive diversity training which includes looking at barriers that women may face in developing into managerial positions.
Encouraging women returners to traditionally male industries


The research was commissioned by the DTI and conducted by the Institute of Work Psychology (IWP). It was based on a survey of 280 “women returners”* and 40 consultations with employers and their representatives.

Key findings of relevance to the WINS study were:

Managing a return to work – Almost 60% of women with caring responsibilities wanted to work flexibly.

Facilitating Child Care – Women generally managed their child care using family and partners with women in the two highest socio-economic groups making more use of formal paid childcare schemes.

Access to flexible working – While 2/3 of the women surveyed had flexible working patterns, only 50% report that they are able to influence the hours they work and when they work these hours. While it is encouraging that women are able to benefit from such schemes it is potentially also indicative of flexibility being provided more-so for the employer than the employee.

Career choices - many females take work in administration or sales occupations. Some women would require retraining or additional qualifications to take work in their ‘ideal’ job.

The majority of respondents had taken traditionally “female” jobs. It was argued that this was primarily for two reasons.

- Advice, role models and experience – these tended to reinforce occupational segregation with only graduate level entry being likely to direct women into non-traditional sectors. Provision for returnees was regarded as patchy with lone parents having some access but provision for partnered women being regarded as “almost nonexistent”. Respondents were most likely to gain information from social networks and newspapers.

- Employer’s attitudes – whilst it was noted that some employers in non-traditional sectors did have flexible working practices they had tended to develop these for existing staff and had not made these public or actively promoted them. For other employers it was argued that they saw their jobs as “unsuitable for women with childcare responsibilities”. Childcare is of course not an exclusively female concern and flexible working practices are of benefit generally in attracting and recruiting valuable employees.

Job search – Almost 60% saw returning to work as an active process while for the remainder it was more a matter of chance.

Factors important in returning to work – In addition to flexibility, respondents were motivated by factors such as job satisfaction, financial independence and companionship – be it from other women or men.

Interest in jobs within the non-traditional sectors – respondents were interested to some extent – primarily in the ability of certain jobs to offer job satisfaction and responsibility. However there was some doubt in the likelihood of such jobs offering flexibility with many jobs being perceived as requiring long hours.

Retraining – respondents had a positive attitude to training and learning and saw training as important with a clear role for government funded training in providing the skills to access non-traditional jobs.

Role of employers in encouraging women into non-traditional sectors (NTS) – respondents felt that employers needed to give greater encouragement to women returners in their recruitment information and practices. Building on noted NTS benefits of job satisfaction and some degree of autonomy / responsibility would also widen the attractiveness of the work as would promotion of flexible / family friendly policies. Respondents also saw the benefits of employers providing retraining opportunities and that government had a role to play in providing free pre-employment skills training.

* defined in the study as “partnered women between the ages of 25 and 55 who hold qualifications at NVQ level 3 or below, have taken one or more breaks from work for caring reasons in the last 10 years and are currently either not working or working part-time
What Employers Look for When Recruiting the Unemployed and Inactive


The focus of this study was on the needs of employers when recruiting from the unemployed / inactive and the extent to which government provision meets their needs. The research considered a review of the policy, evaluation and academic literature, and comprised 22 qualitative interviews with individuals from across government departments, regional agencies, and voluntary sector organisations.

Findings most relevant to the WINS project are reproduced below:

- Overall, employers are less demanding of technical skills, considering them trainable, if candidates exhibit employability and soft skills, and positive attributes (Winterbotham et al., 2001).

- Assessing soft skills (e.g. interpersonal and communication skills) precisely is problematic. Often measurement is based on employers’ perceptions of their interaction with candidates at interview (Hogarth and Wilson, 2003).

- Employers look for core characteristics such as motivation, flexibility, willingness to work and learn, and appearance, behaviour, confidence, and positive gestures and mannerisms (Bunt, 2005).

- Soft skills are often linked, in employers’ minds, with positive characteristics and attributes.

- Qualifications do not appear to be important for a large number of employers and jobs, consistently ranking beneath characteristics and soft skills in recruitment frameworks (Bunt, ibid; Jenkins and Wolf, 2005). Qualifications are most often used to inform the screening process.

- The unemployed (and some inactive groups) can be disadvantaged by employers’ recruitment methods. Where employers use informal methods of advertising, such as word of mouth, those without contacts in the workplace are unlikely to hear about job opportunities (Hogarth and Wilson, ibid).

