



LOOKING THROUGH THE GLASS CEILING:  
a detailed investigation of the factors that contribute  
to gendered career inequalities

*A research project undertaken as part of the  
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## Chapter 1

### Careers, skills and access to opportunities in 'The Knowledge Economy'

#### 1.1 *The context and the issues*

In the UK, equal pay and sex discrimination legislation have been in place since the mid 1970s. New entrants to the labour market in the mid-1990s grew up in a society which encouraged them to take equal opportunities for granted. Social and economic policy in Britain, as throughout the European Union (EU), is geared towards the extension of equal opportunities in education and employment and the alleviation of poverty via increased female economic activity rates. In March 2000, the EU set itself a new strategic goal for the current decade: 'to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'. This strategy set ambitious targets for member states, in terms of the growth of their labour forces, the modernisation of education and training systems and their expenditure on research and development. There are explicit and largely unquestioned assumptions made throughout policy documents and instruments that the expansion of higher education and the increased participation of women in the labour market will be critical for the success of this process, with successful equal opportunities policies axiomatic (Roderigues 2003, Goetschy 1999).

Educational policy and investment in most developed countries, particularly with reference to higher education, is predicated upon the explicit assumption that increased skill and educational achievement levels hold the key to economic prosperity within an increasingly competitive global economy. A central pillar of this is the conviction that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, successful economies will rely more upon knowledge rather than material resources, and that location will be less important than technological sophistication. This is not a new idea. It was perhaps most influentially expounded by Daniel Bell (1973) in *The Coming of Post Industrial Society*, which set the foundation for much of the debate on emerging social structures, employment and the future of work organisations and has been developed by subsequent theorists (Drucker 1993, Reich 1991).

The UK now has one of the highest rates of participation and completion of higher education courses in Europe (OECD 2006) and women's participation rates, in particular, have risen substantially in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, little is known about the complex interplay between the career aspirations of graduates, the availability of suitable jobs and the gendered choices and constraints facing men and women as they move out of higher education and into the labour market.

## **1.2 Women, qualifications and equal opportunities in the UK**

In education, girls and women in the UK have caught up with, and in many areas exceeded, the achievement levels of their male peers. However, despite equal opportunities legislation, effective contraception and cultural change in the norms and values associated with gender roles in both the public and private spheres, the employment profiles of the male and female populations continue to show marked differences, which increase with age and career development. This is particularly evident among graduates, where gender remains a salient issue in accessing opportunities and career development (Purcell and Elias forthcoming, Elias and Purcell 2004).

As women continue to achieve equal opportunities in education and male and female lifetime employment participation rates continue to converge, the success of gender mainstreaming and accompanying policies to facilitate higher rates of economic participation compatible with social and family welfare become increasingly critical. Successful policies are based upon sound and reliable evidence. This project was designed to build upon ongoing research on the relationship between education and career opportunities, to provide evidence to inform policies designed to reduce and eliminate differences that arise due to direct and indirect gender discrimination by employers. It addresses directly the priorities of the European Social Fund (ESF) Equal Opportunities Mainstreaming Action Plan, by identifying barriers to participation and success in particular sectors and occupations. In engaging with specific cases, examples of good and bad practice have been identified in particular contexts; findings that can be used as examples in promoting policies aimed at gender mainstreaming.

Throughout the twentieth century and into the present time, highly qualified women have been more likely than less qualified women to remain in paid work throughout their adult lives or to have a shorter gap at the family-building phase, to work full-time and to have successful careers (Joshi and Paci 2001, Martin and Roberts 1984). However, gendered occupational segmentation and a significant gender pay gap remain, even among the most highly qualified groups. Increasing proportions of younger women, especially those with degrees, appear to have been opting not to have children or to postpone reproduction until they have established a career. Particularly in traditionally 'male' jobs such as private sector management, there is evidence that women perceive themselves as having to choose between career development and family-building. It is not clear how far and under what circumstances this reflects freely taken or constrained choices, but in addition to equal opportunities in employment, it also has profound implications for pension rights and longer-term welfare.

In order to refine and implement labour market and higher education investment policies, there is a clear need for further information to assess the extent to which, relative to similarly qualified men, highly-qualified women's skills are under-utilised and/or undervalued by employers and how far differences in the career profiles and experiences of equally highly-qualified women and men in the important early stages of career development may be due to

employers' discriminatory practices, gendered preferences, gender divisions of labour in partnerships or women's underachievement. Current practices within the higher education sector (e.g. promoting business studies degrees for women) and labour market policies (e.g. legislative reforms seeking greater equality of opportunity for women and targeted at employers) have failed to address this key issue. This detailed study of recent trends, experiences and attitudes among graduates of British higher education institutions provides robust evidence on the causes of the observed gender differences in careers - evidence that also has implications EU higher education policy in general and for UK employment policymakers and employers in particular.

### **1.3 Education, skills and economic restructuring<sup>1</sup>**

Successive UK governments since the late 1980s, in line with EU strategic objectives and in common with those of virtually all developed and most developing countries (OECD 2004), have developed policies designed to widen access and increase participation in higher education, in the belief that the resulting increased output of graduates will contribute to greater economic and social prosperity, nationally and individually (DfEE 1998, Thurow 1994, Crouch *et al.* 1999). The longer term implications of UK policies have been questioned, particularly with reference to the social impact of extension of 'the learning society' (Keep and Mayhew 1999, 1996) and the allegation that, far from an increased demand for high level skills, there is an oversupply of graduates competing for too few 'knowledge-based' jobs, leaving the majority in employment where their knowledge and skills are not required (Brown and Hesketh 2004, Brown 2003, Brynin 2002). Research has nonetheless continued to indicate that obtaining a degree increases the propensity of individuals to obtain better jobs and higher earnings both in the short and long term (Elias and Purcell 2004, Brennan *et al.* 2001, 2002, Dearden *et al.* 2000, Elias *et al.* 1999a). The real test of how degrees contribute to employment access and economic prosperity requires systematic exploration and analysis of the variables associated with employment outcomes. What kinds of work do graduates do? Who gets which jobs, and why – and who fails to achieve the employment they aspire to? What evidence is there that the relatively recent graduates who acquired their qualifications in the new UK mass higher education system are accessing jobs that utilise their skills, knowledge and qualifications?

Research that we had embarked upon at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, investigating the early careers of those who had completed undergraduate degrees in the mid-1990s (Elias *et al.* *ibid.*, Purcell *et al.* 1999) indicated that, as in the wider labour market, the graduate labour market had remained persistently gendered. The career outcomes and rewards to which a degree provided access appeared different for women and men, to the apparent disadvantage of the former. Traditionally, women's lower earnings and lower occupational

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<sup>1</sup> The research was supported by the Economic and Social research Council (Award ref: R000239589) and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit.

achievements have been explained by their lesser investment in human capital development, their propensity to have discontinuous employment throughout their family-building life stages, lower prioritisation of career development and, to a greater or lesser degree, gendered custom and practice in households and workplaces that in some contexts, constituted institutionalised sexism. In so far as equal opportunities and equal pay legislation have succeeded in eliminating discrimination on the basis of gender and promoted culture change leading to equality of aspirations among women and men and their equal treatment by employers, it might be expected that we would find these highly-qualified labour market entrants, near to the start of their careers and mainly having been employed continuously in full-time employment to the same extent as their male peers, to be particularly well-equipped to take advantage of the changes. Why did we still find a gender pay gap and evidence that women had experienced greater obstacles in obtaining employment that made use of and rewarded their higher education skills and knowledge?

