

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL / CITYWIDE INTEREST

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8TH FEBRUARY 2007

**GENDER & EMPLOYMENT IN LOCAL LABOUR MARKETS (GELLM)
FINAL REPORTS OF THE LEICESTER STUDIES**

Report of the Service Director Regeneration, Highways & Transportation

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To introduce the three printed research reports attached, and to offer Members the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in these studies.

2 Summary

- 2.1 The GELLM study produced three detailed reports for Leicester:

- Working below potential – women and part time work
- Ethnic Minority Women and access to the labour market
- Career Development for women in Local Authorities

- 2.2 All three studies found evidence that women could make a much higher level contribution to the economic prosperity of Leicester, but were prevented from achieving their full potential by a number of perceived and actual barriers.

- 2.3 The reports all include recommendations for actions which the Council and its partners could take to reduce the effect of these barriers.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are asked to consider the study recommendations, and give guidance on their priorities.

4 Financial & Legal Implications

Financial Implications

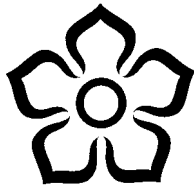
- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications of this report.
(Martin Judson, Head of Finance, Regeneration & Culture)

Legal Implications

- 4.2 There are no direct legal implications of this report.
(Joanna Bunting, Head of Commercial & Property Law, Legal Services)

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Report

1. Background

- 1.1 Members will recall that some three years ago, Leicester was invited to take part in a European Social Fund research project run by Sheffield Hallam University to investigate how gender affected employment chances in 12 English Local Authorities – Leicester and Birmingham, Camden, East Staffordshire, Newcastle, Sandwell, Somerset, Southwark, Thurrock, Trafford, Wakefield and West Sussex.
- 1.2 The first product, published in September 2004 and placed in the Members' Library, was an analysis of 2001 Census data to establish a gender profile of Leicester's labour market.
- 1.3 The City Council and its partners set up a steering group to assist the study and provide local guidance to the researchers. The field work was carried out in 2005 and early 2006, and the reports were launched at an event held at the Peepul Centre on 17th November 2006.
- 1.4 The event was chaired by the Chair of the Leicestershire Learning & Skills Council, Maureen Milgram Forrest, and the Lord Mayor and the Chair of the Leicester Partnership gave keynote speeches. A number of Members were able to attend.

2. Recommendations of the studies

- 2.1 Each study came up with a number of conclusions and recommendations for action. For convenience, the recommendations for the City Council to consider on each study are reproduced below.
- 2.2 Members are asked to give guidance on how they wish these issues to be addressed.

3. Working below potential – women and part time work

- 3.1 This study states:

3.2 “We estimate that at least 51% of part-time women workers in Leicester employed in low paid, part time jobs are working below their proven past potential in the labour market. This is a waste of women's talents and experience, and a waste of the education and training invested in them. The issue of women working below their potential in part-time jobs also raises questions about the efficiency of the local labour market. Although there are shortages of skilled labour, local employers continue to under-use the skills of local women. The under-use of women's labour market experience also has implications for women themselves. It affects their quality of life and the standard of living of their families. There are ways to address this problem.”

3.3 “We recommend that employers:

- **Adopt a more strategic approach to the design of jobs and the replacement of employees**

In many organisations the replacement of jobs takes place at the line manager level. This can lead to a situation where job design is static and traditional, as some line managers tend to replace like with like; part-time with part-time and full-time with full time. A more strategic approach would place the emphasis on skills and work outputs rather than working time.

- **Rethink the value of part-time working and part-time employees**

Part-time jobs are currently seen by employers as having very distinct and limited purposes within a workforce, i.e. where tasks are time-limited or where the size of the workforce needs to expand or contract to meet changes in demand for products or services. Part-time working can have a value beyond these limited purposes, for example, enabling employers to tap into a much wider, skilled and experienced labour market.

- **Recognise the wider organisational benefits of part-time working**

Part-time working has additional value as a tool for enhancing employee retention, and can make an organisation the ‘employer of choice’ for skilled and qualified women who do not wish to work full-time.

- **Take a risk in opening up part-time opportunities at all levels**

Organisations are concerned that senior level jobs cannot be performed on a part-time basis. But organisations which have taken this risk are enjoying the benefits of a wider pool of labour, find part-time workers have high productivity and report that good job applicants are choosing them because of the flexibility they offer.

- **Offer senior and management posts on a part-time basis when recruiting on the open labour market**

Many organisations are willing to offer flexible or part-time working patterns to existing employees who they wish to retain. But this does not help skilled women who are searching for work. Only by offering more part-time jobs on the open labour market can we fully use women's talents and skills.