- Age stereotypes persist about older and younger workers (and other inactive groups) and while they benefit some groups, they disadvantage others. Older adults may be perceived as being good with customers but also as ‘hard to train’. There is little evidence to support such views (Meadows, 2003). Employers may overlook a lack of qualifications if young adults demonstrate positive attributes (Canny, ibid).

- Overall, the evidence suggests that a focus on qualifications would appear not to contribute to an individual’s employment outcomes, due to low emphasis on these in recruitment. Developing soft and generic skills is likely to be more important.

Work trials were emphasised as a way of developing work and employability skills in unemployed and inactive people, and offering employers an opportunity to test whether the person is appropriate for the job.

Tackling Gender Barriers to Better Jobs


In 2006 the Equal Opportunities Commission completed a two-year investigation looking at why women and men continue to work in traditional jobs and why young people choose apprenticeships and other vocational training in traditional sectors. Relevant key excerpts from the work are reproduced below:

The EOC produced a number of reports and recommendations - including those relating to the role of employers in improving access to employment for atypical workers in which they noted that one of four key barriers to change was “a lack of coordinated and consistent action amongst employers”
The EOC concluded from the investigation that Britain is failing to provide real opportunity and choice for young people entering training and work, with girls from lower socio-economic groups losing out the most. The investigation also revealed there were high levels of support for change amongst young people, adults and employers.

The EOC acknowledged that there were pockets of best practice to recruit more atypical workers across all sectors (mainly in response to a perceived business need) but employers were not actively engaging with schools and 46% of apprenticeship employers that were surveyed recognised that they were not offering enough work experience opportunities to young people. This means young people were not encouraged or enabled to make the connections between what they do at school and their occupational opportunities.

It was noted that employers were generally more positive about attracting women than the make-up of their workforces suggested and there were increasing numbers of employers in the sectors who were reaping the business benefits of training and recruiting women.

At the same time, however it was contrasted that negative, dismissive and discriminatory attitudes and practices among employers in all sectors made it hard for young people and females to enter and remain in non-traditional sectors with many women facing isolation and a culture of machismo, bullying and harassment, often with little or no support.

The report identified best practice examples in training & employment by highlighting that:

**Training providers** were:
- Setting more flexible training hours to fit around women's caring responsibilities.
- Subsidising childcare, either directly or via an allowance to offset costs.
- Offering personal development modules to help atypical trainees build confidence and assertive behaviour.
- Dedicating a member of staff to helping atypical trainees find work placements and supporting them through the placements.
- Encouraging employers to offer flexible-hours placements to accommodate caring responsibilities
- Offering single-sex training courses to open up training possibilities to individuals from a wider range of backgrounds.

**Employers** were:
- Offering flexible hours to accommodate caring – there is evidence that small employers and large employers across all the investigation sectors have been able to meet different working patterns – often to the benefit of their clients and business.
- Providing travel and childcare support.
- Establishing 'buddying' and mentoring to address isolation and lack of confidence.
- Setting clear expectations of standards of behaviour for employees – one large construction employer tackled persistent harassment by getting rid of the offending male employee.
- Establishing good links with local schools including offering work experience placements, single-sex taster days and open days.
- Providing training, support and guidance to open up non traditional career routes, for example by Kibble Education and Care Centre's 'Men Can Care' project.

In summary, the authors recommended that employers should be encouraged to:
- train, recruit, and retain women in non-traditional sectors;
- re-skill women employees to allow them to take work in non-traditional skills;
- offer at least one non-traditional work experience placement;
- support and promote better, more flexible employer practices that would help and encourage more women to enter male-dominated sectors;
- report on human capital – where it is material to business performance – in a way that includes indicators relevant to progress towards diversity, recognising that good practice is material to good performance.
Women in non-traditional training and employment

Source: Angela Dale, Nors Jackson, Nicky Hill, (2005) Women in non-traditional training and employment; Equal Opportunities Commission

Commissioned as part of the EOC investigation (noted above) this study presented findings from a number of women who had succeeded in entering training or employment in the non-traditional sectors of plumbing, construction, engineering and information and communications technology (ICT).

Focus groups were used to interview 43 women (six groups) from England and Wales who were in training (mainstream or women only) and who were employed / self-employed in the construction sector: 6 staff from training centres were also interviewed. Key findings from the study are reproduced below:

Benefits Accrued

- Women experienced considerable benefits from training and work in non-traditional skills sectors, and their passion for the work was a feature of the research.