#### **1.4 *The questions addressed by this research***

New research undertaken for this project has enabled us to reassess the prospects for equality for women who have acquired the credentials to compete for opportunities in the 'knowledge economy', characterised by rapid growth in employment opportunities in general, with the growth of female employment exceeding that for males, as will be discussed in the chapters that follow. Analysis of labour market trends reveals that in some sectors of the economy and across a variety of occupational areas, gender inequalities in employment are less apparent than in others, reflecting the advancement of equal opportunities legislation, the recognition that productivity is independent of gender and changing expectations among employees and employers. However, for graduates working in management and related jobs in private sector organisations, while the proportion of women moving into such jobs has been steadily increasing, the gender gap in pay and occupational status has been worsening. Access to career development and to high rewards appears to be restricted by invisible mechanisms, which constitute a 'glass ceiling', permeated by only a small minority of women.

The aim of this project has been to move beyond analyses of general trends to explore the diversity of career opportunities in different industrial, occupational and organisational contexts, to provide robust evidence about the operation and extent of the mechanisms that challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes and gendered inequalities. The objective is to quantify the direct and indirect discriminatory employment practices, in order to inform policies and activities targeted at the promotion of gender.

#### **1.5 *Resources drawn upon and research methods used in the investigation***

To make sense of gender differences in career paths, we were able to draw upon high quality longitudinal data that are (a) representative of the wide spectrum of experiences faced by comparable men and women, (b) cover a sufficient period to enable us observe the evolution

of gender differences, and (c) are completely up-to-date in terms of their ability to inform policy. It is a rare occurrence to meet all three requirements, yet this is exactly what we have been able to do. The integrated methodology we used achieved this by (i) taking advantage of surveys which are currently in the field (large national surveys of people who graduated in 1995 and 1999); (ii) through the development of privileged access to major and new national longitudinal data (the Census Longitudinal Study) and (iii) via the access permissions we have developed with survey respondents (who, in agreeing to be part of the longitudinal research programme, had provided names, addresses, telephone and email contact details. These enabled us to select and conduct the interviews which formed the core of the qualitative component of this project. All interviews have been coded and fully transcribed, and analysis was undertaken with the help of NVivo software. This combined qualitative and quantitative methodology was used for two previous projects: the second-sweep investigation of this 1995 cohort of graduates, *Graduate careers seven years on*, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Higher Education Careers Services Unit (HECSU) and *the Class of '99* study of 1999 UK graduates, funded by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES).

Using and building on these resources, we conducted three main research exercises:

1. A national framework study, comprising of comprehensive analysis of existing national longitudinal data on employment trends among graduates, examining the relationship between gender, qualifications, occupations, regional location, family formation and household activity patterns. This activity will make use of privileged access to the England and Wales Census Longitudinal study - linked census of population data from the 81,'91 and 2001 censuses.
2. A detailed exploration and comparison of the work histories of men and women who graduated in 1995 and 1999 graduate, involving meticulous investigation and analyses of the development of gender differences in various types of employment.
3. Case study analysis of a selected sub-sample of 200 graduates (and in some cases, their partners) to explore the dynamics of career development within the context of partnership formation and family-building activities and plans.

We draw upon the resulting quantitative and qualitative data and analyses to produce the report that follows.

## **1.6 Outline of the report**

In Chapter 2 we present findings based upon the Census Longitudinal Study. Using this source, which consists of the linked census records for 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 from 1 per cent of the population of England and Wales, we are able to investigate the role that social class and gender have played in the rise in participation in higher education that has taken

place over the past two decades. Apart from setting the scene for the later chapters, this chapter also presents remarkable new evidence on the relationship between the types of jobs graduates hold and their family formation decisions.

In Chapter 3, we investigate the impact of different educational and demographic variables on career outcomes, focusing particularly on those graduates who are most obviously equipped to break through the glass ceiling – those with excellent qualifications who exhibit the abilities and achievements that employers claim to seek in their pursuit of managerial and professional talent.

In Chapter 4, we look at these highly-qualified women's experiences in employment - the jobs they did and the sectors they were employed in. Comparing males and females, we examine the quality and characteristics of their current jobs and work patterns, the aspects of them they valued, their perceptions of job quality, appropriateness of their jobs in relation to their qualifications and the skills and knowledge developed during their higher education and their perceptions of their promotion prospects. We look in particular at differences in job characteristics, terms and conditions of employment and career opportunities of those employed in public and private sector employment. We have established in the research upon which this project has been building that female graduates are more likely than males to work in public sector employment - and that this appears to have an earnings penalty. But how far do other aspects of public sector employment compensate for relatively low graduate earnings - and what are the wider costs and benefits of graduate employment in these two sectors?

Chapter 5 focuses still more closely on the issue of occupational segregation, examining the earnings and other outcomes reported by graduates in both traditionally 'gendered jobs' - engineers and teachers - and occupations where both male and female graduates tend to compete in relatively equal numbers - managers and lawyers. We examine the characteristics, qualifications and experiences associated with successful career outcomes and probe further into the issue of how far gender occupational and career differences in outcomes essentially reflect different characteristics and skills - or how far they can only be explained by more subjective or intangible criteria - the preferences of graduates themselves or those of the employers who make decisions about recruiting them and setting the parameters of the career opportunities to which they have access.

Chapter 6, drawing on attitudinal survey data and accounts provided in the interviews, looks at the similarities and differences in female and male graduates' attitudes and values about work, employment and the place of career development in their lives more generally. We explore the finding that emerged in the *Seven Years On* interviews that, approaching their late twenties, many respondents of both sexes were questioning how they wanted to live and anticipating changes - sometimes involving the realisation that they would need to prioritise career-development and ambition more highly if they wished to achieve the success and

lifestyles that they aspired to - but more often, questioning the work/life balance of the 'high flying' jobs that they found themselves in, and wondering how their current lifestyles and the expectations of current employers could be compatible with the family-building phase that they were beginning to consider. We discuss the importance of wider values in career decision making, particularly among women, that was increasingly articulated in the interviews undertaken ten years on - not so much about the *balance* of work and non-work (particularly family-related) activities - but about the *nature* of work and career themselves and their meaning to the individual within their social and moral context.

