Women in non-traditional training and employment

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to thank Sue Botcherby, Anne Madden and Dave Perfect and Dave Darton at the EOC for commissioning this research project.

The research could not have been completed without the support and co-operation of the agencies in Bradford, Oxford, Cardiff and London, which took responsibility for coordinating the focus groups with the researchers and participants.

The report authors would particularly like to thank the focus group participants in the four areas, who made generous contributions to the discussions, and shared their experiences of training and working in non-traditional fields.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a small, though rigorous study and captures the perspectives of women who have succeeded in entering training or employment in the non-traditional sectors of plumbing, construction, engineering and information and communications technology (ICT). They are therefore, the exception in the context of a highly segregated labour market. These women provide valuable information on occupational segregation and gender from an 'insider' perspective.

The focus group method was used to interview six groups of women, 43 in total who were:

- Training in mainstream environments
- Training in women-only environments
- Employed and self-employed in the construction sector

In addition, 6 staff from mainstream and women-only training centres took part in individual interviews.

The research was conducted at venues in London, the South East, Yorkshire and Wales with women aged between 20 and 50 years old.

Key findings were:

Benefits

- 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**

- Although women's experiences differed, there is compelling evidence of the range of obstacles and challenges faced in entering training and employment. In order to succeed in the present climate those women have had to become particularly resilient and determined.

- 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 for 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.

What helps?

- It is clear that women need support and active encouragement from individuals to pursue careers in non-traditional skills areas. One key individual who believed in them, could make the difference for women in their decision-making.

- 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.
Implications
It is clear from the research that those women who have succeeded in non-traditional skill areas are particularly resilient and determined. In the context of a highly segregated labour market and the obstacles that women continue to face, it is unrealistic to expect that numbers will significantly increase unless particular actions are instituted. Nor, is it reasonable to expect women to be unusually resilient and determined in order to survive in training or work.

It seems that particular attention and positive action is required to meet the needs of women entering training and employment and a national policy is developed. This could be successfully achieved through collaboration between major organisations and stakeholders like the DFES, QCA, LSC, Sector Skills Councils, Women’s Training Network and The UK SET Resource Centre.

Suggestions
The following actions are suggested to re-address the needs of women entering training and employment in non-traditional skills areas:

- Girls are encouraged and supported to undertake work placements and choose vocational options in non-traditional skill areas.
- Girls are introduced to role-models of women working in non-traditional skill areas.
- Careers and connexions advisers are trained to counter gender stereotyping in career choice.
- Positive action training is highlighted and marketed to women.
- Features of positive action training for women are taken into the mainstream and adopted as good practice.
- Positive action training provision is supported and developed in every local labour market.
- New adult apprenticeships are developed for women.
- 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.

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

1.1 Research background and objectives
In June 2003, the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) launched an investigation into gender segregation. The focus of the investigation, which is being funded by the European Social Fund (ESF), is on Modern Apprenticeships (MAs), which are currently the main training route into work for young people in Britain. It also concentrates on five occupational sectors where there are skill shortages: construction, plumbing, engineering, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and childcare.

This study was commissioned in December 2003 and is the fifth in a series of research studies that the EOC has set up to support the investigation. The Women's Training Network worked in partnership with the EOC to progress the research. In the context of a gender-segregated labour market and national skills shortages, it is important to investigate the perspectives of women who have made non traditional choices. Women who are in training or employment in non-traditional skill areas are well placed to describe the benefits of such choices. Their success challenges the prevalent myths that women cannot or should not be employed in skilled manual occupations. These women have encountered obstacles to entering and making progress in non-traditional skill areas, so have direct experience of available solutions. The good practice principles of positive action training and employment practice for women are essential components for tackling gender segregation.

This study aims to:
- Understand the obstacles women have encountered in entering non-traditional training/employment.
- Explore how they negotiated and managed those experiences.
- Identify the factors that enabled them to succeed and what else would have helped.
- Identify how more women can be enabled to enter non-traditional occupations and succeed.
- Highlight good practice for women in non-traditional skills training/employment.
- Provide recommendations, which can be fed into the EOC investigation into occupational segregation.
1.2 Context

1.2.1 Occupational segregation

The research was conducted in the context of a highly segregated labour market. Despite 30 years of anti-discrimination legislation, many occupational sectors and jobs in the UK remain strongly gender-segregated.

Table 1.1 demonstrates women’s under-representation in the sectors under investigation of construction, engineering, plumbing and ICT, with 1% of women in construction occupations, 9% in engineering and 18% in ICT.

Table 1.1: Employment in sector occupations of investigation, 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All construction occupations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ICT occupations</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All engineering occupations</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All plumbing occupations</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data are for employees and self-employed.
* Less than 10,000 in cell

Source: Miller et al, 2004

The National Skills Strategy (NSS) White Paper (DfES, 2003) raises issues of concern to this study, noting that women workers are ‘typically locked in a narrow range of low-level manual occupations and in part-time work where training opportunities are limited’. It recognises that the gender gap in qualifications contributes to the national skills deficit.

1.2.2 Skills shortages

The sectors of construction, ICT and engineering are amongst the areas where there is an identified skills shortage. Construction has the 2nd highest proportion of skill-shortage vacancies out of 28 industries (38.2% against an average of 19.9%) (EOC, 2004).

The phase one report of the EOC’s investigation identified “a correlation between sector-specific skills shortages and under-representation of women in these sectors” (EOC, 2004: p.3). The same investigation identified how skills shortages “…seriously
undermine the UK’s productivity and competitiveness. They impact on the quality of work being produced in the form of delays, increased operating costs and reduced customer services, which often means a loss of business” (EOC, 2004: p.9). Therefore, occupational segregation is a ‘gender issue’ and a barrier to addressing skills shortages and increasing the productivity and competitiveness of the country as a whole.

1.2.3 Equal pay

In 2003, women working full-time in Britain earned 82% of the average full-time earnings of men. This means that at 18% there has been little change in the full-time gender pay gap since the mid 1990s. Occupational segregation contributes to the gender pay gap. Men tend to work in occupations where there are high proportions of other men, thus there are higher rates of pay. (Olsen and Walby, 2004).

Whilst tales of plumbers earning thousands of pounds per week may be exaggerated, women can earn considerably more in stereotypically male jobs than stereotypically female jobs. (See Table 1.2)

Table 1.2: Average earnings 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Male Hourly Earnings</th>
<th>Male Weekly earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skilled construction trades</td>
<td>£9.44</td>
<td>£413.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT professionals</td>
<td>£17.87</td>
<td>£684.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering professionals</td>
<td>£15.65</td>
<td>£621.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>£10.44</td>
<td>£445.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childminders and related</td>
<td>£6.22</td>
<td>£260.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>occupations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures are taken for earnings for female childminders as there are no figures for male childminders.


Meeting women’s aspirations in all areas of skills development and employment is not only a prerequisite to women’s empowerment and a just society, but equal access to job opportunities for women will also help to reduce child poverty and dependence on benefits.
1.3 Gender segregation in apprenticeships

Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) were introduced in 1995 as a government initiative to provide vocational training for young people aged between 16 and 25. They offer the chance of paid employment linked with the opportunity to train for jobs, leading to foundation (NVQ level 2) and advanced (NVQ level 3) MAs. In May 2004, the government announced a number of changes to the programme including the development of a ‘new family’ of apprenticeships aimed at young people and adults from 14 years old onwards\(^1\). The term ‘Modern’ has been dropped from the title of the programme. Apprenticeships are currently the main vocational training route into work for young people in Britain.

Concerns have been raised about the extent of gender segregation in MAs, with the patterns in registrations for MAs mirroring those seen in employment.

Table 1.3 shows that over 90% of MAs in hairdressing and childcare are women, who make up only a tiny proportion of MAs in construction, plumbing and engineering. 22% of IT MAs are women, but this includes women working with IT, in areas such as administration, as well as those working as IT specialists.

\(^1\) For details of the announcements and changes, see www.dfes.gov.uk
Table 1.3 Female share of Modern Apprentices in training, England, 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Advanced MAs %</th>
<th>Foundation MAs %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engineering manufacturing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business administration</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer service</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor industry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical installation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel and catering</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and social care</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdressing</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retailing</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountancy</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel services</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road haulage and distribution</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Data are for young women.

Source: Miller et al, forthcoming 2005

1.4 Positive action training for women

The term 'positive action' refers to a variety of measures designed to counteract the effects of discrimination and help eliminate stereotyping. Positive action training for women was developed as a response to gender segregated employment sectors with the aim of developing training designed specifically to meet women’s needs. Positive Action Training is usually delivered in-house by predominantly public and some private sector organisations, with an emphasis on leadership for women.
Women and men’s equality became enshrined in law with the Equal Pay Act of 1970 followed by the Sex Discrimination Act (SDA) of 1975, which prohibited sex discrimination against individuals in the areas of employment, education, and the provision of goods, facilities and services.

