

WARWICK INSTITUTE *for*
EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH



**Improving the participation of Women
in the Labour Market: Coventry
and Warwickshire**

**A review of the dissemination of gender
and employment related research relevant
to the sub-region**

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The main research report is a targeted review and analysis of research, at a national, regional and sub-regional level, relevant to women and employment. This report constitutes a separate part of the research project: ***a review of the dissemination of relevant research in the sub-region including processes and events used to disseminate findings on gender and employment related research.***
- 1.2 Context is provided by the LSC's 'Guidance on Equality and Diversity Impact Measures' (Equality and Diversity Guidance 01/2002). Equality and Diversity Impact Measures (EDIMs) provide targeted measures for improvement relating to participation, retention and achievement at each level of qualification and learning activity. The aim is that EDIMs will equip LSCs and providers to address inequality systematically so that equality and social inclusion are promoted rather than inequality and exclusion being consolidated. For the purposes of this report, the relevance of EDIMs is in emphasising the importance of monitoring the impact of research and dissemination activity relevant to women and employment in the sub-region, and evaluating whether inequality is being reduced.
- 1.3 The main purpose of the review was to identify dissemination of relevant primary research such as surveys, focus groups and evaluation of new initiatives. However, in contacting appropriate organisations examples were identified of secondary research activity such as using information from research by other organisations or analysing existing in-house data. Therefore, while the main focus of the report is the dissemination of primary research, reference is also made to secondary research activity.

2. The review methodology

- 2.1 With regard to the review of dissemination in the sub-region, the research proposal stated that telephone contact would be made with 10-15 appropriate organisations. Potential contacts were discussed at the project support group meeting, convened by David Swales, on 18 November 2002. In the light of concerns that there was likely to be only limited research of specific relevance to the sub-region, further appropriate organisations were identified by the IER research team. In order to undertake as wide-ranging a review as possible, the IER team decided to contact the maximum number of organisations specified in

the proposal (i.e. 15). Extensive efforts, including repeat telephone calls over a period of four weeks, were made to contact those identified as relevant to the review. These efforts resulted in responses being received from all 15 relevant organisations (see Box 1).

2.2 In general terms, those contacted fell into one of two categories:

- organisations in the sub-region involved in activity relevant to women and employment; and,
- organisations involved in promoting the involvement of women in non-traditional sectors/sectors of particular relevance to the sub-region.

2.3 Respondents can also be categorised in terms of:

- those organisations that have undertaken primary research;
- those engaged in relevant activity but which have not undertaken primary research.

(Note that organisations in both categories may have undertaken secondary research.)

The full list of respondents is as shown in Box 1:

<p>Box 1</p> <p>Organisations which have undertaken primary research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">i. (Coventry and Warwickshire) Women’s Business Development Agencyii. Gender Equality and Race Inclusion (GERI) Projectiii. Hoshin researchiv. Staffordshire Universityv. Warwickshire Collegevi. Warwickshire County Councilvii. Women in Rural Enterprise <p>Organisations engaged in relevant activity but which have not undertaken primary research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">viii. Coventry and Warwickshire SETpointix. Coventry Universityx. Foleshill Women’s Training Ltdxi. Institute of Plumbing, Women in Plumbing Working Groupxii. Osaba Women’s Centre, Coventryxiii. Warwickshire Rural Enterprise Networkxiv. Women and Manual Tradesxv. Women’s Engineering Society, Coventry circle (contacted by e-mail)
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2.4 Respondents were asked:

- whether their organisation has undertaken any research on women's participation in the labour market relevant to Coventry and Warwickshire;
- what processes and/or events were used to disseminate the research findings; and
- how the impact of the dissemination was assessed e.g. was there an evaluation process; were evaluation criteria determined; was there an evaluation report?

3. Key points

3.1 Three key points emerged from the review:

- i. There are clearly several local organisations engaged in activity relevant to improving the participation of women in the local labour market, as well as national organisations seeking to promote the involvement of women in non-traditional areas. Some highly relevant projects are currently taking place.
- ii. There are examples of relevant primary and secondary research activity, but overall there is not a significant body of primary research upon which to draw. In particular, there is a lack of primary research within the sub-region.
- iii. Dissemination of what research is currently available, is partial and fragmented.

3.2 Evidence in support of these three points is provided in the commentary in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.18.

4. The review

4.1 This section distinguishes those organisations that have undertaken primary research from those that have not. The aims and activities of the various organisations are outlined as appropriate.

Organisations which have undertaken relevant primary research

4.2 The following organisations are undertaking, or have undertaken, some form of primary research of relevance to the sub-region.