Chapter 7 looks particularly at the significance of partnership and family-building for the 1995 cohort of graduates. Ten years after graduation, they were in their early 30s and were increasingly settling into lifetime partnerships and embarking upon parenthood. We had found in analysis of the graduate cohorts studied that partnership had a significant influence on career and accommodation decisions, even 3-4 years after graduation, for both women and men - which led us to question the extent to which, for most people, careers are indeed 'individual'. Ten years on, the majority of respondents were living with a partner. Furthermore, ten years on, those in the most demanding and successful jobs were faced with the greatest challenges in managing personal relationships and their work/life balance. We find that partnership modified women's career plans and perceptions to an extent that was not the case for men - and we explore the relationship between the views that individual respondents had about the relative importance of their own career development and that of their partner, relative to individual and household earnings. However, the obstacle to women's ability to develop and maintain successful careers (particularly in management occupations within the private sector) was the difficulty of combining parenthood - or, rather, childbirth and motherhood - with career continuity. The research provided valuable and revealing evidence from graduate respondents of the impact of careers on family-building - and of family-building on careers.

The data collected in this research indicate very clearly that both workplaces and households remain gendered. There is considerable evidence of how equal opportunities and sex discrimination legislation have facilitated high career achievements among women who have been able to take advantage of educational and occupational opportunities - and that graduate women generally perceive career development as a significant aspect of their identity and a theme that will continue throughout adult life. There is also evidence that many graduate women and men continue to value divisions of labour in partnerships that, during the family-building phase at least, reflect the traditional male main breadwinner/woman primary parent and main home-maker. The finding of greatest policy relevance, however, is that a significant proportion of the highly-qualified women surveyed and interviewed in this study key had embarked upon partnerships and family-building where they aspired to continue to develop the satisfying and successful careers that they enjoyed, alongside becoming parents and having a fulfilling personal life. They recognised that this presented challenges and

required hard work and careful management, but for them and their partners, the ability to have a satisfactory work/life balance that did not involve career-damaging compromises or unacceptable costs to relationships and time available in their private lives was a paramount consideration. At the stage when the *Ten Years On* interviews were conducted, many respondents were negotiating a route through this key career stage, where life-plan decision-making and family-building, as well as career development, were very much on the agenda. Decisions about divisions of labour within households, and the extent to which employers were committed to equal opportunities practice, and to facilitating career development that was compatible with parenthood, were of crucial importance in enabling - or obstructing - career maintenance. In chapter 8, we present evidence from the respondents' accounts of good and bad practices that illustrate the importance of organisational policies and practices in determining whether highly-qualified young women were able to continue to take advantage of equal opportunities as they moved towards jobs in the 'glass ceiling' zone that marks off early career posts from senior management and professional roles.

Finally, in Chapter 9, we summarise the key findings of the project, discuss their implications and argue for a conceptualisation of the policy agenda that moves on from general ethical and pragmatic injunctions to a strategic approach that targets the residual obstacles to progress and concentrates effort in the areas where it is most urgently required and more likely to be effective. We draw attention to the personal, organisational and wider social implications of policies and practices that facilitate or inhibit progress towards equal career development opportunities that recognise and take account of work-life balance considerations.

## Chapter 2

### **The rise in educational participation: social class, gender and family formation**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapter we made reference to the rise in educational participation, particularly higher education, and the extent of economic restructuring that has taken place over the last two decades. These changes have impacted particularly on young people, whose social and economic position has been transformed over the past twenty years. More young people than ever before now complete a higher education qualification. Women appear to have been the major beneficiaries of this expansion, yet our knowledge about the nature of these changes and their profound implications for the sexes, and for longer-term gendered labour market access and participation, is limited.

Throughout this report we address this gap in knowledge in a variety of ways. In later chapters we make use of detailed longitudinal studies of recent graduates, examining the career paths they have followed, the jobs they have held and exploring gender differences in their early labour market experiences. We followed many of these graduates as they approach a critical period of family formation, interviewing them some ten years after graduation to gain a better understanding of their career choices and family formation decisions. In this chapter though, we step back a little. First, we show how the labour market has been changing since the 1970s, using a new classification of graduate jobs for this purpose. Second, we utilise a large national source of longitudinal information to shed light on the role of social class and gender as important factors determining the decision to participate in higher education and to investigate the possible relationship between these trends and the postponement in childbearing which has become so apparent in recent years. In revealing these trends in the labour market and by exploring family formation in relationship to higher education, we set the scene for the detailed research presented in later chapters.

#### **2.2 Occupational change and graduate employment**

A good understanding of the career paths of graduates requires a classification of the kind of work that graduates do – a classification that reflects both the demand for their graduate skills and qualifications and the extent to which these are used within their jobs. In previous research on the graduate labour market (Elias *et al.* 1999), a three-fold classification of

occupations was used for this purpose<sup>2</sup>. On reflection it was decided that this did not yield sufficient information about the nature of graduate employment. A new classification was required.

Creating a broad classification of occupations to reflect the utilisation of graduate skills is not a straightforward task. Clearly a 'graduate job', defined with reference to the criteria mentioned above, is more than simply a job in which a graduate works. Equally, occupational classifications are, in places, fairly heterogeneous. Graduates and employers may use job titles for graduate jobs that do not reflect changes in the nature and organisation of the associated tasks and the utilisation of graduate skills within them. We needed access to detailed information about the kind of work graduates do in their jobs, the extent to which they use their degrees and to identify the areas in which changes in work organisation are creating new opportunities for graduates.

To tackle this issue a variety of extensive information sources were processed. First, for employees observed within the UK Labour Force Survey between 2000 and 2003 and aged 25-34 or 45-54, a detailed tabulation was prepared showing the proportion of employees holding degrees within these two age groups, for each occupation unit group of the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification. This source yielded information from over 300 thousand individuals on the change in the proportion within each occupational and age group holding a degree. A second source was the text descriptions of the nature of their work and the qualifications required to undertake such work as recorded by respondents to the Winter quarter of the 1996/97 Labour Force Survey. In total, more than 65,000 job titles and job descriptions were available from this source. A third source came from the respondents to our survey of 1995 graduates, each of whom gave information about every job they had held since graduating; detailing whether they had been required to have a degree for the job, and whether or not the job required them to use the knowledge and skills acquired on their 1995 degree course. Through a careful and detailed analysis of these three sources of information and for the wide variety of jobs in which graduates work, a five-fold classification of occupations was developed<sup>3</sup>. Table 2.1 describes these categories and gives some typical examples of the kinds of jobs that fit into each.

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<sup>2</sup> The classification used in earlier research had three categories: 'graduate' occupations, 'graduate track' occupations and 'non-graduate' occupations. These distinctions were made within unit groups of the 1990 Standard Occupational Classification, allocating unit groups according to the proportions within the Labour Force Survey who reported that they held a degree.

<sup>3</sup> For further details, see Elias and Purcell (2004).

