

## INTRODUCTION

The balancing of work-life responsibilities has been a key objective of Government policy since 1997, with a raft of measures introduced from April 2003 (DTI 2003) aiming to enhance choice and support for parents, including the reform of the tax and benefit system, The National Childcare Strategy, Surestart and a review of flexible working practices.

Whilst the work-life balance is an issue for both women and men, women's position as primary carers mean that they are most likely to be affected by work-life balance initiatives (Women's Equality Unit, 2002). Women constitute 44% of the UK labour market (Labour Force Survey, 2001), yet despite Government recognition that flexible working arrangements, combined with quality childcare, are key factors in improving women's employment status, traditional patterns of women's relative disadvantage in the labour market remain. Horizontal and vertical segregation mean that women are concentrated in just 3 occupational groups, and in low paid, part-time work. 83% of part-time employees are women and, whilst this appears as a way of managing the work life balance, it disadvantages women in terms of pay, training and progression.

Whilst policy has responded to the needs of working parents in the past decade, the lack of any real legislative power, the prevalence of long hours cultures and the embedded nature of gendered assumptions relating to caring and domestic responsibilities, mean its effectiveness is questionable.

This report presents preliminary findings from the ESF Objective 3 Project Combining Work and Family Life: Removing the Barriers to Women's Progression.

### Objectives of the project:

- To evaluate family legislation and policy, and explore its effectiveness as a means of addressing work-life balance and progression.
- To examine the extent of the take up of work life balance initiatives by women.
- To explore work-life balance in terms of lived experience.
- To identify the barriers to women's progression in the UK labour market.
- To identify examples of good practice from the Netherlands.
- To provide recommendations for initiatives which support women's progression in the labour market in the UK.

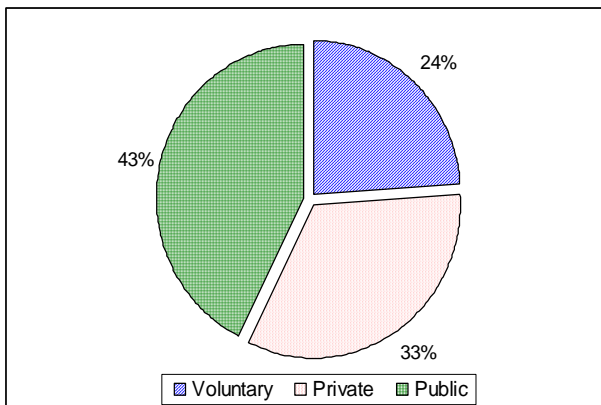
## Overview

The project is based on 64 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups in the UK, 14 interviews with policy makers, academics and trade unionists and 4 focus groups with working women in the Netherlands

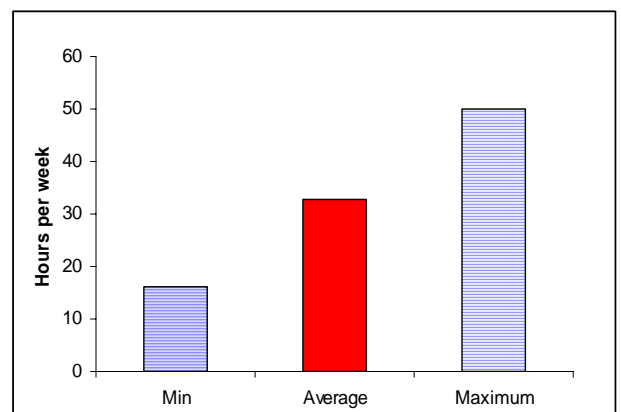
The interim report is based on the analysis of 21 in-depth interviews. This sample is mainly drawn from the private sector, but it also highlights women working full-time and flexibly across public, private and voluntary sectors. The majority of women in this sub-sample were from London and the Southeast. The sub-sample includes women working in a variety of occupations, in the private (33%) public (43%) and voluntary (24%) sectors, working full-time and part-time (30 hours or less), with around a third of the sample working at management level. The women had children of varying ages (18 months to 14 years)<sup>1</sup>. 17 of the research participants were married or living with partners with four of the women divorced or separated from partners. 19 of the women identified as White British, one woman as White Irish and one woman was Turkish Cypriot. The findings discussed in this report represent in-depth explorations of women's experiences rather than a statistically representative extrapolation from the wider population.

### Diagrams 1 & 2

#### Summary of employment sector for sample



#### Hours per week



<sup>1</sup> Key elements of government 'family-friendly' legislation – the flexible working request and parental leave - aimed at parents with children under six, justified by the fact that new parents with younger children may need enhanced rights in order to manage their dual roles as workers and parents (Dti, 2002). However, it was decided that women with older children should also be interviewed as managing dual roles and achieving 'work-life balance' does not diminish when children reach age six. In any case, often organisations' family-friendly and flexible working policies are more generous and are also available to parents with older children and non-parents.

**Table 1 List of interviewees**, occupations and sectors, hours worked and ages of children

	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Hours</b>	<b>Age of Children</b>	<b>Sector</b>
Elspeth	Project Leader: IT/ Business Services	26	17; 14	Private
Aileen	Consultant: IT/ Business Services	40-50	5; 3	Private
Jane	Hr Manager, Government Organisation	25	10; 7	Public
Lily	Computer Programmer: Financial Services	21	4; 3	Private
Denise	Outreach Worker: Community Organisation	37	17; 13	Voluntary
Diana	TV Producer	21	3; 2	Public
Wendy	Projects Coordinator: Community Organisation	30	18 months	Voluntary
Emily	Civil Servant	16	5; 4	Public
Genevieve	Executive TV Producer	37	12; 8;5	Public
Paula	IT Technician: Financial Services	21	7; 3	Private
Janet	Area Manager: Housing Project	37	9	Voluntary
Katrina	Credit Policy Manager: Financial Services	38	9	Private
Ailsa	Lawyer	32	18 months	Private
Anna	Customer Service Assistant	35	11; 3	Public
Michelle	Product Design Engineer	37	3	Public
Elaine	IT/Business Consultant	50+	7; 3	Private
Megan	Marketing	37	4	Voluntary
Marianne	Lawyer	37	4	Public
Melissa	Primary Schoolteacher	40+	8; 5	Public
Stella	Manager of Community Programme	40+	4	Voluntary
Rebecca	Administrator	28	6	Public

# CHAPTER ONE

## EXPLORING WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH FLEXIBILITY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Shortly after the work-life balance campaign was launched, the first Work-life Balance baseline study (WLB1) (Dti, 2003b) was conducted in order 'to assess the extent to which employers operated work-life balance practices within their workplaces and whether employees felt existing practices met their needs' (Hogarth *et al.* 2000: 4). The findings from the study of 7500 employees and 2500 employers indicated that other than part-time employment, there were few employees working flexibly:

- 6 per cent of employees reported working a compressed working week, 4 per cent a job share.
- 2 per cent were working annualised hours.
- 16 per cent of employees within the survey would have liked a job share (13 per cent of men, 20 per cent of women).
- 35 per cent of all employees would have liked to work a compressed working week (40 per cent of men and 30 per cent of women).
- 21 per cent of employees wanted to work annualised hours (24 per cent of men and 18 per cent of women).

The 2003 Labour Force Survey (ONS) also shows:

- 11.6 of all full-time employees worked flexibly (within standard flexible working categories).
- 9.7 per cent of male full-time employees and 14.9 per cent of female full-time employees working flexibly. Figures for part-time employees were 6.6 per cent for men and 8.4 for women.

The results from Work Life Balance 2 (Dti 2004) indicate:

- 11 per cent of employees reported working a compressed week.
- 6 per cent had a job-share.
- 6 per cent of employees were working annualised hours.
- 24 per cent worked part-time and 24 per cent were working flexitime.
- 14 per cent worked term-time only.

The WBL2 (2004) survey also indicated that demand to work flexibly outweighed the

possibility of doing so within many workplaces, a situation which had not altered significantly since WLB1 (2003). Only 17 per cent of employees had approached their employer with a flexible working request within the past two years – women with children were the group who made the most requests. In addition, employees in service and sales occupations were more likely than operatives or unskilled workers to make requests (26 per cent and 14 per cent respectively).

The 2004 **Dti** Flexible Working Survey found that **13 per cent** of employees had **requested to work flexibly** (37 per cent women and 10 per cent men), lower rates than those for WLB2. Female employees were much more likely to cite childcare as a reason for requests. In terms of regional comparisons, the study found that employees in London demonstrated the highest number of requests (16 per cent), the East of England had the lowest number of requests (10 per cent). Of those employees who requested to work flexibly, **77 per cent** of requests were **accepted immediately**.

## 1.2 WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

In general, this sample of women appeared to access a considerable degree of flexibility in terms of their working arrangements (see table 2). This is supported by evidence from Workplace Employment Relations Survey (2004) which shows increases in employees adjusting from full-time to part-time working hours, as well as job shares, term-time working and home-working (Kersley *et al.* 2004). This may indicate the fact that organisations are beginning to appreciate the need to provide flexibility, given employees' changing circumstances. However, it also reflects how professional, qualified women at fairly senior levels may be offered flexibility commensurate with their occupational status, and also have the necessary professional 'capital' to negotiate their working conditions.

**Table 2 summary of working arrangements**

Elsbeth	Project Leader: IT/ Business Services	Works 26 hours a week. Works very flexibly and chooses the hours she works. Works set days but can change the days she works if she needs to.
Aileen	Consultant: IT/ Business Services	Works 40 to 50 hours a week. Works very flexibly and chooses the hours she works. Works from home a lot. Sometimes has to work away from home 'on-site'.
Jane	HR manager, Government Organisation	Works 25 hours a week. Chooses the hours she works but must work 5 hours a day, Monday to Friday.
Lily	Computer Programmer: Financial Services	Works 25 hours a week. Works set hours from 7-12, Monday to Friday.
Denise	Outreach Worker: Community Organisation	Works 37 hours a week. Works set hours and is required to work some evenings.
Diana	TV Producer	Works 21 hours a week as a job share. Works set hours.
Wendy	Projects Coordinator: Community Organisation	Works 30 hours a week. Hours are set but there is the opportunity for flexibility if needed.
Emily	Civil Servant	Works 16 hours a week. Hours are set, 8.45 - 2.45, three days a week. Can negotiate occasional later starting times if needed.
Genevieve	Executive TV Producer	Works 37 hours a week. Works set hours but starting later and working from home not a problem.
Ailsa	Lawyer	Works 40 hours a week. Can work flexibly. currently negotiating a nine-day fortnight
Paula	IT Technician: Financial Services	Works 21 hours a week. Works set hours, 9 -2.15, four days a week
Janet	Area Manager: Housing Project	Works 37 hours a week but can work more. Works set hours.
Katrina	Credit Policy Manager: Financial Services	Works 40-50 hours a week. Works core hours but very flexibly.
Anna	Customer Service Assistant	Works 35 hours a week. Works set hours with little flexibility.
Michelle	Product Design Engineer	Works 37 hours a week. Has the opportunity for flexibility but needs to do conventional office hours because of childcare commitments.
Elaine	IT/Business Consultant	Works up to 70 hours a week. Works flexibly and works from home once a week.
Megan	Marketing	Works 37 hours a week. Works set hours but very flexibly.
Marianne	Lawyer	Works 37 hours a week. Has the opportunity for flexibility but needs to do conventional office hours because of childcare commitments.
Kim	Primary Schoolteacher	Works 40-50 hours a week. Works set hours, no real flexibility.
Stella	Manager of Community Programme	Works up to 50 hours a week. Works set hours but has the opportunity for flexibility.
Rebecca	Administrator	Works 28 hours a week. Is a home worker and completely flexible.

- **Extensive flexibility**

Access to flexibility may reflect the fact that a significant number of the women were working in IT, financial and business services. Higher-level employees may be able to access flexibility in order that trained and skilled staff are retained (Dex and Scheibl, 2002; Yeandle *et al.* 2002).

Two of the women interviewed worked for a company which provided outsourcing services in finance, accounting and IT services. The company had been established in the 1960s by women with children, and had a tradition of employing women and offering part-time and flexible hours. Aileen worked up to 50 hours a week at management level, but enjoyed autonomy and flexibility in organising her working time.