However, the SDA permits special single-sex training initiatives either to equip people to work in jobs more often carried out by members of the opposite sex, or to return to work after a period at home looking after children or other dependants. Section 47 states that single-sex training is legal, when its purpose is to encourage one sex to take advantage of opportunities for working in a sector where they are under represented. This is known as ‘positive action’ training.

Positive action training may include:

- Courses to develop confidence or assertiveness,

- Specific retraining for women whose skills have become rusty or out of date,

- Training which is based on job sampling, work experience, "taster" days with employers, work shadowing experience,

- Training in a skill, e.g. carpentry, computer programming,

- Training in a technique, e.g. interviewing, managing or supervision,

- Middle management training to encourage women to apply for promotion,

- Career counselling and guidance for working women, or for those wishing to return to work,

- Retraining into areas of skills shortage - especially suitable for women returners who did not have the opportunity of obtaining these qualifications at school.

1.5 Women’s Training Network
The Women’s Training Network (WTN), a partner in this research, is a major network of providers of positive action training for women. It was set up in 1984 to advance the education and training of women in the UK, and to provide a forum for the exchange of information and good practice between women-only training centres. Positive action training was relatively new to the UK in the early 80's, and WTN projects and programmes pioneered the way forward.
WTN now has over 20 years’ experience in developing and delivering training and support programmes for women, primarily in non-traditional skills. It has 35 member organisations, representing 35 centres, in England, Scotland and Wales, and a number of gender equality associates.

Woman and Manual Trades (WAMT), a membership organisation that promotes the advancement of tradeswomen, is a member of WTN.²

Since its inception in 1984, funding for WTN centres has significantly been provided through the European Social Fund (ESF), matched with local or national funds for adult training. The ESF funding has given the centres the flexibility required to provide holistic support for women trainees, many of whom are single parents/unemployed and/or requiring English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) support.

1.6 Research methodology
The research consisted of six focus groups in total. The research team gained access to the groups through the Women’s Training Network and Joint Interventions (JIVE) - JIVE Partners is a national ESF Equal funded project led by Bradford College delivering initiatives with learning providers, careers professionals and employers in the engineering, construction and technology sectors. The overall aim of the JIVE project is to create cultural change in the engineering, construction and technology sectors by addressing the barriers that prevent women from pursuing careers in these sectors.³ Each of the centres was responsible for recruiting participants for the focus groups.

Four of the focus groups consisted of women in training, and two of women in employment.

1.6.1 Women in training
Of the four groups of women in training, two were conducted with member organisations of WTN, and two with students attending a mainstream college. Participants from one of the college groups were attending a women-only initiative within the college.

A topic guide was developed to guide the focus group and ensure coverage of the main points for discussion (see appendix one), which were:

² [http://www.wamt.org/splash], [http://www.wtn.org.uk]
³ [http://www.jivepartners.org.uk]
• The processes women went through in deciding to participate in non-traditional training.

• Features of the training provider/provision that attracted women to participate.

• The perceived benefits (small and large) of training and future employment in non-traditional skill areas.

• Any barriers affecting their ability to complete the training.

• The skills, knowledge and attitudes identified by women deemed necessary to achieve in non-traditional skills training.

• The broader impact of non-traditional skills training on women’s lives.

• To what extent progression into further skills training or employment is an issue for women.

• The solutions women suggest for reducing occupational segregation.

1.6.2 Women in employment
Two focus groups were conducted with women in employment in the construction sector.

The topic guide for women in employment (see appendix two) covered:
• Women’s experiences of progression into employment, including the recruitment/selection process.

• The choices women made regarding types of non-traditional skills employment.

• The benefits for women of employment in non-traditional skills areas.

• The barriers women face in continuing non-traditional employment and how they overcome them.

• The skills, knowledge and attitudes identified by women deemed necessary to achieve in non-traditional employment.

• The broader impact of non-traditional skills employment on women’s lives.

• The solutions women suggest for reducing occupational segregation.

Two members of the research team facilitated the focus groups which were tape-recorded.
1.7 Research sample
Four of the focus groups contained women in training in ICT, engineering, plumbing and construction and two groups consisted of women in employment in construction. A total of 49 women were interviewed (See table 1.4). The construction and plumbing industries were, therefore, most heavily represented in the sample.

A multi-site design was used to achieve a broad geographical spread in England and Wales with the four training focus groups taking place in Yorkshire, Wales, London and South-East England.

The two groups of women in employment (in construction and plumbing) were based in London, where there was access to a greater number of women employed in construction.

The women ranged in age from between 20 to 50 years old. Some women entered non-traditional skills training with no formally recognised qualifications and others were qualified to postgraduate level. Women in the focus groups were from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

The women in training were on courses leading to a range of qualifications, including:

- Engineering: Higher level qualifications - BA and PhD,
- Construction: most of the women were following courses leading to NVQ 2,
- ICT: the women were from a range of courses including graphics, networking, multimedia and web design.

Table 1.4: Profile of participants in focus groups and interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Age range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training (mixed)</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Under 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training (women-only)</td>
<td>Plumbing</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25 – 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training (women-only)</td>
<td>Construction &amp; plumbing</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25 – 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training (women-only)</td>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25 – 45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Construction/ &amp; plumbing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25 – 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.8 Data analysis
Data was analysed according to the main themes that emerged in the discussion. The focus was upon themes that repeatedly emerged in every focus group, as they were clearly significant to all women entering non-traditional skills work and were not sector specific. However, there were some inevitable sectoral differences, such as the emphasis by women in construction on the physical aspect of their trade.

1.9 Ethics
The research was conducted according to the recommendations of the British Sociological Association (BSA). Anonymity, confidentiality and the purpose and uses of the research were explained before the beginning of each focus group. Participants signed a consent form (see appendix three), and will be given a summary of the report on publication.

1.10 Report structure
In chapter two the benefits of training and work in non-traditional skills areas to women and employers are identified. In chapter three the obstacles to women training and working in non-traditional skills areas are explored. The features of practice in training and employment that help women to succeed are highlighted in chapter four. The conclusions arising from the research and policy implications are developed in chapter five.
2. THE BENEFITS OF TRAINING AND WORK IN NON-TRADITIONAL SKILLS AREAS

As the report unfolds, it is abundantly clear that women face numerous obstacles to satisfactory training and employment in non-traditional skill sectors. However, it is equally important to focus upon the considerable benefits experienced by women in pursuing such routes. 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. Moreover, there is increasing, though limited evidence of employers in non-traditional skill areas who have clearly identified the business benefits of employing women.

2.1 Job satisfaction

Across the focus groups, a key message to emerge was the extent to which women had been drawn to work in non-traditional spheres through interest and passion for the work.

For those in employment, job satisfaction featured strongly as one of the main reasons for choosing the sector. One of the recurrent themes in the focus groups was how much the women loved the work. Many said that they had always wanted to work in a non-traditional area, but had only come to it later in life due to the obstacles they had encountered. Many spoke of the satisfaction of “actually going out there, doing something for someone.”

I’ve always mended my own car. I just enjoyed doing it.
Trainee mechanic

I really like painting and decorating. I just love it.
Trainee painter and decorator

Women spoke of how determined they had been to overcome obstacles they had faced, and of their satisfaction at now training or working in a non-traditional skills area. Women spoke particularly passionately about woodwork and those training and working in carpentry and joinery spoke eloquently about their enjoyment of the trade.

I love carpentry. I love joinery. I’m not going to stop.
Trainee joiner

I always wanted to be a carpenter. I love wood. I love tools. I love timber – it’s crisp and it smells. I really love it. I’ve always wanted to do it, but it’s been very difficult getting into it.
Trainee carpenter
Women training in the construction and mechanical sectors also commented that their choice of trade was useful to others, and could be utilised at home as well as at work, and this added to their sense of job satisfaction.

Now my dad rings me up when he’s got problems with his car.  
Trainee car mechanic

I want to do something that people need done.  
Trainee bench joiner

I’m building my house from scratch.  
Employed builder

2.2 Empowerment
There was evidence that training in non-traditional areas had increased women’s self esteem and confidence. It became clear that doing what they had always wanted to do had enhanced their confidence and made them more self-assured.

Women from a variety of backgrounds – some previously unemployed and others who had been managers – spoke enthusiastically about how discovering that they could work to a high standard in an area previously seen as a male domain had given them a new understanding of what they could achieve.

Some women spoke of the fact that, even when they were discouraged at the start, being good at the job earned them the respect of others, which boosted their confidence. Gaining qualifications was also empowering, as it was proof that they had achieved in areas that they had been told were ‘not for women’.

I feel like I’m taking control.  
Employed joiner

When the certificates arrive, and the kids see what you’ve done, that gives you a big boost.  
Trainee plumber

When I was at the work placement, I got on brilliant with my boss. We were like on a friendly basis. I learned so much while I was there. It was total hands-on, and I was offered a job. I didn’t expect that… He picked me to do the job. That was fantastic.  
Apprentice ICT technician

Being able to work at Ford for a year – it surprised me how much I did know. I were really made up after that.  
Trainee mechanical engineer
2.3 Opportunities for self-employment
The construction industry in particular offers scope for self-employment, and a large number of respondents training and working in this sector highlighted the benefits of self-employment, including its flexibility and autonomy.