**Table 2.1: A classification of graduate occupations based upon the 2000 Standard Classification of Occupations - SOC(HE)**

<b>SOC (HE Category)</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>1. Traditional graduate occupations</b>	The established professions, for which, historically, the normal route has been via an undergraduate degree programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Solicitors</li> <li>▪ Medical practitioners</li> <li>▪ HE and secondary education teachers</li> <li>▪ Biological scientists/ biochemists</li> <li>▪ Pharmacists and pharmacologists</li> </ul>
<b>2. Modern graduate occupations</b>	The newer professions, particularly in management, IT and creative vocational areas, which graduates have been entering since educational expansion in the 1960s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social workers</li> <li>▪ Design and development engineers</li> <li>▪ Primary school teachers</li> <li>▪ Authors/writers/journalists</li> <li>▪ Senior officials in national government</li> </ul>
<b>3. New graduate occupations</b>	Areas of employment, many in new or expanding areas, where the route into the professional area has recently changed such that it is now via an undergraduate degree programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Marketing and sales managers</li> <li>▪ Physiotherapists, occupational therapists</li> <li>▪ Management accountants</li> <li>▪ Welfare, housing, probation officers</li> <li>▪ Countryside/park rangers</li> </ul>
<b>4. Niche graduate occupations</b>	Occupations where the majority of incumbents are not graduates, but within which there are stable or growing specialist niches which require higher education skills and knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leisure and sports managers</li> <li>▪ Hotel, accommodation managers</li> <li>▪ Nurses, midwives</li> <li>▪ Retail managers</li> <li>▪ Actors, entertainers</li> <li>▪ Graphic designers</li> </ul>
<b>5. Non-graduate jobs</b>	Occupations which do not require higher education skills and knowledge and generally do not recruit or reward incumbents on the basis of educational qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Personal assistants and other secretaries</li> <li>▪ Travel and tour guides</li> <li>▪ Routine laboratory testers</li> <li>▪ Call centre agents and operators</li> <li>▪ Sales-related occupations</li> <li>▪ Waiters, waitresses</li> </ul>

Source: Elias and Purcell 2004a

The first four groups represent areas of work in which there is a strong probability that a graduate employed in these areas will be making use of their degree skills and knowledge. We use this new classification to show how the structure of employment has changed over the last 25 years. For this purpose we needed a source of occupational information that maps these changes at the national level for a long and continuous period. Only one source could provide such detail for the whole time period, the New Earnings Survey (NES). We transformed the occupational information it contains for the period from 1975 to 1989 into a

form consistent with the definition of the above classification of graduate occupations<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 2.2: Changes in employment in the UK by gender and full-time/part-time status, 1975-2000**

	1975	2000	growth p.a. %
	(thousands)		
Men	13,239	12,466	-0.2%
Women	8,973	12,175	1.2%
Full-time	17,964	17,164	-0.2%
Part-time	4,248	7,477	2.3%
Total	22,212	24,641	0.4%

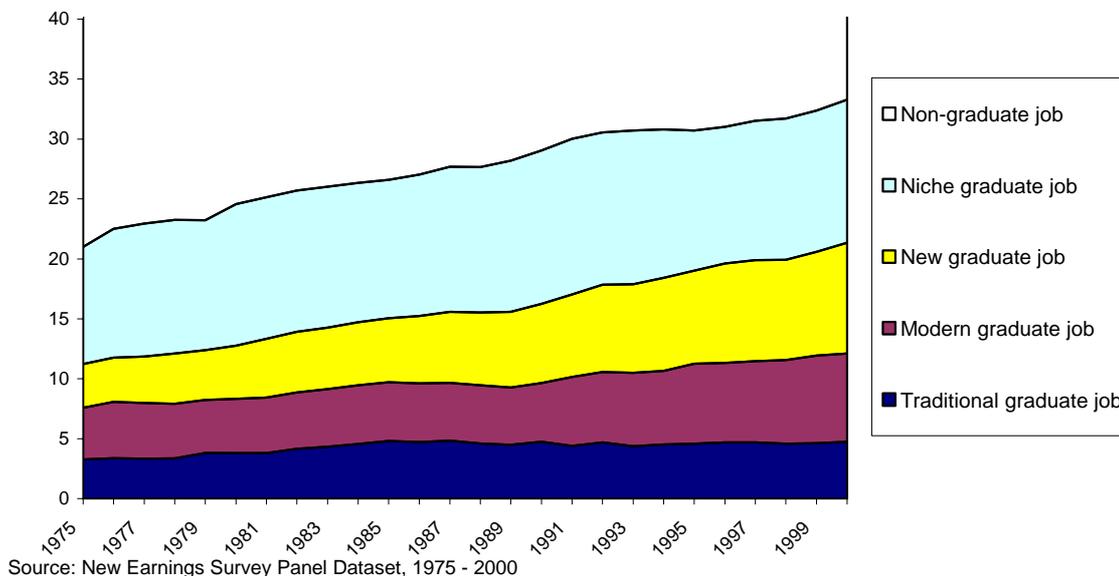
Sources: DE Historical Abstract of Labour Statistics, Labour Market Trends October 2001.

Before investigating how the structure of employment has changed, we show in Table 2.2 how employment levels have shifted between 1975 and 2000. Full-time jobs have declined slightly over this period from 18 million to 17.2 million, but this decline has been more than offset by the growth of part-time employment from 4.2 million to 7.5 million. This growth in part-time employment is associated with the general rise in the number of jobs held by women, showing a growth rate in excess of 1 per cent per annum. In summary, therefore, the total *volume* of employment has expanded significantly over this period, possibly by almost one million equivalent full-time jobs. Bearing this expansion in mind, Figure 2.1 shows the changing occupational composition of employment in the five groups of occupations we are utilising for our analysis of the graduate labour market. Interestingly, for both men and women the proportion of jobs that we classify as *traditional graduate* occupations has remained virtually constant over the period 1975-2000. *Modern graduate* occupations have displayed some growth, but the major part of the general rise in the proportion of total employment accounted for by our four 'graduate' categories of occupations stems from the increasing proportion of *new and niche graduate* occupations. These are the jobs that have absorbed the major part of the growing output of graduates from higher education. For women, the proportion of employee jobs across the whole economy, which we classify as areas that can accommodate graduates and are likely to make use of their skills and qualifications, has risen from one fifth of all jobs held by women to one third. For men the rise is from 25 per cent to 36 per cent. Given that the total volume of employment has grown by almost one million full-time equivalent jobs, these figures indicate that the number of jobs in the UK economy that we classify within our four graduate categories has increased by well