I work from home. Today I've come in simply to meet with some person and you. I didn't have to be here today. Tomorrow I do, I've got meetings scheduled. But if I couldn't make the meetings, I can dial in on teleconference. I plan my own week. But that is just as a consultant, in my previous role I had to, I covered the office.

Aileen 41, consultant - financial, accounting, IT outsourcing.

Elsbeth had worked for the same company for 16 years, initially as an analyst programmer before becoming a project leader. During her time with the company, she has been able to plan her working week fairly flexibly and was currently working 26 hours a week. Her employment experiences highlight the availability of well-paid, fairly senior positions at part-time level within this organisation.

It's swings and roundabouts. It's about getting the work done but it's also...I've got to do my 26 hours but I don't have to be in the office at a particular time and it is quite flexible...If there is meeting on a Friday that I am needed to be at, then I will work on a Friday. But by the same token, if I have to take one of the kids to the doctors or something, or myself on a Tuesday, I'll work Friday instead of Tuesday that week as long as it fits in.

Elsbeth 47, project leader - financial, accounting, IT outsourcing

The experiences of other women in the sample suggest flexible working is now a common feature of many workplaces within the private and public sectors. Other women working full-time and also those in management positions worked a flexible '9-5', and were given the

option to adjust start and finishing times.

It is flexible. And we are expected to get the work done. Nobody looks at me if I arrive late or leave early, which I do quite often actually as I have been quite ill and so if I need to take a day off then I do. And I have got webmail at home so I can log on at seven in the morning if I want and start dealing with my emails, which I do sometimes.

*Genevieve 43, managing editor/producer BBC*

The extent to which this solved the work-life balance issue for these women is debatable however, given that flexibility may be combined with long working hours and may be offset by women's circumstances outside of the workplace. Furthermore, several examples from the data highlight that women may have the opportunity to work flexibly, but their childcare commitments mean they are more likely to keep to a conventional 9-5 in order to collect children from nursery and school.

Initial findings from this project are largely positive in terms of working arrangements. However, two of the women working in the public sector were required to work set hours because of the nature of their jobs. One of these was training to be a primary school teacher whilst working in a school. In contrast to many of the women interviewed, those working directly with people found that employees have less control over when and where they work. Kim commented "You don't realise how inflexible teaching is".

Inflexibility was also highlighted as an issue by women who were often required to work within teams, manage other employees and attend meetings. Flexibility is less straightforward for employees whose jobs involve providing immediate face-to-face services and working with people, rather than autonomous task completion.

- **Part-time working arrangements**

Working part-time has been identified as the principal means by which many women manage the dual responsibilities of paid work and caring for children (EOC, 2003; Purcell *et al.* 1999; Perrons, 1999; Branine, 1999; Walsh, 1999; Sheridan, 2004). However many women working part-time hours worked more set hours with specific working times. One woman was a home worker, which was entirely flexible; although, this also worked against her as she often ended up working significantly above her contracted 28 hours, sometimes up to 50 hours a week. Another woman working for a voluntary sector children's organisation worked set days but was able to rearrange working times if needed. Other women working in more conventional office settings in the public and private sector worked more set hours but women

working part-time in higher-level positions still enjoyed substantial flexibility.

Jane worked part-time as a HR manager for the Environment Agency. She had previously worked in the private sector but had withdrawn from the labour market for three years when she had children because she could not cope with the long hours culture in HR in the private sector. She also felt very strongly that she wanted to be fully available to care for her children and did not want to rely on additional childcare provision such as a nanny or a childminder. Jane was required to work five days a week in order to keep on top of what was going on within the organisation, but other than that, her working hours appeared to be extremely flexible.

We have flexi time. So my contracted hours are 25 a week and I specify I do 5 a day. But in practical terms I do what I can. For instance yesterday I had to go and look at a secondary school for my daughter. I didn't get into the office until half past 11. I will make that time up, or if I can't I will have to take it as holiday at the end of the year. So yes it is very flexible.

Jane 47. HR manager

Much of the literature on part-time working focuses on its marginal and low status nature (Rubery and Fagan, 1994; Rubery *et al.* 1994; Dti, 2003b; EOC, 2004). However, evidence from this sample shows that meaningful and fairly high status part-time employment is available and can be an effective means of managing work and care. Part-time work may not be evident at the highest levels of management; nevertheless, it should not merely be framed in terms of marginal and low-level employment. This still raises issues about progression, relating to the way that some professional women may maintain occupational status on reduced hours in order to take primary responsibility for childcare, but cease to progress to higher occupational levels, in what has been referred to as the 'mommy-track' (Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

These experiences are indicative of the now fairly widespread nature of flexible working arrangements, and the fact that organisations are acknowledging the need to provide alternative forms of working. As well as working arrangements, women also talked about other positive examples of 'family-friendly' workplaces. This ranged from knowledge and use of formal family-friendly policy to interactions with colleagues and line managers.

### 1.3 VIEWS ON FORMAL ORGANISATIONAL POLICY

Women's awareness of and engagement with family-friendly policies within their organisations appeared to be variable. Generally, women working for larger organisations, within both the public and private sectors, identified more elements of policy and appeared to be clearer about what their companies offered in terms of flexible working options and leave policies. Some women in management positions were more knowledgeable as they may have had to implement policy and organise flexible working requests. Women talked about different types of flexible working such as four-day weeks, flexitime and working from home. For some of the women, working from home was part of their organisation's official policy; for others, this was less official but they had the option if they needed to take it. Several women mentioned leave entitlements such as carers' leave and compassionate leave. Another woman, who worked at the BBC, talked about their subsidised play scheme in the school holidays for employees' children and one voluntary sector organisation offered subsidised childcare for parents with children under five.

In addition to a general awareness of company policy, some women had also come into contact with formal policy and had successfully negotiated reduced hours. The view was also expressed that the need for such policies had been acknowledged and there had been definite changes in the workplace. Some women expressed a positive view of organisational policy, reflecting how employers have responded to calls for family-friendly and flexible working policy that is often superior to government measures.

They've got a pamphlet that HR will give you that lists about 20 different ways in which you can apply to work flexibly... Because we've got a very active employment department. I think they've been priding themselves on being at the forefront of the interpretation of employment law and they were trying to... I don't know if you ever see, every year The Times have the best 100 firms to work for. They're the first to see it when it comes out and they're trying to get themselves up in the ranking. And all that is, is employee feedback on a firm. So I think they're very much trying to be seen as being flexible and family-friendly.

Ailsa 32, lawyer

You know they have invested in admin diversity. So we have a fairly senior woman who is running our diversity policies and campaigns and all that sort of stuff. So I think corporately and from a policy point of view absolutely. I think a lot of it is driven by legislation - you can't not do it to a certain degree now. I think a lot of it is driven by that. I think also as a sector, we are all facing the fact that you know we all recruited and trained really heavily in the late 1990s.

Elaine 38, senior manager - IT/business outsourcing consultancy

#### 1.4 BROADER EXPERIENCES OF A 'FAMILY-FRIENDLY' WORKPLACE

Some of the women, most notably women working in the voluntary sector, did not refer to formal organisational policy to the same extent and were more likely to arrange flexibility amongst themselves in much smaller teams of employees.

But for my team, it very much works around their childcare. I mean we've even had children in the office.

Stella 42, manager of a community programme

Organisations may pay lip service to policies promoting work-life balance (Hochschild, 1997; Brannen *et al.* 2001), but it is how these issues are negotiated on a daily basis between colleagues and managers that shape positive workplace experiences (Dex, 2003). Others were generally positive about their workplaces with regards to accommodating their caring responsibilities.

I haven't really had any problems with them. Like I said, when my son was poorly they basically gave me work and said work from home. It's all been positive, I have not had any negative experiences at all.

Claire 32, programmer

#### 1.5 NEGATIVE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

It is clear recent campaigns to make the workplace more flexible for employees have resulted in workplace practices and cultures that aim to accommodate working parents and also produce positive workplace experiences. It could also be argued that this is indicative of 'feminised' working conditions where career progression is relinquished for flexibility (Lewis and Lewis, 1996). However, there was also considerable evidence of how companies and

organisations failed to understand and accommodate their employees' responsibilities outside of the workplace. This was expressed in various ways. Some women were explicit in their criticism of their employers and clearly viewed them in wholly negative terms. Examples of employers inflexibility include:

- Denial of leave entitlements.
- Lack of consideration of even minor adjustments to working hours.
- Creation of a work place culture which leads to women feeling reluctant to take time off when children are sick or to attend school events.

The ambivalence of this issue was highlighted in the way that workplaces often demonstrate contradictory practices, for instance, the way in which flexibility was often combined with long hours working or working away from home. Furthermore, although some women were uncritical of their organisations, they would highlight tensions by talking about their reluctance to discuss family at work or to admit they had had problems with their children or childcare.

#### ➤ **Long hours culture**

Evidence from the data highlights that often it is the case that full-time working hours are not the problem, rather it is the additional hours full-time employees are required to work, or additional pressures such as a lack of support outside of work, which make combining dual roles problematic. The UK has the longest working hours in Europe (Eurostat, 2002) and increased demands on the time of employees have become a significant workplace feature with certain sectors and occupations in the UK and the US (Hochschild, 1997; Eurostat, 2002). Senior managers are likely to work over and above conventional full-time hours in order to demonstrate commitment within organisations where long hours and 'presenteeism' are inherent to organisational cultures (Kodz *et al.* 2003). A Dti recent survey of the IT industry highlighted that working over and above 'full-time' continues to be an accepted practice for those in management positions, and is often seen as an example for other lower level employees to follow (Dti, 2004).

The data demonstrate several significant examples of long hours working and excessive demands on employees' time. Several women working at mid-management level talked about working 50 hours a week, but were able to manage this because it was flexible and they had control over their own time and sufficient formal or informal support. This highlights the extent to which flexibility provides a means of managing over and above full-time hours, although it is likely that excessive working hours cancel out the benefits of flexibility.

Elaine worked up to 70 hours a week. She worked at senior management level in business management and IT outsourcing. She enjoyed substantial flexibility and worked from home once a week, but had to 'be available' between 8.30 in the evening until 7.30 at night. She was one of 150 Vice Presidents within the company which meant that she was part of the higher-level leadership within the organisation and was responsible for approximately 1000 employees. Elaine explicitly acknowledged that her working hours were extreme and identified the fact that she could not use nurseries because of this. Consequently, she employed a nanny. She felt that long hours were a general problem within her sector, and that her company merely paid lip service to family-friendly policy. She talked about 9-5 as a far off dream that illustrates that in terms of work-life balance, reasonable full-time hours are not necessarily the problem. Ultimately, however, she appeared resigned to the fact that such time demands were fundamental to her role and she took it as given that work would encroach into her private life.

I have a real thing about working weekends. I really try hard not to do anything at the weekends. But this weekend I had something that... So I got up at 6.30 on Sunday morning so that I could get up before the kids got up and do a couple of hours. And I was getting replies to my email. I was logged in at 6.30 on a Sunday and I was getting replies to my emails.

Elaine 38, senior manager - IT/business management outsourcing

## 1.6 CONFLICTING EXPERIENCES

Often the positive aspects of formal workplace policy such as access to part-time and flexible hours may be negated by less formal workplace dynamics such as sectoral and organisational cultures that advocate long hours and do not accommodate the caring role. The way that formal and informal elements of workplace structures and cultures may counteract each other is also evident in the attitudes and actions of colleagues and line managers. For instance, although part-time working can be an effective means of reconciling work and family, it can also be problematic if not accepted by colleagues. The following comment highlights how the benefits of shorter working hours are countered by negative attitudes from colleagues:

I have no argument with the hours. I have got no arguments. I have not had any battles with them sorting my hours out. It's just the attitude.

Paula 40, IT technician

It is likely that employees' workplace experiences will be contradictory and fragmented in terms of family-friendly workplaces, given the various levels at which such policies and practices operate.

## 1.7 THE FEASIBILITY OF FLEXIBILITY

The issue of feasibility was also identified. As mentioned earlier, within service-based occupations and teaching, flexibility may be more difficult to implement because employees are required to work at a specific time in order to provide a service to others.