- **Address the long hours of work associated with senior level jobs**

Some organisations are losing skilled and talented women because of the difficulties they face in balancing their home lives and their working lives.

- **Ensure that part-time workers can progress at work**

In many organisations part-time workers are required to work full-time to secure promotion. Opening up career pathways to part-time workers will enable employers to capture the un-used skills and talents within the part-time workforce.”

3.4 “We also recommend that local authorities and their partners:

- **Acknowledge the waste of local women's talents and skills**
As long as over 50% of local women are working below their past and proven potential in the labour market, the local economy is losing out. At the same time, investment in the training and education of many women is being squandered. Addressing this could improve the standing of part-time workers as well as raising the status of part-time work.
- **Adopt good practice within the local authority**
The local authority has an opportunity to lead the way in this field, by opening up a wider range of jobs to part-time working.
- **Encourage their employer partners to 'take a risk'**
The local authority, in its engagement with other local employers, has an opportunity to use this new evidence-based research about Leicester to raise the local problem of women working below their potential, and to encourage local employers to open up more opportunities for part-time working at all levels within their organisations.
- **Work with partners to extend and advertise the training and education opportunities to women returners**
Women returning to work after an absence often lack knowledge of the educational and training opportunities open to them. Some cannot find the support and training they need. More could be done to reach out to women in the places they go, for example in schools and community centres, and to inform them of the support and training available.
- **Work with partners to develop financial support to women returners seeking to upgrade their skills and qualifications**
Women have to draw on their own financial resources to upgrade their skills after an absence from work. There is scope to offer women more financial support so that they can regain their labour market status, and this needs to be explored with local partners such as Jobcentre Plus, the Learning and Skills Council and relevant sector skills councils.”

4. **Ethnic minority women and access to the labour market**

4.1 This study involved a number of workshops with women from the Spinney Hills ward. The Shama Womens Centre and the Pakistani Youth and Community Association were most helpful in assisting the researchers. It concludes:

4.2 “Voluntary/community sector organisations and funders:

- **Need support to sustain the work of local, community-focused organisations in meeting the needs of ethnic minority women.** These centres have successfully engaged hard-to-reach groups, by building their trust, increasing their skills, confidence and employability, and bringing them closer to the labour market. They offer ‘value-added’, by encouraging women’s self-help and independence, as participants progress from ‘beneficiaries’ to volunteers. It will be important to identify ways of sustaining this work in the longer term.
- **Could increase opportunities for training and progression:** e.g. to accredit skills and experience gained in the voluntary sector, and to provide improved career structures and opportunities for gaining professional qualifications, while retaining opportunities for women lacking qualifications to enter the sector.
- **Extended ESOL/English-language support** is needed: Free access is needed in community based centres providing opportunities to develop

skills and confidence in a safe environment, alongside basic skills/IT training to enhance employability. This provision needs to be culturally appropriate and gender sensitive. Crèche facilities (preferably on-site) are important. Translation and interpretation services should be monitored and reviewed to ensure this provision meets the needs of local women.

- **Increased provision of personal development and confidence-building courses and activities** is needed: Arts-based/creative activities can be highly positive and empowering, without over-reliance on verbal communication skills. Group activities further enhance mutual understanding and shared experiences.”

4.3 “Employers/employers’ organisations:

- **Recognition of prior qualifications and skills gained abroad** needs to improve, building on existing schemes. Employer awareness needs to be raised by challenging misconceptions and assumptions about particular groups, and recognising that prior experience and motivation to work can be an indication of potential.
- **Work placement and on-the-job training opportunities** are needed: tasters of alternative and non-traditional opportunities; and opportunities to gain experience.
- **Staff management, career progression and staff development support** may need to be enhanced. Managers need to be aware of how workplace cultures exclude certain groups. Practices need to be sensitive to individual differences and needs, and to recognise that lack of confidence can hamper progression for some groups.
- **A much wider range of part-time jobs** is needed, to enable women with other responsibilities to progress and achieve their potential.
- **Vacancies need to be advertised in a wide range of local community settings and media.** Jobcentre Plus, Connexions, careers-related services and training organisations
- **Improved access to careers advice** is needed: This should be tailored to women from different backgrounds, with varied experience and aspirations, offering advice and guidance on short, medium and longer-term goals. Nonstereotyped careers advice and information on alternative and non-traditional employment and training options, matched to local skills gaps, employers, and job opportunities is required – particularly in schools and colleges.
- **Access to pre-interview and job-preparation support and coaching** in schools, colleges and elsewhere, on: job-search skills, CV writing, applications, and interview skills. Because ‘self-promotion’ in applications and interviews is a cultural barrier for some groups, specific, targeted coaching may be needed.
- **Better local information, advice and guidance** are needed: This should relate to employment, training, the education system and benefits, and be offered in community languages or with language support. Further outreach work by JobCentre Plus and community organisations needs to be developed, to bring mainstream support, local jobs and information to local women. Particular attention needs to be given to ethnic minority women displaced from textile, hosiery and other manufacturing industry.
- **Targeted supported is needed to tackle the barriers experienced by unemployed ethnic minority women** e.g. for Bangladeshi and Pakistani women seeking work through JobCentre Plus. High unemployment among economically active Pakistani/Bangladeshi women suggests entrenched disadvantage and discrimination persist.