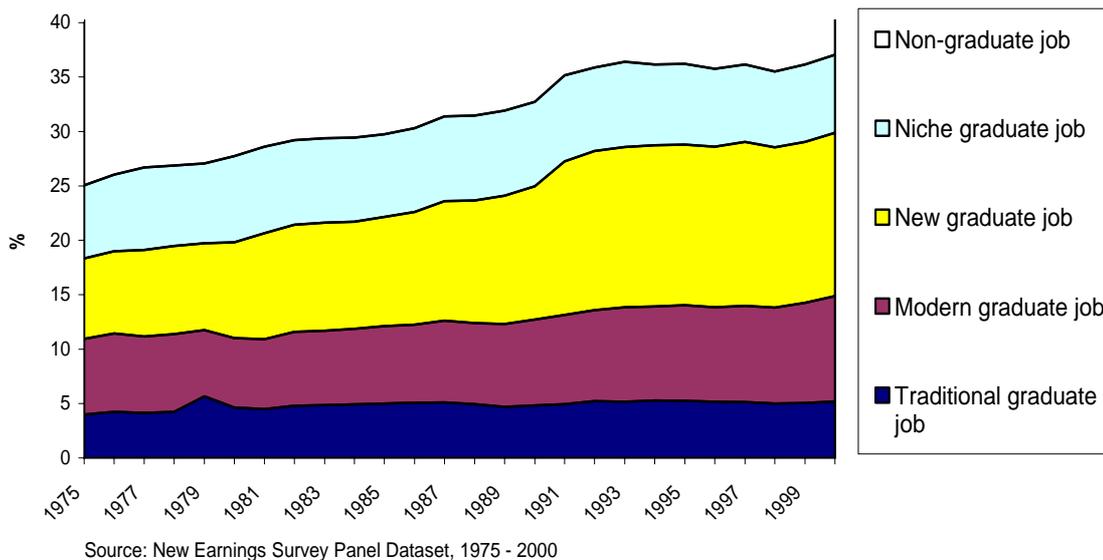
<sup>4</sup> The NES is approximately a one per cent sample of employees, covering the United Kingdom and available for each year since 1975. From 1975 to 1990 the New Earnings Survey utilised a classification of occupations known as the Key List of Occupations for Statistical Purpose (KOS). In 1990, occupations were coded to both KOS and the 1990 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 90). Using this cross-classification, earlier years were reclassified to unit groups of SOC90. These unit groups map to our graduate occupational classification.

over 3 million between 1975 and 2000. This indicates the sheer scale of the process of restructuring work and reskilling within the UK labour market.

**Figure 2.1: Changing composition of employment, 1975-2000**  
Female employment



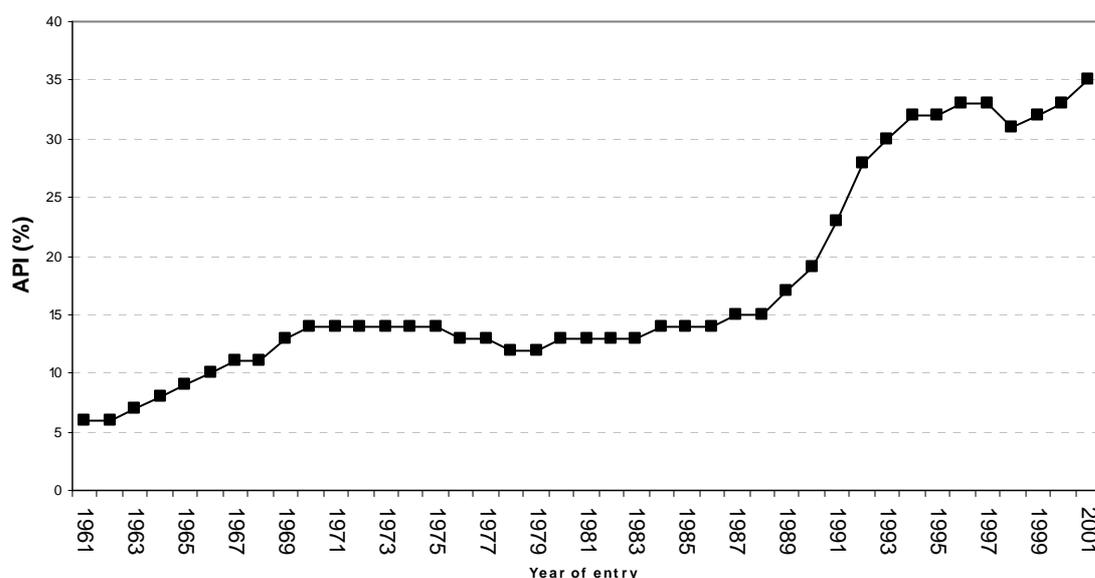
Male employment



### 2.3 Social class, gender, graduate employment and family formation

The remarkable changes that are recorded in the occupational structure over the past 25 years have two important consequences. First, and most obviously, they provide new and expanded opportunities for those who gain a higher education qualification. Conversely, the labour market prospects for those without access to higher education may have become more limited. There is another more subtle mechanism at work though, that mediates the choices young men and women make to enter higher education – the role of social class. Restructuring of the economy - away from heavy manufacturing towards services - and a long period of economic growth, with an associated rise in disposable incomes, have shifted the social structure markedly. The resulting shift towards a more 'middle-class' society may also have accelerated the demand for higher education, a demand that was fuelled by the expansion of higher education places throughout the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Figure 2.2 reveals the scale of the increase in participation by young people, showing the major rise that took place through the 1990s.

**Figure 2.2: Participation by young people in Higher Education, Age Participation Index<sup>5</sup> (API) Great Britain, 1961 to 2001**



Sources: Department for Education and Skills, Trends in Education and Skills ([www.dfes.gov.uk/trends](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/trends)), Wilson (2000).

<sup>5</sup> The Age Participation Index (API) measures the number of home domiciled young (aged under 21) initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses, expressed as a proportion of the average 18 to 19 year old Great Britain population. This measure has now been superseded by the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate, which measures the initial participation of 17-30 year olds in Higher Education (where such participation is on courses expected to last at least 6 months and the actual participation exceeds 6 months), recording a continued rise in participation from 41 per cent in 1999/2000 to a provisional rate of 44 per cent in 2002/03.

Given the magnitude of this increase, some have argued that the labour market has been 'saturated' with graduates, that graduates now take non-graduate jobs and that graduate earnings, relative to those of non-graduates, are now in rapid decline (Brown and Hesketh 2004). Our earlier work showed that this was not the case. Graduate earnings have declined relative to those of non-graduates, but the graduate earnings premium is, on average, still high by international standards (Blöndal *et al.* 2002). For those leaving higher education, the process of finding and moving in to suitable employment may be slow, but there is little evidence to support the view that the labour market has been swamped with graduates as a result of this expansion (Elias and Purcell 2004). Economic growth, technological change and organisational restructuring have provided opportunities for the highly educated to move into jobs which make use of their high level skills and knowledge (Purcell *et al.* 2005). For this reason and despite the increased costs to the individual and his/her family, the route into higher education is increasingly popular, with almost 40 per cent of those under the age of thirty now opting for a high level qualification. Simultaneously, fertility rates declined rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, stabilising at about 1.75 children per woman since the 1980s. In part, this reflects the increased participation in higher education as highly educated couples postpone family formation or choose to remain childless. Recent estimates of the average age at first birth for women with a degree indicate that this is now well into her mid thirties<sup>6</sup> – the years when female fertility potential begins to decline. A picture is emerging in which most women and men will benefit from tertiary education and will lead prosperous lives with fewer children than was the case for earlier generations.