*When it comes to tourism, especially if you are frontline staff - like the work I'm doing - you cannot have that. Again because you have got the set working hours*

*Anna, 29, tourist information assistant*

However, Anna also commented that her organisation had demonstrated a distinct lack of imagination with regard to altering her hours, even in a minor way. Others working in television production also expressed the view that flexible and reduced working hours were not feasible when making TV programmes 'on location'. On the other hand, several women in managerial positions talked about a lack of imagination and hostility amongst employers and organisations with regards to enabling employees to work in ways that would help them to reconcile work-care conflicts. Their managerial experience meant that they were experienced enough to know that altering employment practices to suit the needs of employees with caring responsibilities was often possible without being detrimental to the running of companies and organisations and that there was merely a lack of acceptance of such practices.

Attempts have been made to promote flexible working as not only feasible, but also as beneficial for employers in terms of performance, productivity and staff retention (Dti, 2003a; CIPD, 2003). However, research evidence to support the business case for flexible working is inconclusive (Dex and Smith, 2002). It is clear that flexible working practices have potential; however, employers frequently do not demonstrate a real commitment to accommodating those with caring responsibilities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Evidence suggests that for the most part, women's access to workplace practices that might influence the reconciliation of work and family life are largely determined by the employer rather than as a result of engagement with government legislation, such as parental leave and the flexible working request. Government policy in this area includes:

- Parental leave
- The flexible working request
- Childcare provision
- Tax credits

#### PARENTAL LEAVE

In the UK, the right to parental leave was introduced in 1999 as part of the Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations. Parental leave grants parents with children under the age of 6, and disabled children under 18, the right to up to 13 weeks unpaid leave for each child. Both fathers and mothers are entitled to take parental leave, as well as a legal guardian or those in the process of adopting a child. Leave can be anything up to 13 weeks unpaid leave per year (18 weeks for parents with disabled children) and must be for the purpose of looking after or ensuring the welfare of a child or dependant. According to the Dti (2000) parental leave 'enables parents to spend more time with their children or to help children settle into new childcare arrangements or a new school' (ibid, p.30). The government does not provide payment for periods of leave and this issue is left to the discretion of the employer.

Employers have the right to postpone leave for up to six months after the leave request has been made if they feel that an employee taking leave may disrupt the business. For example, 'at a seasonal peak; where a significant proportion of the workforce applies for parental leave at the same time; or when the employee's role is such that his or her absence at a particular time would unduly the harm the business' (Dti, 2000: 24). However, when an employee requests leave immediately after childbirth or adoption, employers cannot reschedule leave.

## 2.2 PARENTAL LEAVE: AWARENESS, TAKE UP AND LIMITATIONS

Take-up rates for parental leave are low. A Dti survey of working parents indicates that 3 per cent of parents have used the entitlement (Dti, 2000a). Bond *et al.* (2002) found that take-up rates for statutory parental leave entitlement within their study were around 1 or 2 per cent (see also Lewis, 2004). WLB2 found that only 12 per cent of parents who were aware of parental leave provision had taken it up, but as the authors highlight, this represents only 4 per cent of all parents. There has also been considerable criticism of parental leave primarily relating to the fact that it is unpaid. Commentators have highlighted that until leave is paid, take-up rates will remain low and women will be more likely to take it as they generally earn less; this serves to reinforce women's role as principal carers and to perpetuate gender inequality (Toynbee, 1999; Lister, 2001). In addition, the fact that it is unpaid discriminates against parents on lower incomes who would not be able to afford to take it (Ward, 1999). Research exploring the impact of the flexible working request (Camp, 2004) demonstrates that although parents have benefited from it, many employers do not fully acknowledge legislation and do not adhere to its stipulations. Camp also found that employers reported that the legislation had had little effect on workplaces with low take-up rates.

The low levels of awareness and take-up within the sample suggest that this piece of legislation is failing to reach those who are or *were* entitled to it. Furthermore, even when women were aware of parental leave, some expressed the view that they were unlikely to use it and that it would not be acceptable in their workplace

### ➤ **Awareness**

Awareness of parental leave was variable. Women with a comprehensive awareness of the right were in the minority. The three women who had used the right, or were planning to use it, were fully aware of it but women were more likely to have partial knowledge or have not heard about parental leave at all. This is likely to be the case if women had older children, as the right does not apply. However, many women were eligible and had no awareness of it. In total, six of the women who were entitled to parental leave or had been had no real knowledge of it, and a further six expressed only a partial or limited awareness of the right. Several women said they would have used it, had they been informed about it.

Right and they've got to be under six. See 1999, I didn't work for this association - I joined here in 2001. 1999, I didn't actually know about that coming in 99. I was working for a different organisation at the time who were not very nice. If I'd have known about it when he was under-six and that...maybe I wasn't working full-time at the time.

[interviewer] You don't need to be working full-time.

No, it would be something that I'd...yeah I think it's a really good idea and I think it's definitely something I would have pursued.

Janet 33, area manager for a housing association.

### ➤ **Take up**

At the time of interviews, 14 out of 21 women had children under six and were therefore eligible to take parental leave. However, given that the legislation was five years old at the time of interviews, this meant that a further four women were entitled when their children were younger. Despite the high levels of eligibility amongst the sample, only two women had used parental leave, with another woman planning to use it. Interestingly, she was not eligible under government legislation as her children were too old; however, she worked for a large government organisation in the Southeast with generous family-friendly policies and was still able to take parental leave. She also worked in human resources, which meant she had extensive knowledge of such policies as part of her job.

Several factors facilitate the take up of parental leave:

- Employees earn enough to be able to use it.
- The structure and culture of their organisations is amenable to leave requests.
- Managers accept their right to parental leave.
- Employees possess sufficient professional capital to make requests.

Research has shown a variety of opinions to parental leave within the study area as the following box illustrates.

**Question: What's your opinion of parental leave?**

Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Because they can't refuse it. They can refuse the first time but for six months later they cannot refuse it. I have used it twice in those circumstances... I went to my manager saying 'you can't refuse this, we need to agree a time when I need to take it and I'm going to take it.

It's hard to make a decision on a childminder cos I didn't know anybody that could do it so I had to look up the council register and phone people up and go round and see people. So that's when I took my parental leave - because I had no choice, I had to speak to two or three people each day.

Aileen 41. IT/ business outsourcing management consultant

Although some of the women had not used parental leave, there were those who felt it had potential and said they would feel comfortable asking for at least a short leave period. These views came from several women working in smaller teams on community programmes within the voluntary sector. However, the two women who had actually used parental leave were working in the private sector in time-demanding jobs. Their take-up of leave draws attention to its usefulness in providing parents with the means to sort out childcare related issues, spend time with children and have some respite from the practical and emotional stress of juggling care and paid work.

➤ **Limitations**

Three main limitations are emerging from the research:

- Lack of a sense of entitlement.
- Financial barriers.
- Age of children.

When informed about their right to leave, some women said using it would be received negatively in their workplaces:

***Lack of sense of entitlement***

You feel very uncomfortable in our office because there are so many people on sick leave at any one time. And because we are so short staffed, you know that anything you ask for that involves being off work, it's going to go down like a lead balloon. So it makes you feel very uncomfortable before you even start.

Emily 35, civil servant

Others simply did not see it as a right that applied to them. They viewed work-life balance as an issue that they should resolve themselves. Some mentioned that they would be deterred from taking parental leave because it was unpaid. This was raised as a particular issue for mothers who were separated or divorced from partners and were relying on one household income. The following comments from Emily illustrate this point.

***Financial barriers***

If I wasn't able to go on a career break, there's a possibility that I would leave the job centre and for the interim period go back onto income support for the least amount of time, whilst sorting out whatever problem there was.

Emily 35, civil servant

The fact that parental leave is unpaid is indicative of the government's failure to consider the needs and circumstances of single women with children which has been identified as a common thread running through New Labour family and welfare policy (Lewis, 2001; Rake, 2001).

Another criticism of parental leave related to the fact that leave was only available to parents with children under 6. Some women made the point that childcare actually becomes more problematic once children reach school age and that children still require care, and more specifically time, whilst at secondary school. Such opinions reflect similar criticisms of age limits evident within Dti consultations on the needs of working parents (Dti, 2000).

***Age of children***

I think it's really mad because you still got to look after them until they are 12 or 13, they can't be left on their own can they. Even an 8 or 9 year old, if they are ill or whatever, you still have to go and get them. I don't think 6 is neither here nor there to be honest I can't see why they chose 6.

Paula 40, IT technician

The workplace experiences of other women interviewed highlight less accommodating workplaces, low levels of awareness, and also a lack of a sense of entitlement to parental leave. At present, this is a marginal and little known piece of legislation. If it is to be an effective means of addressing the 'work-life balance', then it must become a central feature of employment practice and experience that employees can access as a matter of course in the same way as maternity entitlements.

➤ **Variable experiences**

Women's experiences of maternity and parental leave were variable. In relation to maternity leave, this may vary because of the ages of children, financial circumstances and women's caring preferences. For instance, for women with older children, maternity entitlements and attitudes have changed. With regards to parental leave, entitlement relating to ages of children may affect awareness and obviously take-up. However, it appeared that generally awareness and take-up were low.

## **2.3 THE FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUEST: AWARENESS, TAKE UP AND LIMITATIONS**

### **THE FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUEST**

The right to request a change in working hours came into effect in April 2003 as part of the 2002 Employment Act. Following consultation and legislative processes, the bill was implemented in April 2003 and parents, legal guardians and adoptive parents employed for six months or more were given the right to request to work flexibly on a permanent yearly basis, under the same conditions as those set out for parental leave. Employers are legally obliged to give requests appropriate consideration. Employees can work flexibly in a number of ways: through annualised working hours; compressed hours; flexitime; homeworking; job-sharing; shift working; staggered hours; term time working (Dti, 2003).

Although not mandatory, the Dti advises that the most effective way to request to work flexibly is in writing ahead of the time when employees want their application to take effect. It also advises that employees think about the ways in which their altered working hours would affect and possibly benefit their employer. Such consideration should be present within written applications as 'evidence shows that applications for flexible working patterns succeed where they are soundly based on the business needs of the employer' (Dti, 2003a: 13). In fact, 'an application can only be refused where the employer has a clear business reason for doing so' (ibid, 22). The grounds for refusal are as follows: burden of additional costs; detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand; inability to organise work among existing staff; inability to recruit additional staff; detrimental impact on performance; insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work; and planned structural changes.

➤ **Awareness and take up**

Awareness of the flexible working request was low and no one interviewed had used the legislation to alter working arrangements. However, some women also drew attention to the potential of the legislation saying they would consider using it if flexibility was not available through employers. Others had investigated the details of the legislation in some depth, with a view to using it because they were having problems with working times and managers, and wanted to know their rights.

A number of women were working flexibly regardless of the flexible working request. It appears that 'local', less official arrangements between employers and employees may be more effective than use of flexible working legislation. Less formal opportunities to work flexibly have emerged from general trends towards flexibility across workplaces.

I asked them [company] to change my hours and they did oblige. You see the employer before, might not have been that flexible. But they had good policies in place and they were/are a big company and could help my working hours.

Denise 39, outreach worker

➤ **Limitations**

Two main limitations that have been identified so far, firstly the importance of a family friendly environment for women to give a sense of entitlement, and secondly the ineffectiveness of the legislation. It is important that the work place is family friendly for women to feel they are able to request more flexible working arrangements. Some women made the point that if the Flexible Working Request was not already available through their employer, they would be unlikely to go through official legislative channels to request it.

**Question: If your work place wasn't family friendly would you ask to work flexibly?**

I'd probably not dare ask for it.

Aileen 41. IT/ business outsourcing management consultant

➤ **Ineffectiveness of legislation**

The view was expressed that the legislation was ineffectual, given that employers merely had a duty to consider requests and workers could be refused.

What they're trying to say is 'look there's a minimum standard to be had here'...And if you're just going to go through the motions of 'thanks very much 'Penny Smith', thanks for coming to see us. We've thought about your request and actually no we can't because we can't'.

Katrina 38, credit policy manager

The legislation is a move in the right direction; however, given its lack of 'teeth', in isolation, and without backing from employers, it may do little to help employees and employers alter working practices and reconcile work and care.

I think the fact that you're highlighting it and the fact that it's possible. But they need a lot more education and support to the employer to say that it is ok, you can do it. You know it's all very well coming out with ideas but if you haven't followed it up with the backup.