4.3 **(Coventry and Warwickshire) Women's Business Development Agency (WBDA)** provides support, advice and training to women in Coventry and Warwickshire, particularly those who are disadvantaged by the effects of unemployment, low pay and racial discrimination. WBDA undertakes an annual evaluation of its own clients and their destinations, but this is an internal piece of research which is not disseminated to a wider audience. WBDA also seeks to use information from individual clients and contacts with other organisations to inform its activities. However, WBDA is now becoming involved in

larger projects which do require greater evaluation and dissemination activity. Examples of WBDA's current work include a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund project to raise the awareness of 200 African-Caribbean women in Coventry regarding self-development and business opportunities; a Phoenix Fund (Small Business Service) project in Coventry and Warwickshire and two other areas to raise the awareness of a total of 1,000 women regarding self-employment opportunities plus training 200 women to enter an empowerment programme; and an LSC funded project with Coventry City Council and Coventry and Warwickshire Guidance helping unemployed women in Coventry to access training and employment opportunities. In addition to evaluation of these projects, an outcome of the Phoenix Fund project will be the publication of a good practice guide which will be disseminated.

- 4.4 The **GERI Project** (Gender Equality and Race Inclusion) is supported by the European Commission EQUAL Community Initiative Programme which aims to find innovative ways of tackling inequality in employment. The GERI project aims to work with Connexions services, employers, training providers and other relevant agencies to address gender and ethnic stereotyping. This includes researching the local causes of stereotyping as well as developing initiatives such as the provision of training and guidance materials and mentoring schemes. The project includes several UK Connexions services (but not Coventry and Warwickshire) and transnational partners. To take a specific example of work being done, Connexions Lincolnshire and Rutland is undertaking a 'Breaking the Mould' project with students aged 13 and above in local schools and colleges and a Role Models project using video clips of local people which will be posted on the GERI website. This local work has been informed by analysis of Year 11 student destination data which demonstrate on-going, and very marked, gender segregation. Dissemination is integral to the GERI project and planning for this will commence in April 2003.
- 4.5 Phil Smith, **Hoshin**, undertook recent research on the automotive industry for the Advantage West Midlands Automotive Skills Task Force. A workshop was held in Autumn 2002 as part of the research project but further dissemination is to be undertaken by the Automotive Skills Task Force and none has yet been planned.
- 4.6 **Staffordshire University** (in partnership with the University of Birmingham, De Montfort University, Canterbury Christ Church University College plus ACAS, HEFCE, NATFHE and UNISON) is currently undertaking a Flexible Employment Options (FEO) Project in which eight different practices, such as compressed hours, personalised annual leave and working from home, are being piloted. The project is not gender specific but has clear implications for women. Approximately 1,000 employees are involved in the project. The findings of an interim evaluation, consisting of a survey questionnaire and focus groups, will be available in April/May 2003 and the full

evaluation will be presented at a conference in November 2003. Two dissemination seminars were held during 2002, the target audience being other Higher Education Institutions, but there has been no evaluation of their impact.

- 4.7 **Warwickshire College** is currently undertaking an ESF funded workplace-based Family Learning Works project. During 2003 seven pilot projects will be run. The target group is low-skilled employees who are parents and it is likely that the majority of participants will be women. There will be an interim evaluation of the pilot projects at the end of 2003 plus dissemination events. There are then further phases to the project and a full evaluation will be undertaken in 2005. The project was informed by the College's awareness of the drop-out rate for students engaged in learning, when they got a job.
- 4.8 The main research report refers to work being done by **Warwickshire County Council** regarding the promotion of work-life balance policies amongst local employers. In a related initiative, the Council's Early Years Partnership sent a survey questionnaire to 250 employers in late 2002¹. The aim was to examine employers' awareness of the work of the Early Years Partnership and the Council's promotion of work-life balance policies, but questions were also asked about employers' awareness of local childcare provision, recruitment problems and proportion of female employees. A total of 28 companies responded. The results have not as yet been evaluated nor, at this stage, is dissemination planned.
- 4.9 **Women in Rural Enterprise (WIRE)** based at Harper Adams University College. Research has been undertaken on general (national) issues of women and rural enterprise. Dissemination of research is based on academic conferences and publications, the WIRE website and press releases. There has not been a regional dimension to the research but it should be noted that WIRE plans to set up a group in Warwickshire in early 2003.

Organisations engaged in relevant activity which have not undertaken primary research

- 4.10 The following organisations are, or have been, engaged in activity either directly or indirectly aimed at improving the participation of women in the sub-regional labour market (or non-traditional sectors/occupations). However, when contacted by IER researchers the finding was that they have not undertaken relevant primary research.