This could well be a misleading scenario. Higher education is still the preserve of the minority. The majority of young people, particularly those from lower social class backgrounds, do not follow this route<sup>7</sup>. For them, the choices include employment following secondary education, partnership and, for many, an early start to a period of family formation. Fertility rates have always been higher and childbearing starts at a younger age for those from lower social backgrounds, but the postponement of family formation by those with a degree could be widening the gap between the classes. Despite attempts to encourage access, it appears to be the case that higher education remains the preserve of the middle classes. As a consequence, concerns have been expressed that the expansion of higher education will broaden the gulf between rich and poor (Blanden *et al.* 2005). Those who have the resources, via their parental background, will move through higher education, get well paid jobs, and postpone family plans until they are well into their thirties, building their financial and cultural capital significantly prior to family formation. Those who do not follow

<sup>6</sup> While the overall pattern of their first births remains to be determined, Rendall *et al.* (2005) show that the mean age at first birth for a cohort of women in England and Wales with a university level education and born between 1964 and 1968 could well be in the range 34 to 36 years.

<sup>7</sup> Estimates prepared by the Department for Education and Skills show that participation rates in higher education rose for 35 per cent to 50 per cent for young people from social classes I, II and III M (the non-manual classes) between 1991/2 and 2001/2. For young people from a manual class background the increase over this same period was from 11 per cent to 19 per cent (Summerfield and Babb 2004).

this route will find themselves relegated to lower status jobs as graduates 'crowd out' the middle ground within the labour market, will commence family formation with insufficient private resources to fund their children's education, potentially polarising the impact of higher education within the social class structure.

In the following section we attempt to shed light on these trends. How has the class structure shifted in response to the restructuring of the UK labour market over the past twenty years? Is the expansion of higher education a middle class phenomenon, or has expansion facilitated the entry of the working class into the ranks of the highly qualified? How have these trends facilitated women's participation in higher education? To what extent is a woman's decision to enter higher education related to the postponement of family formation plans, or is this more closely linked with the type of jobs young women hold rather than their education? Are fertility rates among women without degrees significantly higher than for those with degrees, and how have these rates been changing through time? Detailed information on these trends is sparse, not simply because the phenomena under consideration are recent, but because of the need to obtain information that is both longitudinal in nature and facilitates cross cohort comparisons. For this reason we make use of a large national longitudinal study covering residents of England and Wales.

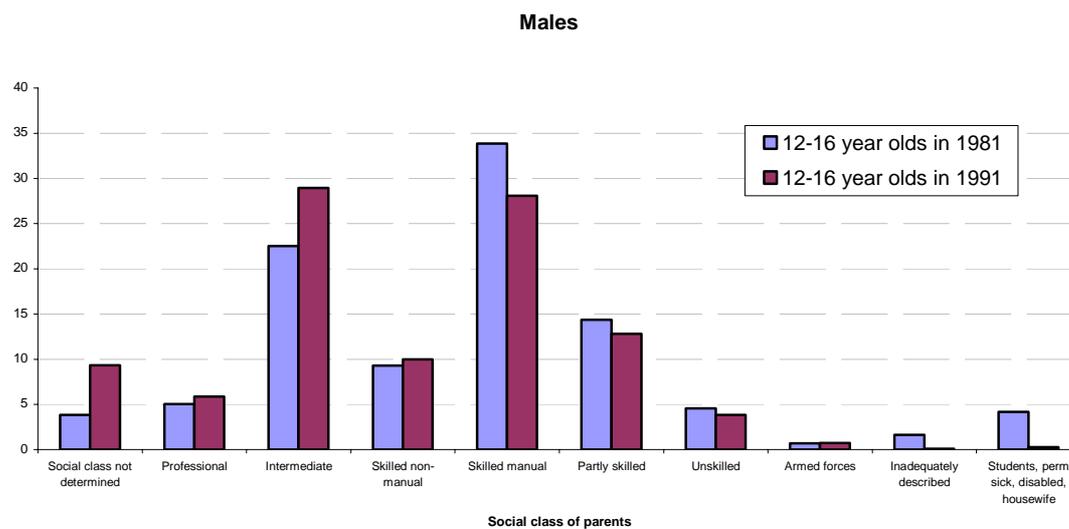
## **2.4    *The Census Longitudinal Study***

The England and Wales Census Longitudinal Study (LS) spans the period from 1971 to 2001. It consists of the linked census records of all persons born on four specific birthdays spread throughout the year (known as 'LS members'). Through this source we are able to explore the changes that have taken place in the social background, education, labour market status and family-building patterns shown by young people over the past twenty years. Linkage has been achieved for the national population censuses held in England and Wales in 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001. The linked data are supplemented with information on births, marriages and deaths occurring in the periods between the censuses. Information for all other persons living in the LS members' household is also held within the database. As such, it is an approximate one per cent sample of the population, covering approximately 800,000 people.

For the purpose of this study, a number of age cohorts were defined. Data for 1971 were not used due to problems of comparability of social class and education. For 1981 and 1991, two age cohorts were selected. These were: all LS members aged 12-16 years in 1981 and all LS members aged 12-16 years in 1991. Each group is further restricted to those who are living in the parental household at the time of the census and for whom at least one parent was present. For the former group, their status in 1991 (aged 22-26) and 2001 (aged 32-36) was available from the LS database. For comparative purposes a further cohort studied consists of those aged 22-26 in 1981. Within this database a wide range of variables is

available, both directly from census questions and variables derived from this information. Social class falls into the latter category, being constructed from information in the census on occupation, status in employment and establishment size. 'Social background' is defined as the social class of the father of a child aged 12-16 years. If no father is present, the mother's social class is attributed to the child. We make use of the Registrar General's definition of social class, given that this is available for the period 1981 to 2001<sup>8</sup>.

**Figure 2.3: Changes in the social class background of young people: a comparison of 12-16 year old in England and Wales in 1981 and 1991, by gender**



**Error! Not a valid link.**

<sup>8</sup> The newer National Statistics Socio-economic Classification is only available for 1991 and 2001 Census information in the LS.

## 2.5 ***Changes in the social class structure of 12-16 year olds between 1981 and 1991***

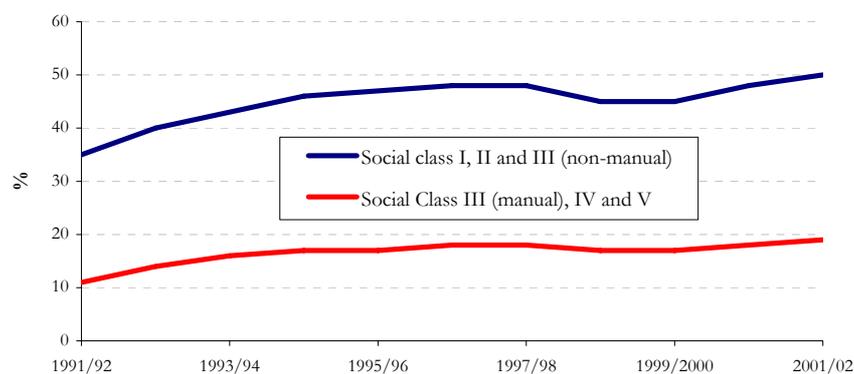
Figure 2.3 reveals the changes that have taken place in the social class structure of these young people over the decade from 1981 to 1991. While comparisons are made difficult by the greater number of young people for whom their social class background could not be determined in 1991, it is evident that major growth in the 'intermediate' class has occurred as the employment of parents in the skilled manual and partly skilled manual classes declined over this decade. Surprisingly, little growth is seen in the professional class between 1981 and 1991. For both boys and girls, their social class background moved markedly towards the middle classes over this ten year period, with the proportion in Social Classes I, II and IIIM rising by about 7 to 8 percentage points over the decade. Despite this movement, 45 per cent of these young people in England and Wales had a social class background which can be characterised as manual working class in 1991<sup>9</sup>.