Aileen 41, management consultant

Clearly, changes to working practices are not always possible in practical terms; however, employers and managers may often be hostile to family-friendly policies because they deviate from familiar and standardised working practices rather than because they are unfeasible.

## 2.4 TAX CREDITS

### TAX CREDITS AND CHILD VOUCHERS

Help with childcare is available through the tax credits system, employees can claim up to 70% of their childcare costs (WTC5), but this is dependent upon income and with no consideration of the variability of the cost of childcare in different parts of the country. From 6 April 2005, new childcare tax rules were introduced to help employees with their childcare costs. The new system enables employees to buy childcare vouchers from employers based on their gross income and worth up to £50 per week. This means that employees' income tax will be calculated on their income after vouchers have been purchased and therefore childcare costs become partially tax deductible (IR115) which was an issue mentioned by several of the women interviewed. However, employees on lower incomes are unlikely to benefit as purchasing the vouchers may reduce tax credits received (Inman, 2005). The new system is likely to advantage employees on higher incomes; however, given the cost of private childcare, middle-income employees may not benefit in any significant way.

There were two broad themes that emerged from discussions of tax credits:

- Potential for those on low income.
- Failure to accommodate differing circumstances of women.

The experiences of Emily, a lone parent, highlight that child tax credit (formerly working families tax credit) does provide financial incentives to help those on fairly low incomes to stay in the labour market.

#### ***Meeting potential for women on low income***

I'm satisfied because if it wasn't for the fact that child tax credit and working tax credit were paid to me, I certainly couldn't work, I would be stuck on income support. There's no way, I mean I went back to work when my youngest child was 6 months old. I went to work part time. I was a lone parent and I went to work part time, I did 21 hours a week then because they were in nursery but I couldn't have done it if I hadn't had got the working family tax credit because that bumped my income up and it paid for a lot of the childcare.

Emily 35, civil servant

A significant number of women interviewed were ineligible because their salaries or combined salaries with partners meant that they earned too much to qualify. Others, who did qualify, received only minimum entitlements, as payments do not vary for those earning between £20,000 and £52,000 (Inland Revenue, 2004).

Some women living in London and the Southeast were dissatisfied with their lack of entitlements, as they felt that although they earned reasonable salaries, their mortgages were likely to be higher due to living in a region where the cost of living was high. In addition, they also talked about their childcare costs. Therefore, although on paper they appeared to be affluent, living in London and the Southeast meant that they struggled financially and it was felt that the tax benefits system did not consider such factors.

***Failure to accommodate differing circumstances***

I don't know. To be honest I get a little bit fed up with this, all you hear is we are helping working families with childcare. I mean I have just finished nursery fees - £350 a month. And I got £36 a month on that working tax credit. They make out they are giving you all this money towards childcare but they are not. And I know OK perhaps it does help with people on a lower income, but we are not on a massive amount. And when you don't claim anything else, you can afford to pay your mortgage all the rest of it. I don't think there is enough. Paula 40, IT technician

## **2.5 CHILDCARE PROVISION**

The strongest views on government policy were expressed with regards to childcare provision. Most childcare provision is accessed through the private sector, and where women had used state provision such as nursery places for three and four-year olds, this was viewed as inadequate. Again, grievances relating to childcare are likely to relate to women's financial circumstances. Most women were on reasonably high salaries and household income. However, some felt that the cost of mortgages and childcare meant that they had little left from their wages.

Childcare is expensive generally, and since 2003 has increased three and a quarter times above the rate of inflation, with costs higher in London and the Southeast. Furthermore, within this sample, professional women living in London and the Southeast were more likely to have relocated from elsewhere in the country and were therefore less likely to have access to informal support from relatives such as grandparents. Consequently, more 'geographically mobile' families are more likely to rely on 'market care' (see also Yeandle *et al.* 2002; Reynolds, *et. al.* 2003) in the parts of the country where it is most costly.

**Table 3 The average cost of childcare**

	Full-time nursery place in England	Full-time nursery place in London & Southeast	Childminder in England
<b>Weekly</b>	£141	£197	£127
<b>Annually</b>	£7300	> £10,000	£6600

**Source: Daycare Trust 2005 Childcare Costs Survey**

➤ **Informal support**

Some women did have informal support in terms of grandparents and other family members to help out with looking after children whilst they were at work. However, the point was made that informal support such as this should not be taken-for-granted, as many parents do not enjoy this type of support. At the same time, other writers have argued that informal care by family and friends within the community, where possible, is the preferred mode of childcare (Dex, 2003).

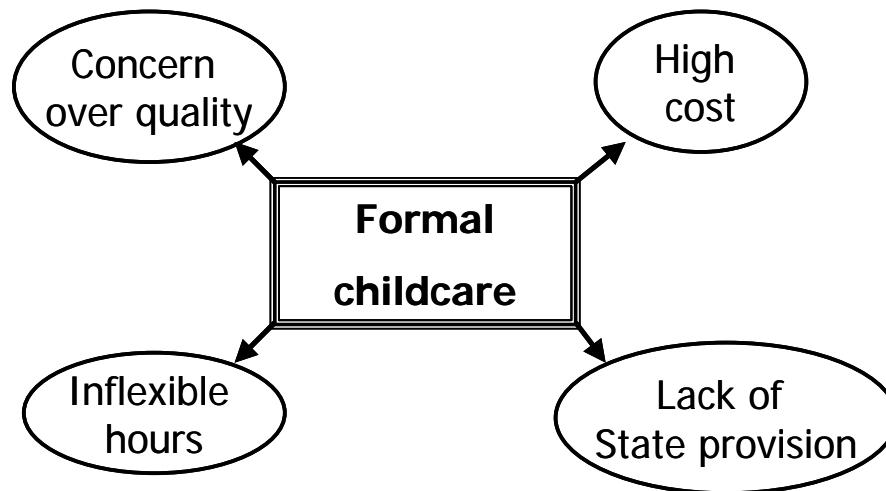
You know I do appreciate that I am lucky in that respect. But you know I know too many people who don't have any support and have to pay for childcare and therefore are either working part-time in jobs they are not enjoying or are not working at all.

Janet 33, area manager (sheltered housing project)

➤ **Formal provision**

There were a number of concerns raised about formal childcare provision that impact on women's work life balance (Diagram 3). These issues will be explored in more depth in the final report.

Diagram 3



➤ **Cost and quality**

Women who relied on formal provision were mainly dissatisfied with the cost of childcare. Some suggested that it should be tax deductible.

Well I think it would be good also if you got help with childcare. Childcare, it's a shock to everyone that I know - how much they have got to pay on childcare. Unless you are quite well paid, it becomes not worth it and that can't be good public policy.

Marianne 38, lawyer

The difficulties in accessing good quality and convenient childcare were also discussed.

I think childcare is something that is very patchy in Britain isn't it? Compared to other countries. Say France where they have very good local nurseries and everybody puts their child into a nursery - especially for younger children. We did find a very good nursery in the end, but expensive for three children - it costs a lot. It is the luck of draw to find something suitable. Genevieve 43, managing editor

➤ **Inflexibility**

Other women talked about the inflexibility of private nurseries and the charges incurred for being late picking children up.

Because it closes and you're still in a meeting somewhere. Because don't forget you're in a meeting at the other end of the borough, in rush hour even if you finish at five, you might not get there for six and that's when the nursery closes. And it is really stressful, and you're like nearly crashing trying to get from one end of the borough to the other. And it's just hard. Stella 42, manager of community programme

➤ **Lack of State provision**

State nursery provision and subsidies were also criticised as insubstantial.

And also we had nursery vouchers. They made a big thing about free nursery places for 4 year olds, but you try and find them and they are not there. Or if you go to a state nursery, they are only there half 9 till half 11. Who can work that? Paula 40. IT technician

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **EXPLORING WORK-LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES**

#### **3.1 DEFINING WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Defining work-life balance is problematic with literature focusing on policy in the workplace (Hogarth *et al.* 2000; Dex and Smith, 2002; LFS, 2003; Dti, 2004), rather than on how individuals experience work-life balance. It is clear that it is not straightforward in terms of definition (Guest, 2001) and is highly subjective (Nippert-Eng, 1996; Crosbie and Moore, 2004).

The attainment of work-life reconciliation should not be viewed as a fixed experience, but as a set of practices which may fluctuate on a daily, weekly or more long-term basis due to employees' changing circumstances (McKie *et al.*, 2002). This was evident during interviews: women discuss experiences that demonstrate the ambivalence of work-life balance and highlight it as an ongoing process rather than as a conclusive aspect of lived experience. Nevertheless, there were some optimistic examples of women who appeared to be managing work and care effectively – by their own explicit admission and also more implicitly from accounts they gave of childcare arrangements, daily routines etc.

#### **3.2 THE PART-TIME STRATEGY**

The main strategy employed to manage dual roles is for women to work part-time (Purcell *et al.*, 1999; Hakim, 2000; Crompton, 2002). For instance, more than two fifths of women (42%) and over two thirds (69%) of women with children under five work part-time (WEU, 2004). In dual earner families, women's part-time employment will generally supplement men's full-time salary (Smith, Fagan and Rubery, 1998; Beechey and Perkins, 1987), in a modified male breadwinner model (Crompton, 2002). Seven of the women interviewed were working part-time<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> The European Framework Agreement on part-time work defines a 'part-time worker' as an employee who works less hours than someone defined as a full-time employee. However, there were women within this sample who worked less hours in comparative terms but viewed themselves as full-time employees. Defining what constitutes part-time work can be problematic and can vary when this is based on number of hours worked. This study adopts the Eurostat (2005) definition, which categorises full-time working as 30 hours or more.

- **Positive Aspects**

For some women reduced hours appeared to help them achieve a work-life balance, practically and emotionally.

- **Emotional Reconciliation**

Because I have done the right thing by my children. And working the hours I do, I pick them up after school - they don't know what I do during the day so that's fine.

Jane 47, HR manager for government agency

- **Domestic Organisation**

Jane further highlights how working less hours makes general domestic organisation more straightforward and provides the opportunity to spend time with children.

I did a four day week and that gave me the opportunity to spend a bit more time with her and also able to cope with the domestics.... So you know there's such a shift in how you manage your time between working full-time and less than full-time.

Jane 47, HR manager for government agency

The following quote highlights part-time work as an effective strategy for achieving work-life balance:

I like the job I am doing. It fits in well with my home life. And I think I have a good work-life balance to be honest...It's brilliant, it could be a lot harder and I am very aware that we have a good balance and between us, I think we manage it quite well.

Lily 34, IT programmer works 25 hours

- **Problems with the part time strategy**

The data also show that part-time hours do not necessarily lead to work-life balance.

- **Domestic responsibilities**

Women working part-time work also do the bulk of domestic work (Hochschild, 1989; Sullivan, 1997, 2000). Furthermore, balancing the two spheres may be more demanding than focusing on paid work.

Yeah, I sort it all out. I do all the organising. She wouldn't be dressed or eat [sic] if I wasn't around. I'm sure they would be alright if I got run over by a bus tomorrow, they would manage quite well. But he wouldn't know what day she goes where. I do do a timetable for summer and he has a copy and we have one stuck on the kitchen wall and I know that is really sad! He has a crap memory. So really I am in charge. He does the shopping because he cooks, but we do do joint shopping as I have to get all the baby stuff and things like that. But I think a little part of that is that the other two kids are his and we have to split that kind of responsibility up a bit otherwise as I couldn't manage it all. So he does take on a little bit more responsibility for the other two. Although I still do quite a bit of the organisation for them, in terms of reminding him what contact they've got with their mum, I remember what days they go there and organising their social life. I am the calendar organiser, with my big timetable for summer with all the coding.

Wendy 38, projects co-ordinator

All of the women working part-time took on the majority of responsibility for childcare and other domestic jobs, receiving minimal help from partners. Part-time hours were often enough to manage dual roles, but other factors may also affect how this is managed.

➤ **Workplace Culture**

Part-time work may not be accepted amongst colleagues and managers and can conflict with the work-intense and long hours culture evident within organisations governed by informal masculine cultures.