- Women unanimously stated that their choice of training or employment sector had improved the quality of their life, bringing them job satisfaction, empowering them to take control of their lives, and, for some, lifting them out of poverty.

- The construction industry in particular offers scope for self-employment, that enables women to combine domestic and caring responsibilities and paid work, with the highest levels of flexibility.

- Some of the women had experienced careers in traditionally female areas and were motivated to move into male dominated sectors for better pay.

- There was evidence that employers were recognising the benefits to business of employing more women. Some customers in diverse households are happier to have tradeswomen in their homes. Women needed to be more highly skilled than men to succeed, therefore, made highly skilled and committed employees.

- Women tended to have communication and interpersonal skills that enable businesses to be more competitive and responsive in a changing labour market.

Obstacles Faced

- Many women had been interested in non-traditional occupations when younger; though had been actively discouraged or unsupported from teachers and careers advisers when at school or in further education.

- Women had not been given appropriate advice and guidance in subject choices or non-traditional route ways, nor when older in relation to training provision.

- Some women encountered resistance to them undertaking non-traditional skills training from their husbands or partners. Success in a male domain, coupled with the fact that they could earn more money than their partner triggered resentment.

- Women found it much harder than their male counterparts to secure work experience placements with employers in order to complete their NVQ qualifications.

- In mainstream training women experienced isolation as the ‘only one’ on many courses, with no female lecturers, inflexible hours and little support. These conditions meant that only the strongest and most determined women completed the courses.

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

- Women in training and employment faced overt and covert discrimination from employers. In some cases employers refused to train or employ women. In other cases women were laughed at, bullied, faced antagonism, were given the worst jobs to do and were expected to make the tea.

- The anti-social and inflexible hours of the industries proved deeply problematic for women with childcare and caring responsibilities.
Although an issue for everybody, health and safety considerations in the manual industries were perceived as a particular obstacle to increasing numbers of women.

**Key Enablers**

- Support and active encouragement from one key individual, could make the difference for women in their decision-making regarding non-traditional work.

- The provision of women only positive action training was instrumental to the success of many women in non-traditional skill areas. Such provision had inspired many to start training.

- Training with peers in numbers, flexible delivery of training, childcare provision, pre-entry skills and entry to employment provision and explicit support mechanisms were key to women’s success.

- Good employers were key to women’s successful entry into the sectors either through the provision of work-based placements or in securing employment and were equally open to employing women. Their male employees were praised as good colleagues.

- The diversity of the market and changing households are such that people are beginning to ask for tradeswomen. Some employers were recognising the added value and business that employing women could accrue for them.

- Women suggested that their communication and interpersonal skills were increasingly recognised by employers as important in enhancing their marketability.

- For some women, the importance of equal opportunities policies was underlined as protection for them in employment in the public sector.

- Some employers in the ICT sector were willing to adopt flexible working practices to meet the needs of women trainees.

**Recommendations for Employers**

- Employers are encouraged to provide quality work placements to women in training.

- Employers give women a chance in employment so that they can demonstrate what they are capable of.

- Employers develop flexible working practices – particularly in relation to working hours which were regarded as “frequently (and unnecessarily) inflexible and all but impossible for women with preschool and school-aged children”.

- Employers develop equal opportunities policies and practices (including harassment) to develop their workforce and provide protection to women.

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* Good Practice in Promoting Diversity in Apprenticeships*


**Apprenticeships Task Force Diversity Working Group**

Commissioned to support the work of the Diversity Working Group of the Apprenticeship Taskforce, this work set out to identify and record case study examples illustrating good practice in diversity and equality across a range of grounds (including gender).

Key lessons arising from the work, relevant to the recruitment of women, are reproduced below:

**Key Barriers**

- poor practice in some schools can lead to an unconscious gender stereotyping of roles and occupations;

- lack of confidence, low esteem among some people;

- stereotypical image / negative perceptions of non traditional work;

- low awareness of career directions (wide range) and opportunities for progression.