Self-employment enables women to combine domestic and caring responsibilities with paid work, with the highest levels of flexibility, including working around school hours and holiday periods.

Many women enjoyed the responsibility and control of being self-employed or running a small business, and, in addition, spoke of the freedom from harassment which they had encountered on a building site or at a male dominated workplace.

Some trainees were already undertaking freelance work that was enabling them to support themselves financially whilst training.

> A lot of women end up being self-employed, because you haven’t got to worry about whether you’ll get a lot of hassle on the site.
> Qualified bricklayer

> I’d like to work for myself. For flexibility having a child.
> Qualified painter and decorator

> I’m self-employed because of childcare. The hours are more flexible, and I can fit it in around her. I don’t end up doing any less hours. There’s a lot of designing, pricing up, and that all takes time, but I can do that at home.
> Qualified painter and decorator

2.4 Pay
Skilled manual trades, that are traditionally associated with men, are relatively well paid, and participants in the focus groups were aware of this. Whilst pay was by no means the main motivating factor, the ability to earn what was described as a ‘decent wage’ was naturally seen as important. Some of the women had experienced careers in traditionally female areas, and were motivated to move into male dominated professions for better pay.

> This course has given me the possibility to earn a decent wage doing something I like.
> Trainee painter and decorator

> I do it for job satisfaction and the pay.
> Qualified plumber
I wanted a career that paid enough as a single parent. It's enabled me to go back on a lot better pay than I would have been on in my other job as a hairdresser.

Trainee in ICT

2.5 Benefits to employers
The research identified a range of benefits to employers from opening employment opportunities to more women. Good employers, we were told, enabled women to build on, and consolidate, the confidence that they had developed from their training course. Respondents suggested that not only would employing more women widen the recruitment pool, but that female employees brought additional benefits to employers, enhancing competitiveness and opening new markets.

2.6 The business case
There was evidence in the research that some employers are becoming aware of the diverse range of households in the market, including those that are headed by women, particular ethnic minorities and older people. Participants in one focus group commented that a local employer had found that tradeswomen brought him more work, as many of his customers preferred to have a woman in their house. This point was reinforced by many of the tradeswomen, who said that they were welcomed in domestic situations, and that employers were benefiting from their presence in the workforce.

He says that he'd like a full team of women. He thinks he'd get plenty of work from women living alone that way

Qualified painter and decorator

There are more and more women living alone, old people, people with kids. They trust you more when you're a woman.

Qualified plumber

A lot of single mums – they'd prefer a woman plumber. Us lot never leave a mess. We always clear up. And Muslim women won't allow a bloke in the house without a chaperone. So we can do that work too.

Qualified plumber

Women in construction and plumbing felt that their standards were more conducive to domestic based work, as they tended to clean up afterwards and that customers were right to expect this level of service.

Respondents in construction industries suggested that women had an eye for detail that made them particularly good at work that requires precision in decorating, joinery and plumbing.
Others commented that their ‘soft skills’ of communication, customer-handling, and team working enabled businesses to be more competitive and responsive in a changing labour market.

A large number of respondents – trainees, their tutors and employed women – felt that women needed to be more highly skilled than men to succeed. One of the tutors suggested the top 10% of achievers in any course in construction always includes the women. The inference is that where women do succeed, they are likely to be highly skilled employees and determined to do well.

*Women don’t have a cowboy attitude, but really want to do a job well.*

Qualified painter and decorator

*We like to do a good job.*

Qualified painter and decorator
3. THE OBSTACLES TO WOMEN TRAINING AND WORKING IN NON-TRADITIONAL SKILLS AREAS

This research identified numerous obstacles to women’s access to training and employment in non-traditional sectors - at school, in mainstream training organisations and from employers. Women encountered personal obstacles, too, with partners and family frequently discouraging them from entering a non-traditional sector.

Although some women training and in employment individually find solutions to the obstacles they face, it became clear that the obstacles were such that many talented women, with an interest in becoming plumbers, builders, engineers or IT specialists, will have been discouraged during the process.

3.1 Education and guidance

Respondents were asked about how their early education, careers advice and any subsequent adult guidance had influenced their participation in their chosen profession.

A majority had been dissuaded by schools – because they were girls, because they were clever, or simply because at girls’ schools the topic had never been raised. As one woman said, “I just didn’t know it was a possibility.”

3.1.1 Status of manual trades in education

There was evidence that women were influenced by messages from schools that a career in the manual trades was less desirable than a more academic career. This will have affected both girls and boys, but women felt that, when added to the male image of manual trades, the impact on girls would have been stronger.

Women who had been academically able at school had been discouraged from entering a manual profession, which was seen not only as a male preserve, but also one for boys who would not achieve at A level or be able to go to university.

The respondents in construction agreed that society at large perceives them to be unintelligent when they say that they are builders. They thought that, while the money earning potential of manual skills was finally being recognised, its status was still an issue that acted as a deterrent for both men and women.

*Manual trades are still seen as ‘jobs for the thickies’. A skilled carpenter has trained for five years – like a doctor – but it’s not seen the same way.*

Trainee carpenter
People really look down on a trade. Schools are so academically oriented. Everything’s focussed on university. We don’t seem to value trades skills.

Qualified carpenter

It’s a problem for boys as well. Manual trades aren’t valued.

Qualified bricklayer

It was a working class job, so there’s no status.

Qualified plumber

They said I was too bright for TD [technical drawing], and had to do languages.

Trainee builder

3.1.2 Teacher discouragement
There was evidence that girls were actively discouraged from considering non-traditional routes. This discouragement took various forms. Some respondents told us that they were compelled to study home economics, whilst the boys did woodwork. Others spoke of how determined they had to be as the only girl in the metalwork class.

There was general agreement that if teachers had encouraged them earlier, their career progression would have been easier. The older women (over 25) felt that they would have been more comfortable emotionally and financially if they had started training straight from school “at the same time as the lads”, and that many of their difficulties stemmed from coming to the sector so much later than young men, around whom industry standards had been developed.

The few who had received active encouragement from a female teacher told us how important it had been in inspiring them to continue in an often-hostile environment.

Respondents talked not only of their own school background, but also of their daughters’ and sons’ schools. Whilst they felt that there had been some improvements, there was agreement that much more needed to be done to counter early stereotyping, and to make girls more aware of non-traditional career possibilities at an early age.

I went to a girls’ school. 1300 girls. Not one of us given an option to do Tech Drawing, let alone anything like carpentry. It was all needlework and HE [Home Economics].
Trainee carpenter

My school wasn’t keen on women going into engineering, but I just kept on being determined.

Student medical engineer

My 15 year-old is in year 10. He’s at the same school that I went to. The girls are encouraged to do Technical Drawing and more of the metalwork and woodwork at that age, but I don’t know if it goes on higher up. I think there is some change – but still not enough.

Qualified carpenter

I had to fight tooth and nail to do woodwork at school. That was in 1982. I think it’s a bit better now.

Qualified carpenter

It made a difference, because at school they said ‘it’s not a woman’s area.

Student mechanical engineer

I wish, when I had been at school, I had been encouraged. They’ve had all these years to build up the skills. Now we’re expected to come in as a trainee at £160 per week.

Trainee on multi-skills course

3.1.3 Careers advice

There was evidence of a lack of appropriate information and guidance, both at school and as an adult, through Jobcentre Plus. When considering career options and looking for work, the majority of advisers steered women towards traditional fields of work. Where careers advice at school had been inadequate, it was felt that this impacted on girls more than the boys, as they had limited sources of alternative information.

Participants training in engineering and construction felt that the information given by careers advisers was frequently an inaccurate reflection of the industries, and young people, therefore, did not have a real concept of what an ‘engineer’ or a ‘construction worker’ looked like – other than the male stereotype!

In one case, we were told that a woman who wanted to be a paramedic had been signposted to the medical engineering course. She had left when she found out what
the course really offered – reinforcing prejudice that women weren’t able to follow an engineering degree.

Some careers advisers had not taken girls seriously when they expressed interest in a non-traditional sector, and had actively discouraged girls from the less traditional fields. In many instances, lack of appropriate careers advice had meant that women did not study the subjects that would have been useful for the sectors they now found themselves in.

_Schools careers advice? You just got well-meaning people saying ‘Oh no. Women don’t do that._

Trainee motor mechanic

_Schools careers – it would have been good if they had just not discouraged us._

Trainee plumber

_The careers computer was a good idea, but ... there wasn’t enough on it to point us in the right direction._

Student mechanical engineer

_How do you figure out which Universities have a decent engineering course? We got no advice with that at all._

Student medical engineer

_It never occurred to me that this was a choice._

Trainee carpenter

### 3.1.4 Lacking Science and Mathematics qualifications

Women studying engineering, mechanics, ICT and joinery confirmed that not having Science or Mathematics A levels had been problematic, and identified how this had negatively impacted upon their current work.