There isn't, I don't think an acceptance of part-time working being as credible in a professional setting...It is a male environment, so it's going about saying 'come on have lunch with me, have a beer, I'm so amazing, employ me because I'm'. So the whole thing is very demanding, so from the minute you get into work till the end it's full on, very, you've got people going 'have you done this? What about? Come to this thing, oh tomorrow can you just go and talk to 50 people about this?' And it's like 'aahhh'.

Ailsa 32, lawyer

### ➤ Working Hours

Other women talked about the stress of having to cram the same amount of work into reduced hours and also about being 'on call' during their days off.

When I didn't work on a Friday they'd still ring me to ask questions that I think could have waited and I think they make you have a certain amount of guilt because you are not there.

Paula 40, IT technician

Yeah I got calls on Thursdays and Fridays. You know it just all became quite stressful.

Diana 30, producer

### ➤ Problems with Working from Home

Home working was more readily available to management level women working in the private sector and appeared to be a means of managing long hours working and avoiding unnecessary hours travelling. However, one woman who worked from home in an administrative role was contracted for 21 hours per week, but frequently worked up to 50 hours because her employer had underestimated the workload for her role. This reflects the problems with home working. Although working from home provides flexibility and convenience, it also leads to problems of managing the boundaries and transitions between work and family spaces (Sullivan, 2000; Crosbie and Moore, 2004).

## 3.3 WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND WORKING FULL-TIME

### • Enabling Factors

There were examples of women working full time and managing their work life balance successfully and achieving progression in the workplace. However, a number of strategies were significant in order for this to be achieved. Women working full-time utilised a variety of childcare provision and support, and the way they coped with work and care in various ways. Some women working full-time coped more effectively than those working part-time, if they received sufficient support.

➤ **Informal support**

Janet was a lone parent who received no support from her former partner. She was able to work long and relatively inflexible hours because of the informal help she got from her parents, who filled in the time before and after school whilst Janet was still at work.

My dad collects [son] from my house perhaps about quarter past 7 in the morning, takes him to their house, where my mum gives him breakfast and then she walks him to school. Cos he goes to school near their house and then she will pick him up after school and take him back to her house and depending on what day it is I either meet them somewhere like we've met at Sainsbury's so we could go for a guitar lesson, or they bring him home here for about 6 o'clock.

Janet was an area manager in the voluntary sector with ambitions to progress further within her organisation. The informal support she received enabled her to progress as well as participate within the labour market.

➤ **Formal Childcare Support**

Other women also used 'bought in' help, using nannies and au pairs. Such help reconciles the conflicting pressures of work and family by being readily available within the home to look after children:

We are fortunate that we can throw money at it, and we have a great nanny so they are at home after school, they are not farmed out to nurseries and things. And that does make a huge difference.

Elaine 38, senior manager - IT/business consultancy outsourcing

Katrina's experiences highlight how flexible full-time working arrangements enable participation, progression and work-life balance.

Thinking about it in terms of the flexibility that I've got with work - just the fact that I can do the things that I want to do. I feel I've got the best of both worlds. If I didn't have that flexibility, then I would think about going part-time.

Katrina 38, credit policy manager

In addition, for Katrina, the equal division of domestic and care responsibilities between herself and her husband, and the use of a childminder, appears to be an effective strategy for achieving work-life balance.

There is just no way I could've done it without [husband]. Because he, I mean I take [daughter] even now to the childminders in the morning and [husband] picks her up in the evening. So if I need to stay later I can do and that works really well. It means we have breakfast together in the morning, various hairstyles and all that bother

And then in the evenings, she comes home and [husband] and her have dinner together and I come in and she's going to bed so we spend some time together and I see a bit of her in the morning. So it's not perfect but it works for us.

➤ **Positive work place culture**

Some women attributed their ability to reconcile their work and family responsibilities to supportive managers or the attitudes of the teams that they worked in.

There's a boss who's a partner and then there's three associates who are all roughly at the same level, then there's three solicitors who are below us. It's a very nice happy little team - very young team. I've been really fortunate. Even the partner's only my age and he's a bloke but they've all got vibrant young kids. So there's been quite a high level of understanding within my team of the pressures of having a family and working parent commitments...When I was pregnant I was working in our London office four days a week, living up here but staying in London on the days I was working. And there has been a recognition that I can't do that now. So because of the level I'm at, you do have a say to some extent, in what work I take on and which projects I get involved with, and we're trying to make sure that I'm only involved in projects that mean I can go home every night.

Ailsa 32, lawyer

### 3.4 NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF FULL TIME WORK

Just as the above examples highlight factors that help achieve work-life balance, the following experiences show how their absence may be problematic for the reconciliation of work and care. A number of women noted that they were having difficulty combining the dual roles of work and being a mother and felt that this was having an impact on their quality of life

Work is all I do, and sort the children out.

{Question}And how do you feel about that?

I've actually felt well these past couple of weeks. But in the past I've felt really drained and I've put on weight. Just not getting structure in your life really.

Aileen 41, consultant - financial, accounting, IT outsourcing.

Aileen and her husband worked full-time and used a childminder to pick up children from school. Although childcare was shared, her husband was required to work abroad for several months at a time and she took the majority of responsibility for organising childcare. In further comments, she explicitly identifies reduced hours as a solution to her work-life balance; however, she expressed the view that this was not acceptable within her current role.

I wish we could both work less hours. It's very tiring. Sometimes you just feel like it's one lifelong struggle and you only sit down to say hello to each other on a Saturday night because we're alternating. In the week you don't get that much time.

Aileen 41, consultant - financial, accounting, IT outsourcing.

#### ➤ Long Hours Culture

There were some particularly extreme examples from the data which highlight how current organisational cultures place excessive time and work pressures on employees and do not consider individuals' lives outside of the workplace.

I worked there every night until about eleven, twelve, and sometimes two, three o'clock in the morning. If I got home at 9pm, I would have considered it early... There is no way I could do it. There is no way I could do it with [daughter].

Megan 35, events organiser

➤ **Travel**

Some companies placed demands upon employees to travel extensively, creating additional difficulties:

I have the added, the added sort of pressure that I am suppose to travel with my job. I am supposed to, you know whenever I need to be somewhere I need to travel and the company expect it. I am supposed to travel. And so well I have agreed with my company, which is actually quite nice of them, is I have to drive my son all the way up to Liverpool, drop him off at my parents drive to Manchester. If I am going somewhere where there isn't a direct flight from Manchester I fly to London, pick up the connection, fly where I am going, fly back to London, fly back up to Manchester pick my son up get a hire car drive home, and go to work the next day.

Michelle 33, product design engineer

➤ **Domestic Responsibility**

Consistent with previous research (Hochschild, 1989), even where partners had similar working hours, there was evidence that women would take more responsibility for the domestic sphere.

I am thinking about my sister who does 100% of the housework and childcare and doesn't even mind, whereas I would mind. Whereas [husband] does what he does but is very conscious of it and he will remind me. He doesn't begrudge it, but he will make sure I do my bit as well.

Marianne 38, lawyer

When women were the main breadwinners and men took on a larger share of care and domestic tasks, there was evidence of tensions and conflicts concerning women's relationship to childcare and domestic responsibilities.

Because there is a lot of tension. If I am late home from work and [husband] has been at home during the day. From 4pm when the children come home, to 6.30 pm, he gets completely and utterly knackered. He has been up since 6.30am, so it's been a long day by then. And sometimes there is a lot of tension between us when I get home. Because he is tired and grumpy and he wants me to take over and look after the kids. So none of that is easy - you know the transition.

Genevieve 47, managing editor/producer

➤ **Lone parents – extra stresses**

The stresses and conflicts of working and childcare are more extreme if women are divorced or separated from partners - highlighting how policies aimed at helping working parents need to consider the greater needs of sole carer families. Support from former partners varied, but most lone mothers interviewed felt that childcare was primarily their responsibility and that they could not rely on former partners for any tangible help. However, experiences were variable according to levels of informal support. If such support was available, then lone parents appeared to cope more effectively than some partnered women. Whereas two parents can divide pick-ups and drop-offs and take advantage of flexible working, lone parents have to work within standard hours more rigidly in order to be compatible with nursery or school hours.

➤ **Inflexibility of Nursery and School Hours**

There is a disjuncture between working hours and school and nursery hours. For some women the solution to this was to employ paid help, au pairs and nannies.

I mean the reason we got an au pair in the first place was because suddenly the kids were going to school and school ends at half past 3. My job ends at half past 5, school begins at 5 to 9 and I have to be at work at 9 or whatever and the 2 just don't tally and unless you live next door to people, you've got very good friends you can dump on everyday.

Kim 41, trainee primary school teacher

➤ **Limitations of Formal Support**

Paid help obfuscates the unreasonable demands on the time and space placed upon employees. However, it is not a general solution to this issue, as most families cannot afford to purchase individual paid help within the home. If families reconcile these issues individually, this detracts responsibility from employers to provide more favourable and accommodating working conditions.

➤ **Emotional Reconciliation**

Even where women achieve work-life balance in practical terms, this may not necessarily lead to emotional reconciliation. For some women, performing dual roles and negotiating transitions between the two appeared to be problematic.

I think you need a huge amount of strength to carve out the boundaries between work and home and to get both things working quite well. I feel guilty about the kids when I am at work and I feel guilty about my work when I am at home.

Genevieve 47, managing editor/producer

I will go through periods where I beat myself up big time where I think I'm the most horrendous parent and get really down. Generally though, I have a balance but I can lose the plot at home every now and then. Like for example if I forget something my daughter told me the week before - it can make me feel inadequate, but I think a lot of working mums go through that.

Denise 39, outreach worker

Judith's preference to care for her daughter herself is less ambivalent. She wants to be at home, but is prevented from doing so for financial reasons. Judith worked 30 hours on a fairly flexible basis in a small team of women. She also received good informal support from her sister and sister-in-law. Despite this, she also had difficulties reconciling work and care because of her strong caring preferences.

I enjoy the job I am doing in the sense you've got to be doing something you like to do. Because I would much rather be at home looking after my little girl than sending her off for someone else to look after. And I think there is a lot of guilt around it as well - you do feel guilty going to work. I leave late in the morning, my partner takes my daughter to my sister-in-law's, and some mornings she has little tears in her eyes as I'm waving her off and I think 'Oh God, I have to go to work and leave you'. And I know she's alright when she gets there, but it's just that you do feel guilty. Have I had a child to give her away to somebody else and get them to look after them?

Judith 38, project co-ordinator (voluntary sector)

## WORK, CARE & POLICY

There is a lack of value and consideration afforded to caring activities both generally and in policy terms. For instance, Ball notes that 'how mothers *feel about* caring for children has been given insufficient attention in current childcare and gender equality policies' (Ball, 2004:19).

Duncan et al. (2003) claim that the replacement of the 'male breadwinner model' with the 'adult worker model' has resulted in misconceptions and inaccurate policy assumptions regarding individuals' orientations to work, where it is assumed that individuals' main preference is towards paid work. The persistence of the 'male breadwinner model' in shaping work and caring experiences is misunderstood within policy, where the fact that many people feel they should care and more significantly 'often wish to do so' is overlooked. This is largely due to the way that New Labour's citizenship discourses promote the notion of mutual obligations and responsibilities between the state and worker that are realised 'predominantly through engagement in the labour market' (Rake, 2002: 211).