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* Lessons relating to Apprenticeships also have relevance for employers in terms of how they design their own induction, training and employment. In addition, many employers (including WINS employers) are finding renewed benefits in using apprenticeships to attract and retain workers.
### Proposed Solutions
- common sense and open minds are important prerequisites, more formal strategies needed in larger firms;
- support (leadership) from senior managers is vital;
- clear objectives and targets give focus;
- ‘buy in’ essential from all stakeholders;
- monitoring, review and impact assessment ensures progress is made;
- diversity audit a good place to start.

### Marketing and Outreach
- always portray a diverse workforce;
- involve non-traditional apprentices in design of materials;
- where ads are placed as important as what they say;
- word of mouth and informal networks very influential;
- carefully targeted events can be helpful -‘hands on’ activities generate interest;
- outreach to community leaders important.

### Recruitment
- assess applicants in terms of strengths, as individuals not members of groups;
- use practical assessments as well assess against actual job requirements;
- sell benefits of diversity to line managers;
- use structured approach - training for managers involved;
- monitor the whole process - identify any unintentional bias.

### On & Off Job Training
- good practice is equally relevant for all staff;
- ‘buddies’, mentors and in-company networks can all provide support;
- regular reviews identify difficulties early;
- minor adjustments to working practices and equipment sometimes needed;
- specialist external support is available.
- flexibility in developing individual job roles also helps;
- diversity training important for all staff.

### Progression
- make range of future opportunities explicit;
- positive role models important;
- encourage non-traditional staff to put themselves forward for promotion;
- awareness training for line managers important (e.g. re criteria for promotion);
- link pay rises with defined milestones;
- monitor long term progression (any issues for particular groups?).

### Implementation
- it’s a long term exercise – no ‘quick fixes’;
- a willingness to be self critical is important;
- solutions best where locally devised;
- in practice, very few adjustments are required – it’s more an attitude of mind;
- however, shifting attitudes and culture is complex;
- the benefits really do outweigh the costs.
**Key Lessons: Assisting atypical workers (including women) into employment**

This section seeks to draw out some of the key lessons arising from the above and from the author’s own work from the mid 90’s onward. In doing so it draws heavily on work funded by the EOC in GB, who in 2006 set out key actions that employers could take to break down gender segregation.

The literature review above clearly sets out a range of ways in which employers can promote access to non-traditional employment, ranging from promoting opportunities for work; recruitment practices; in work practices (flexibility) and both individual support and cultural change. The literature supports not only the direct benefit to business from a more diverse workforce but also the tiered benefits that can occur from working in partnership with others organisations that can provide knowledge, expertise and insight to overcome wider barriers.

**Opportunities for change**

- **Promoting opportunities (pre-recruitment)**
  - Reinforce diversity – Ensure that all promotional materials portray a diverse range of individuals. Consider involving members of under-represented groups in the design of materials to assist with overcoming unforeseen barriers.
  - Grow the sector – work with others to promote the sector in schools, colleges and at careers fairs to generate future interest.
  - Be interactive – deliver hands-on practical sessions to instil confidence and change attitudes to non-traditional careers.
  - Visualise Success – Ask current employees from under-represented groups to act as role models at events to inspire others and demonstrate that barriers can be overcome.
  - Widen outreach – engage with communities, schools, parents to influence career choices.
  - Target groups – by holding recruitment days at community events and locations they tend to visit.
  - Dedicate resources – such as outreach workers as a point of contact and visible focal point for the efforts of the employer.

- **Review practices (recruitment and employment)**
  - Review recruitment practices – to ensure they do not unduly limit applications by containing narrow or irrelevant criteria that may exclude or discourage some groups.
  - Overcome structural barriers – consider giving all atypical applicants who meet the minimum selection criteria an interview.
  - Look for weak points – monitor the number of atypical candidates who get through each step of the recruitment process to identify where problems may lie.
  - Be robust – ensure objective recruitment decisions by using explicit selection criteria and structured interviewing.
  - Proactively improve conditions – making adjustments to working practices and equipment to encourage atypical workers but to benefit all.
  - Update recruitment training – carry out diversity training for managers and others involved in recruitment, ensuring they are aware of the business case for diversity.
  - Be flexible – look for opportunities to promote and implement flexible working. With increases in lone parent and dual worker households, this will help attract and retain workers from both sexes.