While the shift in social class structure is likely to have increased the demand for higher education (HE), given that participation in higher education is strongly associated with parental education and social class, the scale of the increase in HE provision is such that it is likely to have been involved all social groups. Figure 2.4, which makes use of information about social background provided by applicants to higher education on their application forms, together with estimates of the population of young people, shows that from 1991/2 to 2001/2, this was indeed the case. The strong trend growth in HE participation is evident, yet the rate of growth has been much slower among the manual classes than the non-manual classes<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Connor *et al.* (2005) report that the proportion of the total UK working population in social classes IIIM, IV and V is 39 per cent, considerably lower than the 45 per cent shown in Figure 1 for both males and females. This is because the social background of young people reflects higher fertility rates among mothers in social groups IIIM, IV and V, together with the continuing decline in the size of these social class groups between 1991 and 2000 – the date Connor *et al.* measure the social structure of the UK working population.

<sup>10</sup> RG Social class categories I, II and IIIN are referred to as the 'non-manual' class groups; categories IIIM, IV and V are the 'manual' classes.

**Figure 2.4: Participation rates in higher education: by social class, Great Britain**

Note: For students aged under 25, social class is determined by their parent's occupation. For students aged 25 and over, social class is determined by own occupation.

Source: Department for Education and Skills (Summerfield and Babb 2004).

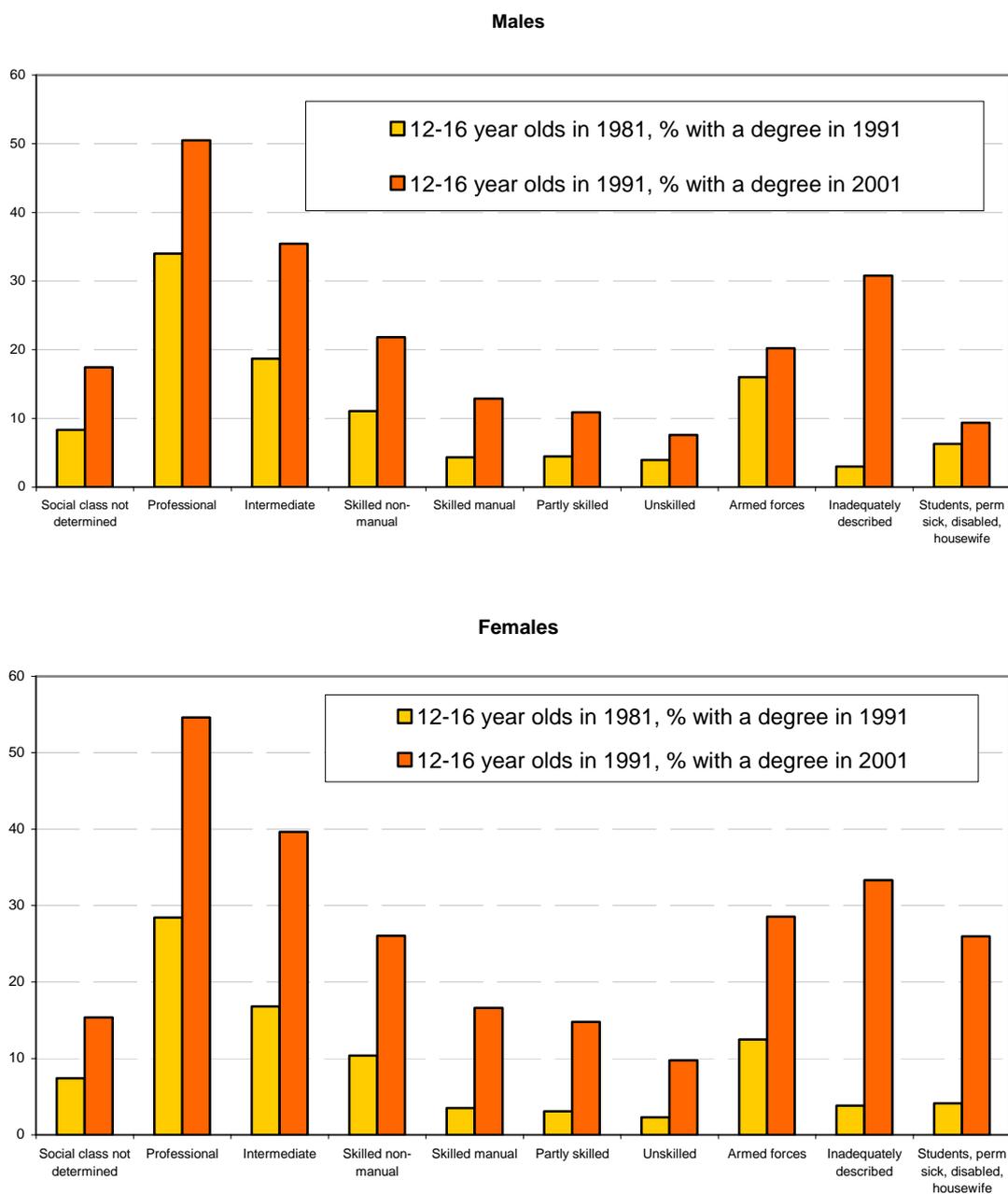
But what is the gender composition of these trends? Figure 2.5 steps back a decade, using the LS cohorts to explore the rise in participation in higher education for the social class groups that took place in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, separately for men and women. Two cohorts of young people are tracked as they move out of the 12-16 age group and in to the 22 to 26 age group. The first of these is the cohort of young people captured in the 1981 Census and again in the 1991 Census, the second is the similar age group captured first in the 1991 Census and again in 2001. Here we show, for men and women, the proportion of each social class group (as measured via their parent's occupations when they were aged 12 to 16 years) that has acquired a degree ten years later when aged 22 to 26.

Examining first the older cohort that obtained their degrees in the period from 1985 to 1991 (those aged 12-16 years in 1981), a sharp distinction is evident across the social classes. Those from professional backgrounds were much more likely to hold a degree by the time they have reached their early twenties than for other social classes. The two other non-manual class groups had progressively lower rates of participation in higher education. The gap between the manual and non-manual classes is extreme. Young men and women from social classes III, IV and V had only a one in twenty five chance of holding a degree compared with a one in four chance for those from the non-manual classes.