An engineering degree requires a high standard of Science and Maths – usually at A level. Students without the appropriate A levels had been required to take an extra year to study for the foundation course – which entailed another year of not earning, and needing to be supported. For older students, this would have been impossible. Mechanics and joinery both require good levels of understanding of the principles of Physics and Maths. This proved problematic to respondents who had not been encouraged to continue with these subjects at school and in further education.
I had to do a foundation year, because of not having Physics A level. It was OK, as I’m young, and my parents are supporting me. I wouldn’t have been able to do it otherwise.

Student mechanical engineer

I have some difficulties. A lot of the stuff is about science. Kinetic energy. It’s about basic principles in science that I never did at school.

Student mechanical engineer

3.2 Mainstream training

Participants on the mainstream training programme had mixed views. On the one hand, they all felt that training and working in a mixed environment was useful in preparing them to deal with negative attitudes and survive in the ‘real world’. However, it was apparent that particular features of mainstream training were felt to be problematic for women.

3.2.1 Lack of support

Trainees on the mainstream training course talked of the lack of support that was available to them. Being treated ‘the same’ as the men was considered inappropriate, as they had numerous obstacles to overcome, for which additional support was required.

Women acknowledged that in the circumstances they were often less confident than men, and that encouragement to continue in a non-traditional area would have been appreciated.

One woman, we were told, had left the mainstream engineering course because of the “stick she got from men.” Another on a brick laying course “just decided it wasn’t what she wanted to do.” When they received harassment from fellow students, this tended to dent their already shaky confidence.

Everyone’s really pleased you’re doing it, but no-one wants to help you.

Trainee motor mechanic

You have a personal tutor that you go and discuss your problems with. And you go. And they’re never there. And not having the confidence to ask is a problem. A lot of girls would never dream of asking a lecturer for help.

Trainee medical engineer
3.2.2 The only woman

Women on the mainstream training course told us that they were frequently the only woman in particular groups, and that this was uncomfortable. Even when they had experienced being the only girls in courses at school it was often an unexpected shock to find the same situation at college or university.

*When I came, I was told that the ratio would be 50:50. I don't know why they told me that. There are 35 on this course, and only three women.*

Student medical engineer

*When I went to the launch of this project in Germany, I was the only woman. Since then, I've been either the only woman on the course, or the only one of two*

Trainee plumber

Respondents felt that men’s and women’s learning styles and ways of dealing with people were different, and that because they were such a small minority, were seen as ‘different’ and ‘odd’. A number of the young men ‘messed about’ during the lectures and by not joining in women felt that this underlined their differences.

Some women spoke particular ways in which men expressed their discomfort and sometimes resentment at the presence of women.

*They’d all swear their heads off. Then when they saw me, they’d stop.*

Trainee mechanic

A course with 35 young men and 1 woman was described as having a "male culture" and dynamic. Women often felt uncomfortable about asking questions for fear of being seen as stupid, or reinforcing existing notions that women weren’t good enough.

*It’s particularly difficult for women who aren’t confident. Especially when you’re younger. It can be daunting to be overwhelmed by all the lads*

Trainee motor mechanic

One strategy adopted by the women was ‘being one of the lads’ so that they were accepted by their peers. Most of the women on mainstream training courses spoke of how they would "give as good as they got" to enable them to survive as the only women.
Many of the male students, it was said, thought that the women worked to lower standards, lacked commitment, and were not serious. These attitudes could cause women to re-think their desire to complete the training.

*I'm feeling really disheartened because of the attitudes of other students. But if I walk away now, nothing's ever going to change.*

Trainee motor mechanic

### 3.2.3 No female lecturers

On the mainstream course, there were no female lecturers, which sometimes made it difficult for women students to discuss personal issues, where they might have been more comfortable talking to a woman.

*It's not always easy. There aren’t any women lecturers in our department, so the personal tutors are all men. I think that can be an issue. Some personal issues are difficult to discuss with a man.*

Student medical engineer

The absence of female lecturers and role models added to the isolation of being the only female student. Women were aware that only the very strongest were able to survive and stay the course.

*There were 50 on this [mechanical engineering] course, and only one woman. The lecturers are all men. But all the girls stuck it.*

Student mechanical engineer

Those women who said that they had "got used to" being in the minority acknowledged that it still created difficulties at times, and they had enjoyed the rare occasions when a manager or a lecturer was female.

Male lecturers tend to have had industrial experience with and are used to training men. Some of the respondents suggested that some of their lecturers found it difficult to understand why women want to train in non-traditional areas, which resulted in low expectations of their capabilities. Some of the women indicated that they had additional needs to reach a greater level of understanding of course content in order to feel fully confident. Additionally, some of the students experienced overt negative and discriminatory comments from male lecturers.

*The lecturer said to me ‘Do you know that it’s dirty?’* 

Trainee plumber
3.2.4 Training when older
When young women had entered college or university straight from school, they felt more able to compete with the young men of their own age training in the sectors. However, inadequate advice and guidance at school frequently meant that women had started training over the age of 25.

The combination of age and gender had caused women to question if they were on the right course. One woman said that she wanted to be a carpenter “but not enough to train with a bunch of 16 year-olds”.

3.3 Employers, employment and work placements
Employers are key gatekeepers to whether women access work experience and employment in non-traditional sectors. Employers’ attitudes to women, their willingness or ability to offer work placements and their work practices contribute to the problems of the recruitment and retention of women in non-traditional sectors.

There was evidence that some employers believe that women are inappropriate for traditionally male jobs, and were willing to flout the Sex Discrimination Act openly in terms of offering work placements, recruitment and promotion.

Others, whilst reasonably keen in principle to employ women, were unwilling to be flexible in work practices to take into account women’s childcare requirements, family responsibilities or age.

3.3.1 Difficulties in securing work placements
In order to complete National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) all students need to secure work placements to give them the necessary practical experience. In construction, an NVQ level 2 requires significantly more work experience than in previous NVQ schemes, and it is now impossible to gain the qualification without the full involvement of employers (Building Work for Women, 2003).

Women in training agreed that the primary barrier to completing their course was difficulty in finding a work placement. Whilst the availability of work placements was acknowledged as a barrier for men too, it was felt that employer prejudice and lack of flexibility combined with the likelihood that women would be older, added a significant gender dimension to the problems of work placement.

3.3.1.1 When training
Women suggested that finding an appropriate work placement when training can be particularly difficult, as employers are even less interested in taking a woman on work
experience than they might be to employ a fully qualified woman who had proved herself.

Probably the worst is outside the course – sometimes it feels like you’re not given a fair chance getting a placement, because you’re a woman. If people had a choice, they wouldn’t choose you because you’re a woman. So they find other reasons.

Trainee plumber

3.3.1.2 When older than 25

With the majority of women entering non-traditional sectors when they are over 25, obstacles to work based experience through training or apprenticeships are exacerbated by age.

When a woman re-trains, the average age is between 28 and 35; and we still get quite a lot of women in their 40s saying ‘I’m finally free, and what I want to do is become an electrician.

Tutor at women’s training centre

It’s difficult to get them on-site when they’re over 25, because they’re seen as too old. Employers like them straight from school so that they can mould them.

Trainer at women’s training centre

I do think it’s an issue that women often come into the trade much later than men.

Trainer at women’s construction centre

That’s my let-down. My age. You can’t get a placement. Some won’t take them if they’re over 25. Even one-day placements would help. We need photos of us doing the job to get the NVQ.

Trainee motor mechanic

Nobody would help me to find any work placement. I’m over 25, so it was really difficult. But I got no help.

Trainee engineer

3.3.2 Inflexible and anti-social hours

Early starts and late finishes remain barriers to women with children or caring responsibilities, for whom working long or irregular hours is often not possible.
Respondents employed in construction and plumbing confirmed that the sector currently lacks the flexibility that would enable both women and men to improve their work-life balance. The working hours in the construction industry are traditionally from 7.30 am to 4.00 pm, and offer very little scope for flexible working patterns.

These hours proved to be a serious obstacle to women with children and domestic or other caring responsibilities, and contributed to many, who might have preferred to work for an employer, choosing self-employed status or part-time work.

I’ve applied for a couple of jobs, and got three interviews. But I can’t start at 7.30, so I didn’t get the jobs. It’s not that you can’t get interviews. It’s just the restrictions, and employers aren’t willing to be flexible about it. Which is crazy, as people I speak to like the idea of women working in their home.

Qualified carpenter

The hours of mainstream training courses tend to mirror the working day of particular industries, and students were generally expected to start at 7.30am. This was particularly problematic for women with children:

I was shocked that structures are built in that exclude women. For example, when they have courses that start early. To be in for 7.30 am is very difficult for women with children.

Trainee plumber

The prevalence of early starts in the construction industry was a major obstacle preventing women with childcare responsibilities from gaining the experience they needed to complete their qualifications.