- Coventry and Warwickshire SETpoint (incorporating SATRO)
- Coventry University

¹ Information from a face-to-face interview with Warwickshire County Council's Business Adviser (Work-Life Balance), on 14 January 2003.

- Foleshill Women's Training Ltd
- Institute of Plumbing, Women in Plumbing Working Group
- Osaba Women's Centre
- Warwickshire Rural Enterprise Network
- Women and Manual Trades
- Women's Engineering Society, Coventry circle

- 4.11 While these organisations may not have undertaken primary research, they do provide evidence of the *breadth of activity* being undertaken within the sub-region. These organisations also provide some examples of secondary research analysis. The following points in particular, should be noted.
- 4.12 **Coventry and Warwickshire SETpoint** engages in a wide variety of activity aimed at promoting the involvement of school children in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) with some events specifically aimed at girls. Examples include: 'GATE' (Girls and Technology and Engineering) - an annual event for 30 girls in Rugby; 'GOT' (Girls on Technology) - one day events at Warwickshire College for girls interested in construction; and the provision of manual trades 'taster' sessions for girls. Participants are asked to complete evaluation questionnaires for individual events but SETpoint has not undertaken any research on how events influence girls' learning or employment choices and decisions.
- 4.13 **Foleshill Women's Training Ltd** is directly involved in improving women's participation in the labour market but its provision of courses is determined as much by the availability of funding for specified learning as by the requirements of its trainees, (or of the local economy) and certainly not by research or evaluation of the impact on women's participation in the labour market. (This is illustrative of an important more general point that activity tends to be reactive).
- 4.14 The **Institute of Plumbing, Women in Plumbing Working Group** was set up in 2002 in recognition of the very low number of women plumbers, as demonstrated by the Institute's own membership data. The initial aim of the group is to provide support to women who are already plumbers and no primary research is planned.
- 4.15 The role of the **Osaba Women's Centre** in relation to employment is more indirect, but the provision of projects such as the establishment of a creche and support for victims of domestic violence, can be important in enabling women to take the first steps into learning and work.
- 4.16 **Women and Manual Trades** has a long history of campaigning to improve the participation of women in the construction industry, but the organisation has no presence in the sub-region and nor is there evidence of the impact of its activities. It relies on data from the

Construction Industry Training Board to highlight the under-representation of women in the sector.

- 4.17 The **Women's Engineering Society** sees local groups, or 'circles', as important in providing practical support for women, and by women, in the sector. The Coventry circle has only recently been established and its impact remains to be seen. Jaguar Cars was unable to tell the circle organiser how many women engineers it employs.
- 4.18 Contact with **Coventry University** and **Warwickshire Rural Enterprise Network** (WREN) found that these organisations had previously been engaged in relevant activity but were no longer doing so according to the staff contacted. From 1990 to 1998 Coventry University ran a 'Woman and Work Programme', aimed at unemployed or under-employed women, plus separate women into management courses. WREN, which provides support to small businesses, organisations, community groups and individuals in rural Warwickshire to stimulate and support local rural enterprise, previously ran an 'On the Road to Employment' mobile course in North Warwickshire to give unemployed women assertiveness training, computer training and job search skills. The training provided by Coventry University in particular was subject to evaluation and this raises an issue about dissemination which is returned to below.

Summary

- 4.19 The above review provides some examples of primary research being undertaken, and organisations also engaging in secondary research activity such as the analysis of in-house data. Overall, however, there is not a significant body of primary research nor dissemination activity upon which to draw. In particular, there is a very considerable lack of gender-related primary research specific to the sub-region and the review demonstrates both local and national organisations engaged in activity relating to women and employment doing so without such activity being informed by research findings.
- 4.20 More positively, there are examples of research currently taking place within some highly relevant projects such as those by Warwickshire College, the Women's Business Development Agency and GERI. Dissemination of existing research appears, however, to be partial and fragmented, such that those involved in new activities will not necessarily be aware of, or be in a position to learn from, previous/ongoing experience. An example of this would be whether work undertaken by Coventry University in the 1990s has informed similar current initiatives. There is also an apparent lack of evaluation of how findings impact on policy development.
- 4.21 What is also evident from the review is the very considerable level of activity within the sub-region aimed either directly or indirectly at improving the participation of women in the labour market.

Notwithstanding concerns about the extent of primary research and dissemination, the range of work being undertaken is very positive.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The review of the dissemination of relevant research in the sub-region therefore suggests the following:

- The need for specific (primary) research within the sub-region to inform current/future policy initiatives.
- The importance of evaluating the impact of work being undertaken within the sub-region as to the impact on women's participation in the labour market.
- The need for effective sub-regional 'signposting' and dissemination both of local research and evaluation findings, and of regional and national level research of relevance to Coventry and Warwickshire.