Others have observed that care must become a more valued activity in both social and economic terms (Fraser, 1994; Land, 1999; Lewis, 2001; Williams, 2001; Hantrais, 2004). This is firstly in recognition that it is an activity which women have historically done, continue to do, and continue to want to do (Duncan *et al.* 2002). Secondly, if care were recognised and rewarded, men would be more likely to become involved in it (McKie et al., 2001; Fraser, 1994). Reframing care and reformulating gender roles would go some way to addressing work-life balance in emotional terms. For instance, making care a visible concern to be taken on board by organisations would result in a more general acceptance of reduced working hours and extended leave periods in order to fulfil caring responsibilities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CARE AND CAREER PROGRESSION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

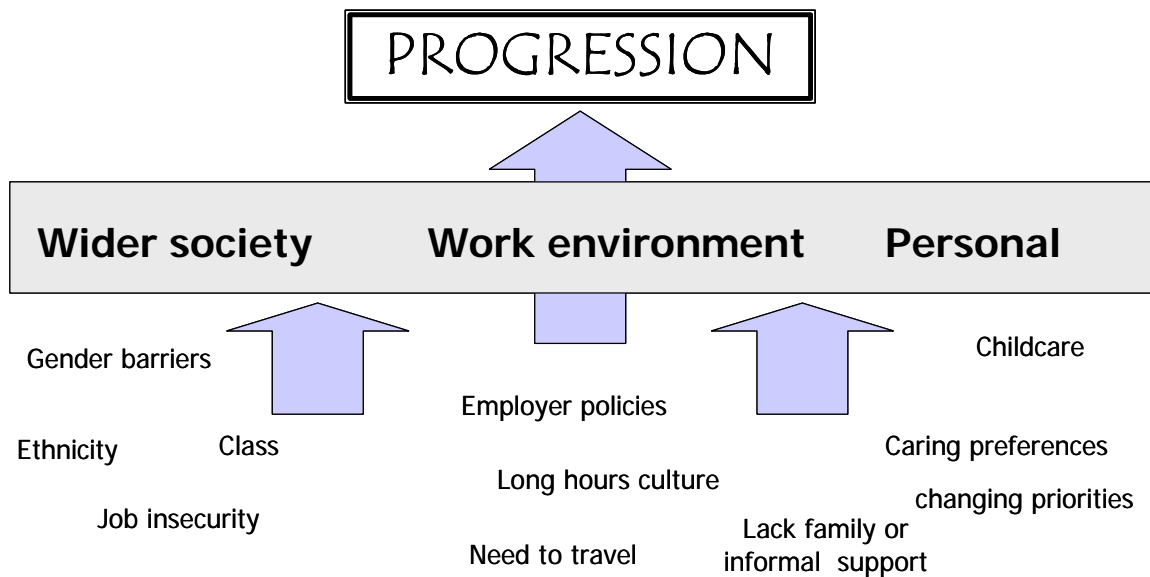
Gendered labour market inequality occurs as a result of the type of jobs women do and their lack of occupational progression. Women are clustered in a more limited number of occupations than men, which are more likely to be lower paid and lower status (Walby and Olsen, 2002). Organisational cultures perpetuate inequality because of women's positioning within a context defined as masculine and governed by masculine norms. As a result, they are considered out of place and are subject to both explicit and implicit discrimination which hinders career progression (Davidson and Cooper, 1994; Halford and Savage, 1995; EOC, 2001; Walby and Olsen, 2002). However, it has been argued that 'institutional discrimination' (Davey *et al.* 2005) - the failure of workplaces to accommodate the caring role - is now more significant than cultural discrimination such as the glass ceiling (Crompton *et al.* 2002).

Ideological and material factors encourage women to take on the bulk of caring responsibilities and to integrate care around work at the expense of progression (Crompton and Harris, 1998). Work cultures based on masculine norms ignore the impact of caring responsibilities (Hogarth *et al.*, 2000; Rake, 2001; EOC, 1999). Some women's occupational mobility is hindered because fragmented career paths caused by taking time out to care for children are not conducive to career progression (Handy, 1993; Ginn and Arber, 1998; Joshi, 2002).

Professional, qualified women dominate this research sample, therefore most women had achieved a reasonable level of progression and were fairly well paid. Of the 21 women interviewed, 9 were working at various levels of management. Of those women not in management positions, the majority were employed in fairly well paid, professional occupations.

## 4.2 BARRIERS TO PROGRESSION

Diagram 1 Barriers to progression



The barriers that women face in terms of paid work and employment progression represents a complex biography of experiences rooted in various aspects of identity and labour market patterns. In this way, women may encounter disadvantage related to class and ethnicity, for example, prior to experiencing the detrimental effects of having children. In addition, women's experiences also reflect the impact of wider factors upon employment such as redundancy, recession and organisational inadequacies inherent to particular occupations.

An additional issue which needs to be considered is the relative nature of progression. For instance, this sample comprises a large number of professional, qualified women earning substantial salaries. Some women had progressed to management level, but some had chosen to work fewer hours – essentially opting for the 'mommy-track'. Crompton and Harris (1998) define these as 'domestic life first' - women who to some degree maintain careers but prioritise their caring responsibilities. The extent to which such women provide positive examples of progression is complex:

- They have not achieved the potential which their professional and qualified status could grant them; however, they may be earning more and be at higher levels than other women who have not relinquished progression and their ambitions.
- To frame their decision to halt progression in such negative terms subscribes to discourses that devalue the role of unpaid care both socially and economically.
- The meaning of progression is clearly problematic and requires some attention.

### ➤ **Employer Policies**

There were some explicit and extreme examples within the data where employers' policies and workplace cultures were problematic for work-life balance and had acted as significant barriers to progression.

Women talked about part-time work being unavailable at higher levels within organisations. Others had resigned themselves to working full-time in order to progress, whilst other examples show women staying at lower levels because reduced hours were not available:

Yes. I don't think you can. When you go to the next level you are not on flexi time, so you are expected to put the hours in, and they expect more commitment of you, and I just can't do it. I can't give them that. Some people can, but I can't do it.

Paula 40, IT technician

My role that I'm doing now is not being offered as a part-time role and I was not offered a part-time role. Simply because there's such a demand for consultants and there's so much work to do they can't afford to have that many. It's very hard to get people who are experienced, who have done the work, who are trained and who can consult. So it's very hard to get those 3 different levels.

Aileen 41, Consultant in IT/business outsourcing

### ➤ **Long Hours Culture**

Women talked about having to leave more highly paid and higher status jobs because reduced hours were not available or because long hours cultures made combining work with caring responsibilities virtually impossible.

They accommodated me in January part-time but only until April and then they said they weren't able to offer any part-time contract. So I had to go back full-time or leave. So I had to leave. So I looked for another job and got the one I have now.

Wendy 38. Community worker.

Megan had to give up a job she loved, with considerable opportunities for progression, because of demanding hours that often required her to work till the early hours in the morning.

Question: If you hadn't have had your [daughter] would you have stayed?

Yeah definitely.

{Interviewer } Because of the security?

Yeah and it was just a great job. I was involved in brand product development, this place was an amazing job, just an incredible job.

As a result, she had resigned herself to changing her career because of the demands within her industry which she felt was dominated by masculine norms and values relating working hours and the family.

I have just struggled with it so much in the past, so now I think look I am not going to beat the system so therefore I am going to have to change my whole career basically...I am angry at the fact that I can't do my job well, or earn the top of my salary

#### ➤ Travel

Another factor that may hinder progression is employees' inability to travel once they have children. Michelle recognises that her career has been halted because she could no longer travel and work at the same level of intensity after she had a child.

I have progressed. I started as a technologist and then that changed to a researcher, then that went to senior researcher, and now I am a principal researcher.

{Question} Is that a fairly typical progression pattern?

Yes I think it was. Errr I think I will probably stay still now.

{Question} Is that because you have had your son and can't put the hours in?

Yeah, absolutely, and I can't do the travel or I can do it very limited.

Michelle 33, product design engineer

- **Childcare**

Accounts revealed the nature of barriers that women faced and the ways in which progression was hindered as a result of childcare responsibilities. The women within this sample had children of varying ages and as a result some women with older children provided more retrospective accounts of their work-care histories and the difficulties they faced. Generally, in terms of external barriers – practical factors relating to support, employers, childcare provision – the most explicit difficulties related to inflexible and unaccommodating employers. However, some women’s accounts highlight how other factors interact and shape work and care decisions and progression.

- **Affordability and availability of childcare**

When I became pregnant with my second child I decided I couldn't carry on. I couldn't afford to have two children in nursery and commute to London...I would have had some money left after paying for my nursery fees and my train fare. But I would have been working for £50 a week. It wasn't worth it. It was a wrench to give up because I feared I would never get another professional job again.

Jane 47. Human Resources Manager

- **Lack of Informal Support**

The following extract also illustrates the value of informal support and the problems which women encounter negotiating work and school hours.

When I had my first daughter I was always lucky as I had strong supportive family. I worked full-time then and it was great until she started school and then I just couldn't cope. My family lived further away then and it was really difficult. It got to the point where I was that stressed working around 9 and 3 - you know school times, that I went to my employer and asked them to reduce my working hours, which they did to 10 til 2.

Denise 39. Outreach worker

### ➤ Lone parents

Issues facing lone parents may be particularly acute, where a lack of support and the workings of the benefit system may disadvantage some women or result in them withdrawing from the labour market completely.

I think when they bring out the legislation they do tend to forget that there are a number of single parents who only have one wage to rely on....erm...and again something needs to be built in because immediately you're disadvantaged by again not having that second income...I know they've got the New Deal, Lone Parents Back Into Work, but I really don't think they've put enough into it.

Janet 33, housing associaiton

### • Caring Preferences

Hakim (1996, 1998, 2000) frames the issue of care in voluntaristic terms where women have the choice of whether or not to prioritise careers or families. However, this position has been criticised because it fails to recognise that often the 'choices' women have are limited due to external factors (Crompton and Harris, 1998); women may want to prioritise careers but this is made difficult because of employers' policies, lack of support from partners etc. As Himmelweit argues 'both personal attitudes and financial or other circumstances play a significant role in mothers' accounts of their own decisions, leaving it as a main point whether they are best described as 'choices' (2003:3).

However, some women took caring as a given, describing their mothering role as 'non-negotiable' and the prioritisation of care as inevitable.

Before you have children you can give yourself to work on a much deeper level than you can when you have children. When you have children you can't, well you can but your children suffer because you don't have a relationship with them.....because you don't want to leave the child. I didn't want to leave him. Full time at the age of two, because when would I see him? I wouldn't see him really except evenings and weekends, and I knew people that were doing it and I didn't want to do it.

Rebecca 43, administrator (homeworker)

For others, tensions were apparent between their ambitions, maintaining occupational status and preferences to care.

I always wanted them so I took that [working less hours and halting progression] as part of the deal. I did as much as I could before I had them. And then I accepted that that would be it. I have no regrets... I am tied, but as they get older, it should become more of an option. So what I have done is resigned myself to the next couple of years doing the school hours and getting them settled, and as they get bigger then I will just be the taxi service and I then I can go and do something else.

Paula 40, IT technician

I think it is impossible to have it all. And you make decisions and I could be in a much more senior position now if I hadn't done what I did. But I think I could have also have been in a situation where my life was quite polarised not having a family, not having a future to look forward to with family, grandchildren that sort of thing. It's about choice.

Jane 47, HR manager (public sector)

The above experiences highlight the interaction of constraints such as caring preferences and the failure of workplace cultures and childcare provision to enable progression for those with caring responsibilities:

- Firstly, women may have explicit career aspirations but workplace cultures render progression untenable.
- Secondly, women's decisions to forego progression may on the face of it appear as 'choice'; however, it is likely that given the opportunity to 'have it all' women would continue to pursue careers if they could combine this effectively with childcare by working reduced hours. If reduced hours were available at higher levels then work-life balance and progression could be combined.
- Thirdly, it is clear that some women do have strong caring preferences, either to work reduced hours or not work at all while children are young. However, there was still a recognition that women may be working below their abilities and qualifications.

### 4.3 FLEXIBLE WORKING AND PROGRESSION TO MANAGEMENT LEVEL

Women in management positions achieved progression via a number of means; the extent to which flexible working contributed to them maintaining occupational mobility was variable. However, it appeared that flexible working had been effective in helping some women to stay in full-time employment and to progress in their careers to management level:

And you know thinking about it in terms of the flexibility I've got with work, just the fact that I can do the things that I want to do. If I didn't have that flexibility, I would think about going part-time. What I would really like to do is to actually be heading up policy across the whole of UK consumer finance within the next 18 months. That's my sort of like 18 months to 2 year goal which I think will work. That's what I wanted and that's what looks like is gonna happen.

Katrina 38. Credit Policy Manager.

Women in management positions also mentioned that flexible start and finishing times were useful and made work and caring commitments more manageable. Several women had made the most significant progress prior to having children and did not demonstrate any real desire to progress further. This was both because they were just about managing their dual roles at present and possibly could not cope with further commitments and also because there was little room to move higher up because of the structure of their organisations.