I’m a single parent. It’s incredibly difficult to get a placement. They start at 7.30, and I can’t start till 9 am. You’re just left high and dry. But how else can I develop my skills. That’s what’s so frustrating. I work on my own, and don’t have anyone else to learn from. I almost got my NVQ2, but just need more practice.

Trainee carpenter

Respondents found that their requirements for flexibility around older children’s needs – including time off for the school play or illness – were not understood or catered for in a male-dominated industry.
I’ve got three children, and the youngest is four. The big problem is going out early. The little one is autistic, and that creates additional problems. I just hope I can find a place to get part-time work.

Trainee painter and decorator

An industry that has a ‘macho’ image isn’t conducive to taking a day off with an ill child.

Trainee bricklayer

The requirement for industrial placements for the ICT industry could also be problematic - though more possibilities were open to trainees. The voluntary sector provided the majority of work placements for the women in the research, although primarily in IT applications and the traditionally ‘female’ areas of administration and graphics. The stereotypically ‘male’ areas of computer programming and networking were predominantly available through public sector placements, which were harder to secure. Despite the efforts of a dedicated officer to secure work placements for women, there was little progress made with the private sector – comprised of mainly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Three months is the longest that we need to give them work experience – that’s for level three. The average time is just six weeks. A lot of that is based in the voluntary sector. We have a work placement officer who is in touch with all the employers in the area. We’ve used hospitals, the University, the voluntary sector. The private sector is much harder.

Trainer at women’s training centre

3.3.3 Discriminatory attitudes
There was evidence that some employers in the construction industry believed that women should not be doing construction work and are not competent. These employers were secure in their beliefs and resistant to change. They were prepared to flout the SDA quite openly, clearly confident that there would be no penalties.

I was talking to an employer yesterday, and he said ‘I wouldn’t employ a woman.’ I thought he was joking, but he wasn’t. ‘Oh no’ he said, ‘I wouldn’t be happy with that at all. Women shouldn’t be painting and decorating.

Trainee painter and decorator

I rang one job with a firm of carpenters. I rang and he asked if it was for my husband. When I told them it was for me, he laughed, and said he’d ring me back. But he didn’t.
Trainee carpenter

*One company said they didn’t want the dynamics of the company changed.*

Qualified bricklayer

Whilst it was by no means always the case, there was evidence that, in some situations, women were laughed at, bullied, faced antagonism, were given the worst jobs to do and were expected to make the tea. Whist some women took pride in their ability to ‘deal with’ such adversity, others felt that the quality of their lives was suffering, and decided to leave the industry.

*There’s still a lot of macho culture round here. They think that women can’t do the job.*

Trainee plumber

*I was laughed out of the site. A couple of the guys were nice. But they had no idea what I was capable of.*

Qualified bricklayer

*They put her on all the horrible jobs in the freezing cold. But she didn’t have enough proof. She quit because of that*

Trainee plumber

*On an unhappy site, the men bully each other, so they’re certainly going to bully you.*

Qualified plumber

*I went into a garage to work, and their hygiene when it came to cups of tea... I take my own. When I went in, he said ‘the kettle’s over there’, and I said ‘that’s nice. You can go and get yourself a cup of tea then.’ They were OK after that.*

Trainee mechanical engineer

### 3.3.4 Childcare

Whilst the women-only training centres provided onsite and offsite childcare support, either through subsidised provision or an allowance to offset childcare costs, mainstream training organisations offered limited support with childcare. One woman on the mainstream training course found that childcare was an issue at every stage of her training – both financially and in terms of her ability to attend college hours and contribute effectively.
I have 2 kids. The eldest is 10. To do an NVQ2, you need to work in a garage, so I’m trying to work full-time in a garage and fit that in with school hours. I get no help.

Trainee mechanic

Affordable childcare was viewed as a major obstacle to women being able to take up employment. It was acknowledged that lack of affordable childcare was a perennial problem for women in all sectors. Some employers with a substantial number of women employees are starting to make provision for childcare needs through workplace nurseries and childcare vouchers. No employers were reported to offer such provision in this research.

An additional obstacle identified was the requirement for an apprenticeship, with low pay for the first year. Women with children had reservations about how they would be able to work as an apprentice on wages that were insufficient to pay for childcare.

My kids are 9 and 7, so I can’t do anything for 3 or 4 years. How are you supposed to pay … the childminders and a playscheme on what you get as an apprentice?

Trainee carpenter

The only thing that would stop me now is the lack of quality affordable childcare. Finding a job that pays childcare costs isn’t possible until you’ve been working for several years.

Trainee plumber

### 3.3.5 Recruitment process

The recruitment process adopted by the construction industry tends to be informal and not follow established procedures, with many vacancies being filled by word of mouth. This process disadvantages women who do not have established, informal networks in the same way as men. Jobcentre Plus provides limited information on vacancies, and, with the exception of certain specialist centres, are not aware of the possibilities. (One London, 2004).

You can’t just walk up to a guy in the pub, and say ‘is there any work here?’ That’s what men can do. If I went up to a guy in a pub, I’d get a very different reaction.

Qualified bricklayer
3.3.6 Facilities
Women in the research reported that employers cited inadequate facilities for women as a reason for not being able to employ them. In particular, there was evidence that women were barred from taking certain jobs because there were no female toilets. Women generally felt that this was used as an excuse, though also a sign of antagonism.

There were a couple of shops I'd have liked to work in, but they didn’t have women’s toilets, so I couldn’t work there.

Qualified carpenter

3.3.7 Unsafe working conditions
Appropriate health and safety conditions at work are fundamental to whether women stay in employment. Respondents suggested that women are frequently more conscious than men of the requirement for proper health and safety procedures and can have particular needs relating to pregnancy.

A spokeswoman from an organisation that supports women into the construction industry said that they would be wary of encouraging men or women from going onto a building site until legislation on health and safety was taken more seriously by contractors.

The government hasn’t kept its promise to bring in the Corporate Killings Act. I am wary of encouraging men or women to go onto a site where there’s not respect all the way down for health and safety.

Tutor at women’s construction centre

3.3.8 Resistance from partners
There was evidence that some women encountered resistance to them undertaking non-traditional skills training from their husbands or partners, to the extent that one of the participants had decided not to tell her husband that she was on a plumbing course.

Some participants talked of the jealousy of their partners when they started to do well. They felt that this jealousy was exacerbated by the fact that they were succeeding in an area that men saw as theirs, or one where they could earn more money than their partner.

Respondents with supportive partners were more comfortable and confident in their ability to continue to study and succeed. Many, however, spoke of the drain on their energy in managing their partner’s expectations of a hot meal on the table and a wife...
THE OBSTACLES TO WOMEN TRAINING AND WORKING IN NON-TRADITIONAL SKILL AREAS

looking after the home. They felt that this would not have been the case if they were entering a more traditional field of work, as their partner’s ‘masculinity’ would have been less threatened. The women felt that housework and domestic labour were used as an excuse to hide the greater problem of jealousy of their achievement in a non-traditional area.

Some respondents felt that training in an area that was not traditionally ‘female’, had impacted upon the power dynamic in their relationship. In more extreme cases, partners were so adversely affected that they left the relationship.

*My husband didn’t like it at all. I was working with his friends.*  
ICT trainee

*My own experience was that he said he was very supportive, but whenever I did really well, it caused conflict at home. When I started earning more money, that was difficult. I think he was really quite jealous. Then one day, he just walked out.*  
ICT trainee

*My daughter’s father found reasons I couldn’t go on this course, and he tried to sabotage it.*  
ICT trainee
4. FEATURES OF TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE THAT HELP WOMEN TO SUCCEED IN NON-TRADITIONAL SKILL AREAS

4.1 The support and encouragement of key individuals
The majority of the women in the research had always wanted to work in non-traditional sectors. However, it was often the support or influence of a key individual in their life that had helped them realise it was possible and had motivated them to start training. The support of someone they respected was usually the first time they had been given ‘permission’ to embark on the career they felt drawn towards.

A wide range of individuals were identified as instrumental in offering vital encouragement, including family, friends and, in one case, a youth worker. Seeing positive images of women in the industries and meeting role models were highlighted as important in helping to overcome internalised messages that some jobs were ‘only for men’.

A friend encouraged me to go on this course, and I took the plunge and gave up my job. Everything seemed to fall into place. I did the woodwork course and loved it. It was really brilliant. Now I’m on a placement with X.

Apprentice carpenter

I’d always enjoyed painting and decorating, and my husband encouraged me.

Trainee painter and decorator

I was encouraged by a youth worker at the adventure playground.

Trainee engineer

I met two women plumbers and a chippie, and I though ‘Oh my God, women can do this stuff.’ I think for a lot of women it’s like that. You meet someone, and it’s like a light bulb goes off.

Trainee carpenter

Sometimes you just need to meet one person to give you confidence.