The following reproduces and develops relevant excerpts from recent work funded by the EOC in GB which set out key actions that employers could take to break down gender segregation.
Support mechanisms (Post Recruitment)

- Mentor – appoint buddies to support employees and help them feel less isolated. Where possible, allocate a mentor of the same gender.
- Coach – Ensure managers have the skills they need to identify and meet the support needs of a diverse workforce.
- Support diversity – by setting up a support team or diversity network to ensure atypical workers have regular contact with colleagues in a similar position.
- Drive culture – make the organisation more welcoming by implementing broad programmes of diversity training.
- Overcome multiple disadvantage, if present, among atypical workers by providing courses in numeracy, literacy personal confidence.
- Encourage Progression – encourage minority employees to apply for promotion to improve their representation among senior management and facilitate this by offering career development training.

Employer Benefits arising from workforce diversity

The literature reinforces longer term benefits as outweighing shorter terms costs, with high level benefits such as:

- Overcoming skills shortages – by recruiting from a wider pool of labour.
- Improving service delivery – by widening the range of skills and aptitudes among employees.
- Better reflecting customer base by creating a more diverse workforce which better helps to meet wider customer demand.
- Branding – projecting a diverse and modern corporate image to further attract both future employees and customers.

Relevant Lessons from EQUAL

Other research commissioned under the Equal Community Initiative in Germany and Republic of Ireland supports the value to the employer of increased flexibility. For example:

A cost-benefit analysis of flexible work organisation and other support measures for parents was undertaken on behalf of the German Government in a sample of enterprises (Senioren et al 2004). The study found that, on average, each company saved up to several hundred thousand Euros in reduced costs by introducing a “family package” (counselling for parents, individualised flexi-time, tele-work and childcare). Model calculations based on the loss incurred through staff turnover and absenteeism on the one hand, and on the cost of the “family package” on the other, demonstrate that on average a company can generate at least a 25% return on investment.

An Irish study (Drew 2002) showed that flexible work arrangements yielded a number of benefits, including:

- Employee satisfaction: +85%
- Attracting/retaining employees: +74%
- Productivity: +58%
- Reduced labour turnover: –55%
- Reduced absenteeism: –50%
- Improved business results: +48%

Further work is being undertaken under the Equal Opportunities Pillar of the EQUAL Community Initiative with more information available on:

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm
Wider benefits – Realising the Value of Accessibility Measures

For Individual jobseekers - particularly those previously non-employed – there are clear benefits from an employer’s reassessment of skills needs and the outreach measures designed to improve access.

“I’m happy here… I’m hoping to stay for as long as possible… the working conditions are excellent… I don’t think I’ll be moving…” (Halifax Call Centre, Bridge to Employment Recruit).

For the employer; benefits are identified in improved perceptions by local jobseekers; flexibility due to differing workforce skills and working patterns; and in workforce stability. Certainly interviews that the author has conducted with workers would seem to support this, with those recruited via outreach seemingly more willing to stay with this employer for an extended period of time:

“The people from the outreach mechanisms are in many cases some of the most loyal people we have…” (Halifax Call Centre, Operations Manager, May 2002)

For the local communities experiencing non-employment, there were also clear and similar benefits to be accrued from engaging employers and encouraging outreach measures – particularly with regard to how more accessible and attainable employment opportunities were slowly changing community attitudes toward seeking work:

“there has been an upturn in employment in the area … increased opportunities on the doorstep that have allowed people to go into the service industries… there’s more of a momentum about employment in the area… I’ve noticed that several of the young men in the community who were doing informal, casual work are now starting to ask us if it’s viable that they could get into [the employer], because they’ve seen some people get in… and then there’s the whole knock on about improved esteem and identity…” (Community Development Worker, South Belfast)
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Further information
Further Information

Interested readers may now wish to review the second report* from this study which summarises key findings and recommendations arising from fieldwork undertaken in Belfast with participant employers; employees; training organisations and job seekers.

In broad terms the supplementary report seeks to identify practical examples of how an employer can:

- Create a workplace attractive to the labour supply being targeted (while seeking to maintain attractiveness to current labour supply);

- Improve accessibility to the post by identifying, minimising and/or removing barriers (real or perceived, in the workplace and in recruitment processes);

- Promote the key benefits of the job and organisation in a manner appropriate to the target audience and in recognition that the marketplace may hold outdated stereotypes and be ignorant of many of the benefits of atypical work.

Information on the WINS project itself can be obtained from http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/wins

* Encouraging Women into Work: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment - Literature Review

- Encouraging Women into Work: Overcoming Barriers to Recruitment - Findings and Key Lessons.
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