### 4.4 PROBLEMATISING PROGRESSION

Much of the literature on women's career progression focuses on standard patterns of advancement within organisations and the barriers women face in attempting to progress to management level (Davidson and Cooper, 1992; Flanders, 1994; Halford and Leonard, 2001; Crompton *et al.* 2002; Broadbridge, 2004). Crompton *et al.* (2002) argue that, although somewhat overstated, changes in the way careers are developed as a result of new managerialism may be beneficial to women who are less likely to pursue conventional progression patterns due to caring commitments. A move away from framing progression in standard masculine terms may be required given individuals' commitments to care as well paid work. The rejection of conventional forms of progression, however, may not be feasible as it continues to be the way in which the majority of organisations operate.

#### 4.4.1 Less conventional patterns of progression

The data evidences examples of 'conventional' progression, but also more unconventional and 'feminised' employment trajectories that are influenced by care commitments and equally significantly by class. There were examples from this stage of analysis which illustrate 'classed' experiences, drawing attention to unconventional modes of progression whereby working-class women had successfully progressed into meaningful, well-paid employment.

After working as a cashier in a building society, Janet worked for a year in newspaper advertising; however, she had to leave due to the long hours culture which she found difficult with a young baby. She stopped working for two years and then did part-time work as a temp in banks and building societies, before starting work for a housing association in an administrative position. She then moved to a similar organisation as a project officer, completed an OU diploma and progressed to management level. Her experiences reflect unplanned progression which arose from an employment opportunity within a voluntary sector organisation, and which has resulted in Janet progressing to area management level within an organisation that specialises in providing sheltered housing and support for teenage mothers.

Yeah, this is a different one to where I am now and I applied for a project officer job cos it was full time but shifts, I thought that might fit ok and I got that and whilst I was doing my shifts there I did an OU diploma and from there I managed to get a managers job but in the company I'm with now and then get promoted so it wasn't a career plan.

{Interviewer: You've done really well though haven't you, you must be pleased.}

So yeah, the last couple of years I've done ok, from getting that break and finding something that I enjoyed and wanted to do I've managed to kind of progress through that field.

Janet 33, area manager for a housing association

Denise demonstrates similar employment patterns, whose cyclical nature is even more pronounced. After becoming the manager of a small building society in her mid- twenties, she left because of a lack of flexibility and went to work for a large organisation working part-time mainly in an administrative role and customer services. After eight years she was made redundant and spent 18 months out of the labour market. She then applied for a part-time administrative position with a housing association and progressed to the position of caseworker. She has been in her current position as an outreach worker consulting communities on NHS policy for a year.

I got made redundant and I made a conscious decision to have 3 months off and ended up having 18 months off. So when I eventually came back to the world of work, so I applied for the voluntary sector as the job was only 9 hours a week, which then escalated into more hours with [organisation], which is a housing association. I was there as a caseworker and that meant going out and meeting people-it was great!

Yes, British Gas was a major turning point as I got promoted and it was a kick in the teeth when I took redundancy. But in one way it was a good effect as it made me think what else was out there. It was probably the best thing that happened actually.

It's interesting dealing with the NHS and learning about the structures within that and dealing with the groups of people, and getting to know them.

Well it's just a learning curve isn't it? I do feel quite proud of myself though, as I saw opportunities and I just took them and worked really hard. Again my manager said that when I started she would have created a job for me because I am good at my job and have potential. But you're quite right ten years ago I would never have imagined what I'd be doing.

Denise 38, outreach worker

The research also shows that some women do not view paid work in economic terms. Rather they expressed views that focus more on the potential of work to enhance their lives and contribute to the well being of others.

I'm still ambitious in that I would go back to some sort of advocacy. And I feel like I achieved quite a lot in that position for people, but this job isn't about that in that sense. It is still about it in terms of enhancing the quality of life of children and young people by involving them in things for themselves and being more aware of their rights, which is great. But in terms of achieving and seeing end products and improving people's lives and having a really positive effect on life, the advocacy brought that, and the group of people that I worked with. Working with children with disabilities and special needs, and actually getting something good for them, is very rewarding. That is a personal reward, well hopefully making someone else's life a bit easier and a bit better.

Wendy 38, projects co-ordinator (voluntary sector)

The above experiences highlight several issues:

- Firstly, the way in which women's career patterns frequently deviate from the standard linear paths that characterise traditional male career paths, illustrating the less strategic and more spontaneous nature of women's employment progression.
- Secondly, such experiences demonstrate how women in relatively low-level jobs have progressed to relatively well-paid and worthwhile careers, which render them economically independent individuals (Lewis, 2001).
- Thirdly, women may have alternative value systems and view progression in wider terms of quality of life rather than purely economic value and status.

## CONCLUSION

This interim report presents initial findings from the project. It highlights that workplace flexibility is actually relatively widespread, although this varies at different levels and between sectors. There are examples from the data which show how flexible working arrangements can contribute to managing work and family effectively and also to facilitating employment progression. However, the data also highlights the conflicts between work and care; although women appeared to access fairly widespread flexibility, the extent to which this addressed work-life balance in any tangible way was highly variable. The data demonstrates evidence of such conflicts at all levels and modes of working and highlights how a variety of factors both inside and outside the workplace can affect work-life balance. Furthermore, even where practical measures such as flexibility and support networks were in place, reconciliation was not necessarily achieved in emotional terms.

These issues emphasise the need to frame work-life balance in wider terms than the implementation of flexi-time within workplaces and relates to embedded assumptions concerning gender, care and work, and the absence of adequate practical support from the state and employers.

Although in broad terms work-life balance can be defined in a straightforward way, exploring how and if individuals achieve a 'balance' between work and care is complex and contradictory. The report highlights work-life balance as a process rather than a fixed state, whereby individuals negotiate both balance and conflict as they manage dual roles. It draws attention to the relative nature of employment progression, as well as women's less linear career histories that are often shaped by class as well as care.

### Summary of Key Issues

- Solutions to the work-life balance issue can be viewed as falling into two broad categories – those addressing working practices and those which aim to improve care provision in order to enable parents to perform dual roles effectively.
- In the UK 'family policy has not become a legitimate and fully institutionalised policy domain' (Hantrais, 2004:161). For example, statutory leave is the weakest in Europe, there is no entitlement to publicly funded early years education and no statutory right to reduced working hours (Moss, 2001).
- State provision for childcare is patchy in the UK, and when women work full-time, childcare is generally provided by the private sector or informally.

- The National Childcare Strategy fails to deliver consistent services across the country because of its implementation at local level (Rake, 2001).
- Finding and paying for childcare is expensive and problematic.
- Inadequate childcare provision acts as a disincentive to both participation and progression<sup>3</sup>.
- Given that formal childcare provision has significant gaps (Moss, 2001; McKie *et al.*, 2001), the level of informal support women receive for childcare is a crucial factor shaping how they cope with dual roles.
- Women's awareness and engagement with family-friendly policies within their organisations appeared to be variable. Generally, women working for larger organisations within both the public and private sector identified more elements of policy and appeared to be clearer about what companies offered in terms of flexible working options and leave policies. Some women in management positions were more knowledgeable as they may have had to implement policy and organise flexible working requests.
- Evidence from the data highlights that full-time working hours are not necessarily the problem, rather it is the additional hours full-time employees are required to work, or additional pressures such as a lack of support outside of work which make combining dual roles problematic.
- Most women in the sample had negotiated flexible working hours informally rather than via legislative channels.
- Examples from the data highlight more 'unconventional' and 'unintended' career advancement shaped by care and also classed experiences. Such experiences highlight how progression is possible even when women have substantial care histories.
- Government needs to employ additional measures to promote efficacy - perhaps in terms of monitoring requests and their outcomes and promoting attitudinal change to alternative working arrangements.
- Parental leave has the potential to help working parents but needs to be bolstered in terms of general acceptance, awareness and payment.
- At present part-time work is a key factor affecting gender inequality in the labour market (Dex, 2003). If it became available at higher levels, it would become a means of addressing employment inequalities (Lewis and Lewis, 1996).

---

<sup>3</sup>Some of these issues are being addressed. For example, women with older children talked about how school hours were incompatible with their hours of work. This is recognised with the government's 10-year childcare strategy pledging to provide wrap-around school-based care for all 3-14 year-olds by 2010 (H.M. Treasury, 2004). However, focusing on childcare and providing wrap-around care, detracts attention from employers to provide working hours that enable employees to spend adequate and quality time looking after their own children.

- Evidence from the data highlights the potential of tax credit as an incentive for labour market participation; however, the system needs to recognise and accommodate adequately the variable needs of ‘middle-income’ families.
- Employers need to provide adequate flexibility to enable progression. For example, evidence from the data indicates how women’s progression is curtailed by flexible working practices not being available at higher levels.

### Barriers to Women’s Progression

- Employers policies
- Long hours culture
- Workplace culture
- Lack of support from partners;
- Lack of informal support from other relatives - most specifically grandparents;
- Affordability and availability of childcare provision.
- Caring preferences

### Factors facilitating progression



## **Issue for Further Research**

Although there is some debate over whether it has removed socio-economic disadvantage (see e.g. Plantenga, 2002), the Netherlands is often cited as a successful model of work-life balance policy and practice. The Dutch model, in which a move towards part-time flexible work as standard working practice, has been successful in supporting women's long term employment and progression. The project will examine whether the experience of the Netherlands therefore provides potential solutions to resolve issues around work-life balance and progression in the UK.

Further questions need to be asked about the nature of progression and the extent to which professional, qualified women's decisions to forego higher-level positions for the 'mommy-track' actually represent positive examples of progression.

The final report will seek to further unpack the meanings behind work-life balance and employment progression, emphasising the 'process' of work-life balance and the relative nature of career progression.

It will also examine in more depth the role of factors external to the workplace such as the domestic division of labour, informal support and women's own attitudes towards their caring role and will seek to emphasise the interconnectedness of the spheres of work and family.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Auer, M. (2002) 'The relationship between paid work and parenthood – a comparison of structures, concepts and developments in the UK and Austria', *Community, Work and Family*, 5 (2): 203-218.

Ambler, M., Armstrong, D. and Hawksworth, J. (2003) *Costs and Benefits of Universal Childcare: A Preliminary Analysis for the UK*. Facing the Future: Policy Papers. London: The Daycare Trust.

Ball, W. (2004) 'Promoting gender equality? Transforming childcare policies for mothers, fathers and children in Wales'. Paper presented to the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, International Conference on 'Work-Life Balance Across the Life Course', July 2004. University of Edinburgh.

Beechey, V. and Perkins, T. (1987) *A Matter of Hours: Women, Part-time Work and the Labour Market*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bond, S., Hyman, J., Summers, J and Wise S. (2002) *Family-Friendly Working? Putting Policy into Practice*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

Brannen, J., Lewis, S., Moss, P., Smithson, J. and McCarragher, L. (2001) *Workplace Change and Family Life*, Report on Two Case Studies, Work Life Research Centre.

Branine, M. (1999) 'Part-time work in the public health service of Denmark, France and the UK', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 10(3), 411-428.

Broadbridge, A (2004) 'Barriers in the career progression of retail managers', *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, 8 (1.):53-78.

Camp, C. (2004) *Right to Request Flexible Working: Review of the Impact in First Year of Legislation*. Report for the DTI, Working Families.

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2003) *Living to Work? Survey Report October 2003*. London: CIPD.

- Crompton, R. (2001) 'Gender restructuring, employment and caring', *Social Politics*, 8 (3): 266-291.
- Crompton, R. (2002) 'Employment, flexible working and the family'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 53 (4), 537-558.
- Crompton, R. and Harris, F. (1998) 'Explaining women's employment patterns: orientations to work revisited', *British Journal of Sociology*, 12 (2): 297-315.
- Crompton, R. and LeFeuvre, N. (2000) 'Gender, family and employment in comparative perspective: The realities and representations of equal opportunities in Britain and France', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 10 (4): 334-348.
- Crompton, R. and Birkelund, G. (2000) 'Employment and caring in British and Norwegian banking', *Work Employment and Society*, 14 (2): 331-52.
- Crompton, R. Dennet, J and Wigfield, A (2002) *Organisations, Careers and Caring*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Family and Work Series.
- Crosbie, T and Moore, J (2004) 'Work-life balance and working from home', *Social Policy and Society*, 3 (3): 223-233.
- Davey, B., Murrells, T. and Robinson, S. (2005) 'Returning to work after maternity leave: UK nurses' motivations and preferences', *Work, Employment and Society*, 19, (2): 327-349.
- Davidson, M. and Cooper, C. (1984) 'Women managers: Their problems and what can be done to help them', C. Cooper and M. Davidson (eds) *Women in Management: Career Development for Managerial Success*. London: Heinemann.
- Davidson, M. and Cooper, C. (1992) *Shattering the Glass Ceiling: The Woman Manager*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Daycare Trust (2005) *Childcare Costs Survey*.
- Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (2000a) *Survey of How Parents Balance Work, Family and Home*. London: DTI.
- Department of Trade and Industry (2000b) *Parental leave: A Guide for Employers and Employees*. London: DTI.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (2003a) *Flexible working: The right to request and the duty to consider – A guide for employers and employees*. London: DTI.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (2003b) *Balancing Work and Family Life*. London: DTI.

Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) (2004) *The Second Work-Life Balance Study: Results from the Employees' Survey*, Employment Relations Research Series, No 27. London: DTI.

Dex, S. (1987) *Women's Occupational Mobility: A Lifetime Perspective*. London: Macmillan.

Dex, S. (2003) *Families and Work in the Twentieth-First Century*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

Dex, S. and Bond, S. (2005) 'Measuring work-life balance and its covariates', *Work, Employment and Society*, 19 (3): 627-639.

Dex, S and Scheibl, F (2002) *SMEs and Flexible Working Arrangements*, Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

Dex, S. and Smith, C. (2002) *The Nature and Pattern of Family-Friendly Employment Policies in Britain*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

Duncan, A., Giles, C. and Webb, S. (1995) *The Impact of Subsidising Childcare*, Equal Opportunities Commission, Research Discussion Series No. 13. Institute for Fiscal Studies. London: EOC.

Duncan, S. (2002) 'Policy discourses on 'reconciling work and life' in the EU', *Social Policy and Society*, July 2002, 1 (4): 305-314.

Duncan, S., Edwards, R., Reynolds, T. and Alldred, P. (2003) 'Motherhood, paid work and partnering: values and theories', *Work, Employment and Society*, 17 (2): 309-330.

Equal Opportunities Commission (1999) *The work-life balance*, Women and Men in Britain, Research Briefing. Manchester: EOC.

Equal Opportunities Commission (2001) *The Gender Pay Gap: A Research Review*, Research Discussion Series. Manchester: EOC.

Equal Opportunities Commission (2003) *Statistics on reasons for working part-time*, findings from 2002 Labour Force Survey. Manchester: EOC.

Equal Opportunities Commission (2005) *Career Paths of Part-Time Workers*. Working Papers Series, No. 19. Manchester: EOC.

Eurostat (2002) *Labour Force Survey 2001*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Eurostat (2005) *Reconciling Work and Family Life in the EU25: Employment Rates lower and Part-Time Rates Higher for Women with Children*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Flanders, M. (1994) *Breakthrough: The Career Woman's Guide to Shattering the Glass Ceiling*. London: Paul Chapman.

Fraser, N. (1994) 'After the family wage: what do women want from social welfare?' *Social Justice*, 21 (1): 80-86.

Ginn, J and Arber, S (1998) How does part-time work lead to low pension income? O'Reilly, J. and Fagan, C (1998) (eds) *Part-time prospects – An International Comparison of Part-Time Work in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim*. London: Routledge.

Guerrina, R. (2002) 'Mothering in Europe: Feminist critique of European policies on motherhood and employment', *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 9 (1): 49-68.

Guest, D. (2001) 'Perspectives on the study of work-life balance', Discussion paper prepared for the 2001 ENOP Symposium, Paris, 29-31 March, <http://www.ucm.es/info/Psyap/enop/guest.htm>

Hakim, C. (1996) *Key Issues in Women's Work*. London: The Athlone Press Ltd.

Hakim, C. (1998) 'Developing a sociology for the Twenty-First Century: Preference Theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, 49, (1): 137-143.

Hakim, C. (2000) *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Preference Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Halford, S. and Leonard, P. (2001) *Gender, Power and Organisations*. London: MacMillan.
- Halford, S. and Savage, M. (1995) 'Restructuring organisations, changing people: Gender and restructuring in banking and local government', *Work, Employment and Society*, 9 (1):97-122.
- Handy, C. (1994) *The Empty Raincoat*. London: Hutchinson.
- Handy, C. (1993) 'Flexing, chunking and changing', *Director*, 46 (7):19-20.
- Hantrais, L. (2004) *Family Policy Matters*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Himmelweit, S. and Sigala, M. (2003) 'Internal and external constraints on mothers' employment: Some implications for policy', *Working Paper no. 27. ESRC Future of Work Programme*.
- Hochschild, A. (1989) *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A. (1997) *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- H.M. Treasury, (2004) *Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: A Ten Year Strategy for Childcare*. HMSO.
- Hogarth, T., Hasluck, C., Pierre, G., Winterbotham, M. and Vivian, D. (2000) *Work-Life Balance 2000: Baseline study of Work-Life Balance Practices in Great Britain*. Warwick: Institute for Employment Research & IFF Research.
- Howard, M. (2004) *Tax Credits: One Year On*. Child Poverty Action Group Report.
- Inland Revenue (2004) *Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit: An Introduction*.
- Inman, P. (2005) 'Beware the childcare voucher', *The Guardian*, April 16, 2005.
- Jenkins, S. (2004) 'Restructuring flexibility: Case studies of part-time female workers in six workplaces', *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 11, (3): 307-333.

- Joshi, H. (2002) 'Production, reproduction and education: Women, children and work in a British perspective', *Population and Development Review*, 28 (3): 445-474.
- Kersley, B., Alpin, C., Forth, J., Bryson, A., Bewley, H., Dix, G. and Oxenbridge, S. (2004) *Inside the Workplace: First Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS)*, National Centre for Social Research.
- Kodz, J. (2003) *Working Long Hours: A Review of the Evidence, Vol 1, Main Report*. Institute for Employment Studies.
- Labour Force Survey (2003), Office for National Statistics.
- Land, H. (1999) 'The changing world of work and families', in Watson, S. and Doyal, L. (eds) *Engendering Social Policy*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Lewis, S. and Lewis, J. (1996) *The Work-Family Challenge: Rethinking Employment*. London: Sage.
- Lewis, J. (2001) 'The decline of the male breadwinner model: implications for work and care', *Social Politics*, Summer: 152-169.
- Lewis, J. (2004) *Combining Work and Family Life: Will Parental Leave Legislation Remove the Barriers to Women's Equality in the Labour Market?* Liverpool John Moores, ESF Report.
- Lister, R. (1998) 'Vocabularies of citizenship and gender: the UK', *Critical Social Policy*, 18 (3): 309-331.
- Lister, R. (2001) *Gender equity is crucial to parental leave*, *The Guardian*, 30<sup>th</sup> March.
- MacErlean, N. (2004) 'Six million say: it's no credit to the government', *The Guardian*, 5<sup>th</sup> December.
- Mackinnon, C (1983) Feminism, Marxism, method and the state: towards feminist jurisprudence, *Signs*, 7 (3): 515-44.
- MacRae, S. (1993) 'Occupational change after childbirth – evidence from a national survey', *Sociology*, 25 (4): 589-605.

- Marshall, J. (1991) 'Women managers', in Mumford, A. (ed) *Handbook of Management Development*. Aldershot: Gower.
- McKie, L., Bowlby, S and Gregory, S. (2001) 'Gender, caring and employment in Britain', *Journal of Social Policy*, 30 (2): 233-258.
- McKie, L., Gregory, S. and Bowlby, S. (2002) 'Shadow times: the temporal and spatial frameworks and experiences of caring and working', *Sociology*, 36 (4): 897-924.
- Moss, P. (2001) *The UK at the Crossroads: Towards an Early Years European Partnership*. London: Daycare Trust.
- Nippert-Eng, C (1996) *Home and Work: Negotiating Boundaries in Everyday life*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Nolan, J. (2002) 'The intensification of everyday life', in Burchell, B., Lapido, D. and Wilkinson, F. (eds) *Job Insecurity and Work Intensification*. London: Routledge.
- Perrons, D. (1999) 'Flexible working and equal opportunities in the United Kingdom: a case study from retail', *Environment and Planning A*, 32 (10): 1719-1734.
- Plantenga, J. (2002) 'Combining work and care in the Polder Model: an assessment of Dutch part-time strategy', *Critical Social Policy*, 22 (1): 53-71.
- Purcell, K., Hogarth, T. and Simm, C. (1999) *The Costs and Benefits of Non-Standard Working Arrangements and Contractual Relations*. York: York Publishing Service.
- Rake, K. (2001) 'Gender and New Labour's social policies', *Journal of Social Policy*, 30: 209-232.
- Reynolds, T., Callender, C. and Edwards, R. (2003) *Caring and Counting: The Impact of Mothers' Employment on Family Relationships*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.
- Rubery, J. and Fagan, C. (1994) 'Does feminisation mean a flexible labour force?', in Hyman, R. and Ferner, A. (eds) *New Frontiers in European Industrial Relations*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Rubery, J., Horrell, J. and Burchell, B. (1994) 'Part-time work and gender inequality in the

- labour market', in Scott, A. M. (ed) *Gender Segregation and Social Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Savage, M. and Witz, A. (1992) *Gender and Bureaucracy*. London: Blackwell.
- Sheridan, A. (2004) 'Chronic presenteeism: The multiple dimensions to men's absence from part-time work', in *Gender, Work and Organisation*, 11, (2): 207-225.
- Smart, C (1995) *Feminism and the power of law*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Smith, M., Fagan, C. and Rubery, J. (1998) 'Where and why is part-time work growing in Europe?', in O'Reilly, J. and Fagan, C. (eds) *Part-time Prospects: An International Comparison of Part-Time Work in Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim*. London: Routledge.
- Sullivan, O. (1997) 'Time waits for no woman: An investigation of the gendered experience of domestic time', *Sociology*, 31 (2): 221-239.
- Sullivan, O. (2000) 'The division of domestic labour: Twenty years of change?', *Sociology*, 34 (3): 437-456.
- Toynbee, P. (1999) 'If you hear ministers say this new law is family friendly, just boo and hiss', *The Guardian*, March 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Walby, S. and Olsen, W. (2002) *The Impact of Women's Position in the Labour Market on Pay and Implications for UK Productivity*, Report to Women and Equality Unit.
- Walsh, J. (1999) 'Myths and counter-myths: An analysis of part-time female employees and their orientations to work and working hours', in *Work, Employment and Society*, 13 (2): 179-203.
- Ward, L. (1999) 'Daddy's home', *The Guardian*, June 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Williams, F (2001) In and beyond New Labour: towards a new political ethics of care, *Critical Social Policy*, 21 (4): 69 – 92.
- Witz, A. (1992) *Professions and Patriarchy*. London: Routledge.

Yeandle, S., Crompton, R., Wigfield, A. and Dennet, J. (2002) *Employed Carers and Family-Friendly Employment Policies*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

Yeandle, S., Phillips, J., Scheibl, F., Wigfield, A. and Wise, S. (2003) *Line Managers and Family Friendly Employment: Roles and Perspectives*. Bristol: The Policy Press/Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Family and Work Series*.

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE EXPLORING WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT WITH FLEXIBILITY</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 INTRODUCTION	4
1.2 WORKING ARRANGEMENTS	5
1.3 VIEWS ON FORMAL ORGANISATIONAL POLICY	10
1.4 BROADER EXPERIENCES OF A ‘FAMILY-FRIENDLY’ WORKPLACE	11
1.5 NEGATIVE WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES	11
1.6 CONFLICTING EXPERIENCES	13
1.7 THE FEASIBILITY OF FLEXIBILITY	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO ENGAGEMENT WITH GOVERNMENT POLICY</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 INTRODUCTION	15
2.2 PARENTAL LEAVE: AWARENESS, TAKE UP AND LIMITATIONS	16
2.3 THE FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUEST: AWARENESS, TAKE UP AND LIMITATIONS	20
2.4 TAX CREDITS	23
<b>CHAPTER THREE EXPLORING WORK-LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1 DEFINING WORK-LIFE BALANCE	28
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>50</b>
Summary of Key Issues	50
Issue for Further Research	53
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>54</b>