Trainee mechanical engineer

One trainee said that she found her inspiration and role models through the course she was attending, even though she had been initially doubtful about the fact that it was women only.
I was quite turned off by a women-only course. I thought there would be feminists everywhere. But the tutor was a real carpenter, and she really inspired me. A mature woman that had been all the way through. She still is an inspiration, even though she’s now left.

Trainee Carpenter

On one rare occasion, we found a supremely confident young woman – the only woman on her course – who had had unswerving family support. This atypical support had clearly contributed to her confidence and success at dealing with the male world in which she found herself.

I never really thought anything of being the only woman on the course. It’s just always been what I wanted to do. My uncle was very helpful. He was an engineer, and told me about the routes into engineering. And my mum used to teach me Maths.

Trainee medical engineer

4.2 Positive action training for women only

It was clear from the research that the provision of women only positive action training was instrumental to the success of many women in non-traditional skill areas. The training provision is sensitive to the needs of women and provides key features of good practice that it is important to highlight. Many of the features of good practice are replicable elsewhere and are not essential to women only settings.

4.2.1 Training provision that overtly welcomes women

A recurrent theme in the focus groups was that women had resigned themselves to working in traditional occupations, but that hearing about a women’s training centre inspired them, and made them realise that it was an option for women. There is no doubt that many of the women would not have begun to train in non-traditional skill areas without access to training provision that overtly welcomes and includes women.

I just didn’t realise it was a possibility for women until I saw publicity and the number of this place, and I thank God I rang it and found this wonderful place.

ICT Trainee

4.2.2 Ethos of participation

Many women felt that the women-only courses allowed them the freedom to be themselves, and not to compete, in ways that they had previously experienced in mixed
classes at school. It was important for women to gain confidence in the skill area and be assured that they would not be undermined. This included being able to ask when they did not understand without fear of being ridiculed. There were indications that women considered some type of women only provision to be an important starting point as preparation for other training and employment.

*It’s the confidence thing. Can I do this? It felt safe to come to a women-only course.*

Trainee carpenter

*It does help to build confidence being around women. If I hadn’t come here, I wouldn’t have done it. I think it’s essential as a stepping stone. Courses like this help women to find their feet.*

Trainee painter and decorator

### 4.2.3 Training with peers

Some trainees felt that by training with other women there was strength and support in numbers. The importance of training with peers in a similar situation to yourself was highlighted. Co-training with other women meant that women did not feel isolated with issues they had to deal with on a personal or professional level.

*If I were the only girl, they’d take over, and you just give in to it. You’ve got a bit of support here.*

Trainee mechanical engineer

*Being around a lot of women gives you an idea of what’s acceptable to put up with.*

Trainee in ICT Networking

### 4.2.4 Religious and cultural factors

This type of training attracted a diverse range of women including those from different ethnic minorities. It met the needs of some women who, for religious or cultural reasons were unable to train with men. Women-only training could be a lifeline for women in such a situation, enabling them to broaden their perspective, acquire useful skills and meet with other women in their locality.

*Women-only courses are important. We had a Muslim student there, whose husband would only let her go on a women-only course. But the training was really valuable to her.*

Tutor on women’s training course
4.2.5 Flexible delivery of training
The structure of day in the women's training centres and hours of attendance were flexible in order not to exclude women with children and caring responsibilities. Most courses started after 9.30am, to allow women to drop their children off at school and ended by 3.30pm to help minimise the need for childminders. School half-term weeks were also a consideration, with training centres following the LEA holidays.

*We're lucky to be on this course. We wouldn't be able to train anywhere else if they hadn't been flexible.*  
Trainee on multi-skills course

*I looked into various courses, but I'm 34, and my youngest is 6. They weren't flexible enough. Then I noticed one of the mums at school turning up in overalls and work-gear. She told me about this (women's training) scheme, and the hours that fit around the school day. Now I really want to make a career of it.*  
Trainee painter and decorator

4.2.6 Childcare
The women-only training courses provided onsite crèche facilities or paid for registered childminders to care for trainees’ children. Without this high-quality affordable (usually free) childcare, trainees would not have been able to attend the course or accomplished their not inconsiderable goals. This was particularly the case for lone parents, and those with several children.

*I've got a son. And there's no way I could have come on this course without a nursery.*  
ICT Trainee

*It's mums with children that need specific help.*  
ICT Trainee

4.2.7 Provision of explicit support mechanisms
The explicit provision of personal skills support, including raising confidence and assertiveness were felt to be necessary features of training that recognises the needs of women in entering non-traditional industries. Trainees on women-only courses spoke enthusiastically of the difference that this type of support made to raising their self-esteem, completing the course, and having the confidence to enter a male-dominated, often antagonistic industry.
The mainstream provision project provided mentors to support the women and help them to succeed in this environment. Female mentors are important figures for women in such settings and provide advice, support and encouragement. Mentors are not always available in the way that permanent staff are and this means that their impact is different.

\[ X \text{ (the woman tutor on the course) is really helpful. If you want a mentor, she'll find you one.} \]

Trainee motor mechanic

\[ \text{It's useful. But sometimes they're not there. And some of it is knowing what questions to ask.} \]

Trainee plumber

4.2.8 Pre-entry skills provision

The women-only centres provide basic literacy, numeracy and English language skills to all trainees that need it. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) support is also offered, enabling women from a variety of backgrounds to participate. Respondents suggested that such skills provision is important in creating an inclusive learning environment for women.

\[ \text{They teach you numeracy and literacy here, and if you've got the ability, that's the most important thing.} \]

Trainee in multimedia

\[ \text{Numeracy and literacy are offered on all entry-level courses. The Council won't fund ESOL here, so we use the ESF funding for the ESOL support.} \]

Trainer at women’s ICT training centre

4.2.9 Entry to employment provision

Women only centres support women in the crucial stages of transition to employment. This includes help in finding work placements through a dedicated tutor. As previously mentioned in the report, it is harder to for women in training to secure the necessary work experience to complete qualifications. This was considered essential support for women.

\[ \text{It can be much harder for women to find work placements, and finding an employer to take them can be really difficult. That's where the support of the tutor would be invaluable.} \]

Trainee engineer
Given that entry to employment in non-traditional sectors is more challenging for women, extra provision is made to enable them to compete. This includes all aspects of the job application process, including writing letters and CV’s, completion of application forms and interview skills.

*We get support in everything we need here. Like CV development. It's having the support of doing that that gives me more confidence, and means I should get a job afterwards. Men aren't judged in the same way.*

ICT Trainee

### 4.2.10 Quality of training

There was unanimity about the quality of the training women received. Respondents suggested the credit was due to the commitment of women tutors who had "been through the mill themselves", and therefore knew what the trainees were up against. In common with the trainees, the tutors had to be as good as, or better than, the men to succeed.

*The standards here are better than at the college. The classes are smaller, and the tutors are more encouraging.*

Trainee carpenter

### 4.3 Employers

#### 4.3.1 Flexible working practices

A number of employers in the ICT industry were revealed in the research as demonstrating an ability to be flexible about working hours in support of women trainees. It seemed that their ability to be flexible was, to some extent, brought about by their close contact with the Women’s Training Network organisation. Such liaison has been productive and resulted in flexible working practices to suit women’s childcare responsibilities. Flexibility included ending the working day at 4pm and working around school holidays and/or sick children. It was agreed that trainees could make up any time from home – a practice to which the ICT industry lends itself.

*If my daughter’s sick, they pay for me to have broadband at home.*

ICT apprentice

*My workplace will let me leave at 4pm.*

ICT trainee
4.3.2 The importance of equal opportunities policies
A number of women were employed by Local Authority-run Direct Labour Organisations (DLOs) who carry out the majority of maintenance on council-owned property. As part of the local council, they are governed by equal opportunities (EO) policies. Such policies deliver procedures and practices which do not discriminate on the grounds of sex or race, encompassing recruitment, training, monitoring and the company disciplinary and grievance procedure. Respondents suggested that DLOs recognised that discrimination is bad for business, leading to higher staff turnover, a narrower talent base from which to recruit and promote staff, an unhealthy working environment and a poor corporate image. Respondents suggested that they were protected by equal opportunities policies, which was not the case from their experiences in the private sector.

_In the council, you’re sheltered by the Equal Opportunities Policies. You don’t get that with private contractors._

Qualified builder

4.3.3 Equally open to women
Some of the respondents had not encountered antagonism from a number of employers or male employees. This was an area that provoked heated discussion amongst the construction workers.

Women who had been successful in construction tended to be very confident and capable of holding their own in what might be an antagonistic environment. It was therefore unsurprising that the majority of successful women in construction had developed mechanisms for dealing with any harassment they might encounter.

Many of them spoke of the advantages of working with men who were likely to have had more experience, and from whom they could learn practical implementation of the theory they had learned at college.

Where employers and employees were equally open to and welcoming of women, there was mutual advantage, with obvious appreciation of the different dynamic that a mixed workforce could deliver.

_It was great fun working on sites. The men are the biggest pussy-cats. There’s always a few that are like that (antagonistic to women). But I had a really brilliant time._

Qualified bricklayer
I’ve loved working with a group of lads. They would show you how to do new things.