- **Formal accreditation mechanisms** that value and recognise practical competences and skills need to be developed.

4.4 Local authorities/other local service providers could:

- **Undertake additional work to tackle racism and discrimination:** Awareness raising/information for the local population, through schools and colleges, local media and employers. Anti-racist, diversity training for service providers and employers. Heightened profile of the work, policies and actions taken by Street Wardens, the Police, Victim Support, legal services and other agencies in combating racism. Initiatives to encourage reporting of incidents.
- **Improve targeting and promotion of information and support services to ethnic minority women using trusted community links** (organisations, events, workers, volunteers), using informal communication mechanisms.
- **Improve access to childcare:** flexible, local, affordable and culturally sensitive provision, to support course attendance, training, volunteering activities and paid work.
- **Improve monitoring data and targeting of services,** relevant to the situation of different groups of ethnic minority women. Guidance could be developed for organisations on how they can meet the multi-layered needs of the local population.
- **Mainstream equalities/diversity policies:** Across all statutory, voluntary and private sector provision/services (in line with the new public duty to promote gender equality).
- **Positively encourage and promote ethnic minority women's representation** and participation in local decision making and governance bodies (e.g. as local councillors, on Boards, and in other ways) to enable local change.

5. Career development for women in local authorities

5.1 This study involved an anonymous electronic survey of all staff with access to email and a number of focus groups with women employees. Its recommendations are:

5.2 “Implement Leicester City Council's work-life balance policies at all levels

- Managers are the key to the successful implementation of work-life balance policies. While Leicester City Council’s policies already offer flexible working arrangements to solve business problems, implementation is perceived to be inconsistent and conservative. We suggest that guidance and support to managers is reviewed, to encourage fair and appropriate application of the policies, and greater innovation in their implementation of flexible working arrangements.
- Further promotion of working arrangements that achieve a better work-life balance could be undertaken for all employees, in particular encouraging part-time and flexible working arrangements in senior roles.”

5.3 “Provide further support for Black and ethnic minority women employees

- Leicester City Council already has a good range of management training opportunities. Given the importance of enabling ethnic minority staff to benefit from these opportunities, more work could be done to promote appropriate role models at senior level, and greater attention could be

given to providing support and guidance to women after their training is completed.”

5.4 **“Extend training opportunities to develop and prepare women for promotion**

- Some women in the focus groups reported that ‘acting-up’ opportunities had been very important in enabling them to move forward in their careers; they had helped them to gain skills, experience and confidence. Women in our focus groups suggested that a formalised system of placements (through which departments could exchange staff for mutual gain, sharing information and overcoming staffing shortages) would be useful. They also felt that centralised information about ‘acting up’ or secondments was needed, with opportunities communicated to all staff. It was perceived that this could help to increase the number of female applicants and ensure women are able to benefit from the available opportunities.
- Many women in the focus groups felt they had benefited from external networks and mentors. These contacts had helped them to make more informed career choices, and had helped them to improve their current performance. More opportunities for mentoring, including arrangements for cross-departmental mentoring or networking outside the authority, could be considered. This might be an effective way of transferring the skills and knowledge which already exist within the female workforce, and of ensuring that the experience and organisational knowledge of senior and older staff is made available to less experienced employees.
- Some women in the study felt that although they had the potential to perform a more senior role, they were held back by their lack of formal qualifications, with particular reference to degrees. Ways of recognising and valuing relevant experience (as an alternative to formal qualifications), need to be explored within appointment criteria.”

6 Further information

- 6.1 All the studies across all twelve local authorities are available electronically on the Sheffield Hallam University web site at http://www.shu.ac.uk/research/csi/publications06_0003.html