Qualified carpenter

I’ve also had very positive feedback from the plumber I work alongside. He thinks working with women is great.

Qualified plumber

Most of the participants, having had experience of employers who would not entertain the idea of women working in construction or plumbing, were very conscious of the importance of employers who welcomed them and saw them as an important part of their workforce.

‘Happy sites’ were the product of good employers who valued their staff, provided training where appropriate and saw their workforce as a team in whom investment would be repaid.

To find an employer that takes on women was wonderful. He takes you into the office and talks you through things. I found a tiling course I wanted to do, and he paid for it. If you’re willing to learn and you show initiative, he will help you. But he’s got no time for plodders. He’s ambitious.

Apprentice carpenter

4.3.4 Recognition of the added value that women can provide

Participants employed in the construction trades felt that women tended to consistently demonstrate certain skills and attributes that were now beginning to be recognised and valued. This view was reinforced by an organisation that publishes a directory of tradeswomen and stated “publication sales have rocketed.”

A lot of people want women for a variety of reasons. Now people are actively saying that they want a woman, and we can use that as a marketing tool.

Trainer at women’s construction centre

X (an employer) says that clients are asking him ‘Do you have any tradeswomen?’

Trainee carpenter

Respondents suggested that their communication skills delivered additional benefits to employers, who had previously focused upon trade skills, rather than ‘people skills’
that enhance competition. Women spoke of the tact and diplomacy they needed when dealing with customers, whether they were running their own business or working for an employer. One employer was described as ‘an entrepreneur’ who positively appreciated the range of skills she offered.

*Being the only woman was a help to me getting the job. I work for a posh plumbing firm, set up by an entrepreneur. He has lots of different ideas. I work in people’s homes, so it’s mainly small work, and not heavy. And they like having a woman that can talk to them.*

Qualified plumber

*Most of all, we listen to what people say. We have communication skills. If there were more women in construction, it would help the image of the industry as a whole.*

Qualified painter and decorator

Many of the women in employment felt that the quality of their work was generally better than men’s. What they lacked in confidence, they felt they made up for in care and attention.

*I’ve never experienced any of that (lower pay for an equivalent job). I’m paid hourly and more than most of the men because I’m better.*

Qualified plumber

*We have the eye for fine detail.*

Qualified painter and decorator

5. **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This was a small, though rigorous study and captures the perspectives of women who have succeeded in entering training or employment in the non-traditional sectors of plumbing, construction, engineering and ICT. They are therefore, the exception. These women provide valuable information on occupational segregation and gender from a close ‘insider’ perspective as opposed to more distant, ‘outsider’ opinions.

**The benefits**

There is no doubt that women experienced considerable benefits from training and work in non-traditional skills sectors. 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 with paid work, with the highest levels of flexibility, including working around school hours and holiday periods. Many women enjoyed the responsibility and control of being self-employed or running a small business, and, in addition, spoke of the freedom from harassment which they had encountered on a building site or at a male dominated workplace.

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

There was evidence that employers were recognising the benefits to business of employing more women. It seems that more people 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 the additional ‘soft skills’ of communication, customer-handling, and team working that enable businesses to be more competitive and responsive in a changing labour market.

The obstacles
Although women's experiences differed, there is compelling evidence of the range of obstacles and challenges faced in entering training and employment. In order to succeed in the present climate those women have had to become particularly resilient and determined.

ICT, construction, plumbing and engineering continue to have an image as male preserves, and this affects how people attribute value to jobs in these sectors. Nevertheless, a number of women felt passionately attracted to working in these fields, and sought to find ways to overcome the barriers. Women had frequently been institutionally discouraged from their earliest years, and where they had a supportive family, this was often the only support they received. Women often remained in traditional jobs for many years, not undertaking job-change training until they were over 30.

Being older was a barrier in itself. The women participating in the research generally felt uncomfortable about training with 16 year-olds. Funding through Modern Apprentices was not available to them due to their age or personal circumstances. In
the construction trade particularly, employers were often unwilling to take on older staff (defined as over 25 in this instance).

Advice and information about what training was available was seen as a problem, and many women spoke of the ‘pure chance’ that they had heard about the possibility of retraining in a field that interested them, where there was a skills shortage and that paid well.

When women decided to train or retrain, confidence and self-image was frequently a problem. Mainstream training in non-traditional spheres frequently failed to meet women’s needs. This included lack of flexibility around hours and lack of support, both of which militated against the participation of women with children.

A major barrier to the successful completion of an NVQ qualification is the requirement for work experience. Whilst this is a barrier for both men and women, it is exacerbated for women for the same reasons that women are disadvantaged in the search for employment. In addition, where work placements are available, they are frequently unpaid or paid at too low a level to be feasible for women with financial, domestic and family responsibilities.

Women who successfully complete their training continue to face barriers in finding and retaining employment. Despite a new breed of ‘entrepreneurial boss’, who sees the advantages of a diverse workforce and new business opportunities many employers continue to be unwilling to employ women and discriminate in a range of ways.

**What helps?**
In addition to their own resilience and determination, women identified a range of features of training and employment practice from their own experiences that had helped them to succeed.

It is clear that women need support and active encouragement from individuals to pursue careers in non-traditional skills areas. One, key individual who believed in them could make the difference for women in their decision-making. In the main, this type of encouragement was found through friends or family, though youth workers and tutors were also identified. Seeing positive images of women in these industries and meeting role-models were positive influences.
Many of the features of positive action training for women were identified as important. The fact that this type of training existed was the catalyst for many women to enter non-traditional skills training. The training has been set up to facilitate the needs of women and overtly welcomes them. 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. The quality of the training was recognised and applauded. It was suggested that women only training was a good place to start for women in order to give them confidence and help them 'find their feet'.

Good employers were key to women's successful entry into the sectors either through the provision of work-based placements or in securing employment. Some employers were equally open to employing women and their male employees were praised as good colleagues. There was evidence that some employers were recognising the added value that employing women could accrue for them. Certainly, the diversity of the market and changing households is such that people are beginning to ask for tradeswomen. 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. There was evidence that the ICT sector was willing to adopt flexible working practices to meet the needs of women trainees.

Implications

1. Decision-making

It is essential that girls and women receive appropriate advice, guidance and information about non-traditional careers if they are to enter them in significant numbers. The earlier that girls are introduced to non-stereotyped information the more likely they are to remain open to the non-traditional career options.

The authors consider that a range of actions could be taken to promote employment in non-traditional spheres to young people.

Specific actions

- Schools and learning environments could ensure that work experience and vocational education options are not gender-biased, and that girls are encouraged to undertake placements in ICT, engineering, construction and plumbing.

- Positive role models would help to counter girls' negative image of non-traditional occupations. This could take the form of asking women working in non-traditional
areas to go into schools to talk about their own experiences as part of the National Curriculum delivery of PHSE and Citizenship, of ensuring that the information available in the classroom includes a wider balance of images – e.g. women and men in non-gender specific roles and of developing/using resources to encourage girls to participate in science, technology and woodwork.

- Careers Advisers and Connexions Personal Advisers have an important role to play in influencing and enabling young people by providing relevant and up-to-date information about what careers are available. Training for careers counsellors could emphasise the importance of raising the awareness of the need for widening career choices for women, of challenging stereotyping in guidance work and of raising awareness of the support mechanisms needed in non-traditional careers training.

- Education, learning, skill based and workforce strategies could consider ways of encouraging girls not to drop important subjects like Mathematics and Science in Further Education.

Women experience particular difficulties when they change career as adults. Lack of information and advice was as relevant at this stage as for young people at school.

Specific actions
- Jobcentre Plus personal advisers should be aware of the range of possibilities for women. Positive action training should be highlighted and marketed to women. Where there are women’s training schemes, personal advisers could liaise closely with them to ensure that they are fully informed of the facilities offered and are able to signpost women to them.

2. Training
It is essential that appropriate training is available to women, which recognises their differing needs in the context of a highly segregated labour market. Simply opening the door to more women in mainstream training is not going to rectify the structural problems that exist.

Specific actions
- Specific features of positive action training for women could be taken into the mainstream and adopted as good practice. These include training with peers in numbers, flexible delivery of training, childcare provision, pre-entry skills and entry to employment provision and explicit support mechanisms.
• Provision of positive action training in every local labour market would ensure that women train for non-traditional skill areas. There is current concern that after 2006, when European funding at current levels is no longer available across the UK, mainstream funding will not be available, nor sufficiently flexible, to maintain women only provision. Funding for childcare is also becoming harder, and women’s training centres are aware that women will not be able to train without childcare provision.

• New adult apprenticeships could be developed for women, including those who are older in the non-traditional sectors to rectify extreme segregation in Modern Apprenticeships.

3. Employers
Unless employers institute positive action measures, the working environment - especially, but not uniquely, in the construction industry - frequently exhibits gender-bias by not meeting women’s needs in a variety of ways. Working hours are frequently (and unnecessarily) inflexible and all but impossible for women with pre-school and school-aged children. Health and safety is not given the priority it deserves, to the detriment of the lives and health of both men and women working on building sites. Employers of all sizes need to have a range of policies and practices in place to create a satisfactory working environment for women.

Specific actions
Employers are actively encouraged and persuaded to:
• Provide quality work placements to women training in non-traditional skill areas.
• Give women a chance in employment so that they can demonstrate what they are capable of.
• Develop flexible working practices.
• Develop equal opportunities policies and practices (including harassment) to develop their workforce and provide protection.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN IN TRAINING

Introduction/background/questions
- Explain the interest in occupational segregation
- Explain what will happen to the research findings
- Housekeeping/domestics – H&S, fire, toilets, smoking, refreshments, length of session etc.
- Introductions from participants
- Facilitators’ backgrounds etc
- Completion of consent forms

What influenced your decision to train in this sector?
Supplementary questions if required
- Early years:
- School: curriculum; careers advice, attitudes of teachers, resources
- Adult influences:
- The ‘image’ (of ICT/engineering/construction/plumbing)
- Information/marketing
- Industry sensitive – aware of skills shortages
- Already knew someone doing this who was important/influential in life

What attracted you to this course?
Prompts if required
- Outreach/advertising in places where women see them
- Content – including confidence building, ESOL, basic skills
- Underpinning support - childcare provision, support structure etc.
- Practical/work-life balance: Hours/location
- Women-only – felt more confident
- Knew other women doing it
- Sense of adventure/difference
- Financial incentive
- Women-only (where appropriate)

Do you see yourself working in the area in which you’re currently training? If so, what benefits do you see in working in this area?
Prompts if required
- Rates of pay
- Self-employment is an option – flexibility
- Creative process – you can see the results of your work
- Hours/regular work
- Always a demand for your skills / market shortage
- Options for career / business development
- Other?

Is there anything that might stop you from completing this training?
Prompts if required
- Childcare/dependent care – access and cost
- Need to earn money now by taking unskilled work
- Disapproval of others (family/friends etc)
• The work is too difficult/dangerous
• Lack of confidence
• Cost of maintenance of tools, insurance, clothing etc.
• Poor transport
• Work experience opportunities not evident / occurring
• Too competitive
• Interpersonal relationships
• Image of women in the industry
• Likelihood that may not be offered a job
• Getting into debt now
• Other

**What skills/knowledge/attitudes do you think are needed to be successful in this training course?**

Prompts if required
• Determination/motivation
• Numeracy / literacy
• Strength – physical and mental
• Skills of the trade
• Confidence - Ability to plan
• Other?

**What impact has this training course had on your lives in general?**

Prompt if required
• Affected relationship with family/children/other/partner/friends (for better or worse?)
• Feel more confident
• Better at managing time
• Less free time/time for house/children
• Feel more confident
• Different self image
• Other?

**What do you plan to do after you have completed this course?**

Prompts if required
• Further skills training – details
• Directly into employment – details
• Other – details

**How confident are you that you will be able to follow these plans?**

Prompts if required
• What might hinder you? (e.g. Lack of finance/lack of tools/need for immediate earning/ etc)
• What might help you? (e.g. Support from family/friends/centre/other)

**What do you think would make a difference to more women coming forward to undertake non-traditional training of this sort?**

Prompts if required
• Early Years
• School
• Image
• Culture and training
• Infrastructure (e.g. More women-only training centres; centres that provide childcare/basic skills support etc)

How might these suggestions have made a difference to you?
APPENDIX 2 : INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT

Introduction/background/questions
- Explain our interest in occupational segregation
- Explain what will happen to the research findings
- Explain time/how group will be run etc.
- Request permission to tape/transcribe/use quotes
- Explain limits of confidentiality
- Introductions from participants
- Facilitator's background
- Domestics/housekeeping- H&S, Fire, Toilets, Smoking, refreshments etc.

Getting the job/employment:

a) Job search/recruitment:
   - What was it like finding a job?

Prompt as required:

i) Finding out where the jobs were:
   - Lack of information about what jobs exist in the construction industry and where they are, who is looking for employees/who is not
   - Recruitment process for the industry (i.e. lack of information about available jobs, which often go by-word of mouth)
   - Attitudes/knowledge of recruitment agencies/Jobcentre plus other people in the industry
   - Support given by training organisations

ii) The selection process:
   - Attitudes of interviewer/employer/site manager
   - Culture of building sites
   - Confidence to enter what is seen as a male preserve

iii) Type of job/employment:
   - Terms and conditions of employment – impact on work/life balance
   - Distance to travel to the site
   - Self-employment

iv) Job requirements
   - Tools/equipment/clothes

TRANSPORT
'Ticket to work', the quality assurance card?

b) What sort of job/employment were you looking for?
   - E.g. - Self-employment, building site, DLO, other

Prompt as required:

Why did you choose that type of job/employment?
Prompts if required:
   - Image and perceived culture of the job
• Flexibility
• Less likely to experience sexism
• Better working conditions,
• Lack of qualifications for other job/s
• More supportive set up, if so how did you know?

c) What do you perceive as the benefits of working in construction/plumbing?

Prompts if required:
• Rates of pay
• Self-employment is an option – flexibility
• Creative process – you can see the results of your work
• Hours/regular work
• Always a demand for your skills
• Options for career progression
• Other?

d) What are the problems in continuing in this type of employment, and how do you deal with them?

Prompt if required:
• Attitudes of colleagues (hostility/violence/sexism/patronising/isolation)
• Attitudes of managers
• Attitudes of clients
• Terms and conditions of employment
• Site facilities & conditions (toilets/shower room facilities etc)
• Working hours (e.g. 7.30 – 4 – and call out - problems with childcare/work-life balance)
• Location (requirement to travel long distances/requirement to be able to drive etc.)
• Childcare provision (lack of childcare made worse by hours and mobility issues, cost of childcare)
• Support in the workplace (lack of information/support for new staff, lack of feedback on performance)
• Contract period (e.g. Short-term contracts)
• Lack of ongoing training
• Lack of career structure
• Cost of insurance/tools/equipment
• Transport – driving licence/car ownership/public transport

e) What skills, knowledge and attitudes do you think are necessary to be successful in this type of work?

Prompt if required:
• Determination/motivation
• Numeracy/literacy
• Strength - physical and mental
• Skills of the trade
• Qualifications
• Confidence
• Assertiveness
• Ability to plan

f) What effect does being employed in this field have on your lives?

Prompt if required:
• Affected relationship with family/children/other/partner/friends (for better or worse?)
• Feel more confident
• Better at managing time
• Less free time/time for house/children
• Feel more confident
• Different self image to perceived image
• Other?

g) What solutions do you suggest for encouraging more women into this type of work?

Prompt if required
• Early Years
• School: Careers advisers/ resources/other
• Image
• Culture
• Infrastructure
• Information - e.g. Jobcentre Plus/other recruitment agencies and schools careers advisers
• Support
• Training issues: e.g. personal skills training
• Women-only construction teams

How might these suggestions have made a difference to you?
APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FORM

The Equal Opportunities Commission are carrying out a General Formal Investigation into Occupational Segregation (Please see www.eoc.org.uk for more information)

An important part of the investigation is a research project to gain the views of women undertaking training and employment in non-traditional skills areas. Angela Dale and Nors Jackson have been commissioned by the EOC to carry out the research.

Information Sheet
You are invited to take part in the above research project. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Aims of the research
The aims of the research project are to:

Understand the barriers you have encountered in entering non-traditional training/employment

Explore how you negotiated and managed those experiences

Identify the factors that enabled you to succeed and what else would have helped

Identify how more women can be enabled to enter non-traditional occupations

Highlight good practice for women in non-traditional training/employment

Make recommendations, which can be fed into the EOC General Formal Investigation into Occupational Segregation.

Focus groups
We will be discussing your experiences and opinions about the training you are undertaking. The success and quality of our discussion is based on the co-operation of those who attend, and we expect the discussion to last for about 1.5 – 2 hours.

Taking Part in the project
We would like to stress that you are under no obligation to take part in the study. If you do agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form. Your personal views will not be shared with anyone else apart from the researchers, and we will not use your name in any published research.

Any questions?
Please feel free to ask any questions about the project whenever you wish during the focus group. You are free to withdraw at any time, and without giving a reason. Your decision regarding the project will have no effect on your work or study.
Thank you for reading this

**Consent Form**

Equal Opportunities Commission- **Research Project**

**Name:** .................................................................

Please tick the following boxes to give your consent

- [ ] I understand what the research is about.
- [ ] I have a copy of the information sheet to keep
- [ ] I know I can ask questions about the study at any time
- [ ] I understand my part in the study, and I know how long this will take
- [ ] I understand that personal information is strictly confidential
- [ ] I freely consent to be a participant in the study. No-one has put pressure on me.
- [ ] I know that I can stop taking part in the study at any time

**Signature:** .................................................................

**Date:** .................................................................