The growth in participation in higher education that took place over this decade is very clear from comparison across the two cohorts. In the space of ten years it can be seen that all social groups have experienced a rise in participation, compared with their counterparts from ten years earlier. Young women in particular show the impact of their increased participation, as they surpass the participation rates of men in *all* social groups, but this growth is concentrated among the higher social groups. The largest increase was among those with a professional background – with their participation in higher education rising by as much as

twenty percentage points for young men and almost thirty percentage points for young women compared with the same age groups of men and women ten years earlier.

**Figure 2.5: Tracking two youth cohorts (12-16 year olds in 1981 and 12-16 year olds in 1991): percentage with a degree ten years later, by social class and gender**



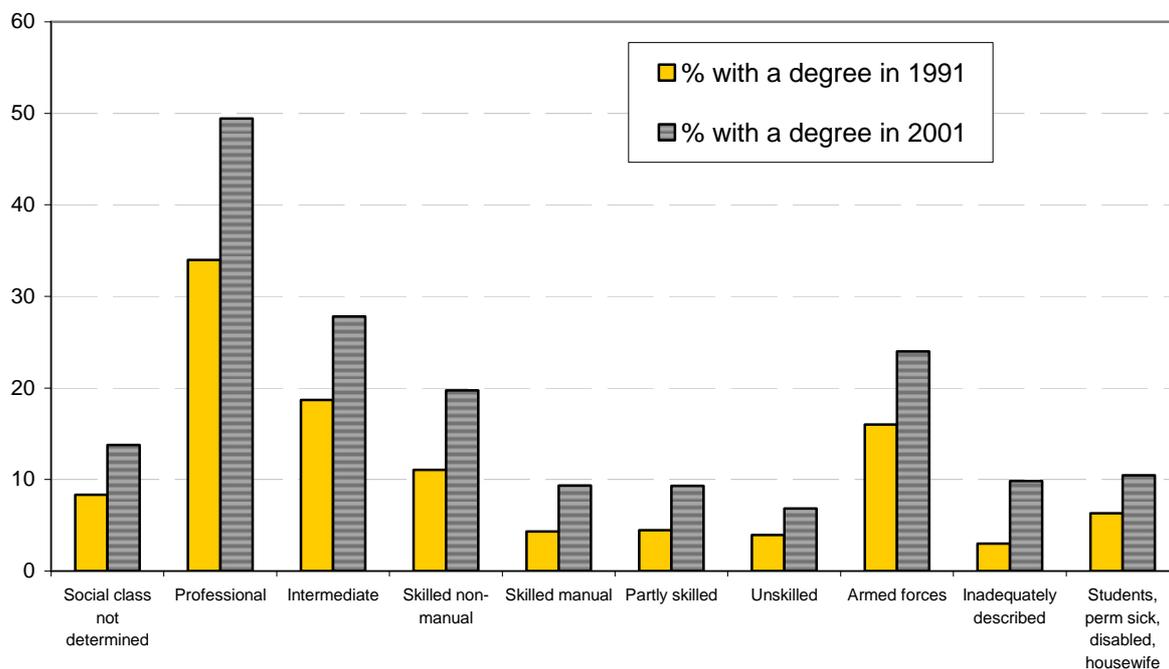
However, the growth in participation in higher education has not been restricted to those taking the traditional route - entry into higher education immediately upon completion of secondary education at age 18 or 19. Many people now enter higher education after a period spent working or travelling. Some participate whilst in employment, on secondment from a job. Information on admissions to university reveals that the participation of 'mature students' (those aged over 21 on first entry to university), has increased rapidly over the past decade.

Evidence of the extent of this later entry into higher education can be seen from an examination of Figure 2.6, which continues to track the progress of the cohort of 12-16 year olds in 1981 as measured by their educational qualifications at the time of the 1991 census (as was shown in Figure 2.5) and, ten years later again, at the 2001 census. The further increase in the proportion holding a degree in 2001, compared with 1991, is significant. As the cohort ages from 22-26 years in 1991 to 32-36 years in 2001, the increase in the proportion who gained a degree after the date of the 1991 census is similar to the increase shown across the age cohorts in Figure 2.5, between ages 12-16 and 22-26 years. Looking first at men, it is apparent that it is in the non-manual classes again that the increase in degree holding among this older age group is concentrated. The proportion holding a degree among those from professional backgrounds had risen to almost a half. There is little evidence here to support the notion that those from the lower social backgrounds catch up with the non-manual classes through later participation in higher education. For women, a similar picture is apparent, with the higher social groups adding an extra 10 to 15 per cent to the proportion holding degrees by the time they are aged 32-36 years.

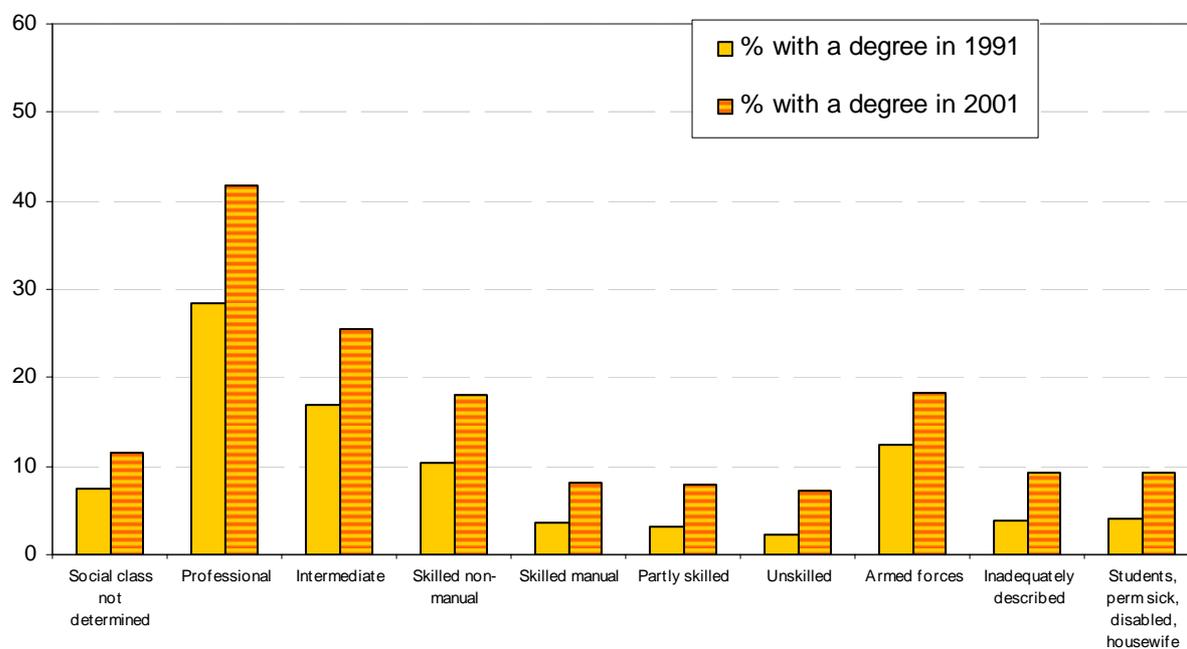
These data show that the impact of social class on participation in higher education has been and probably continues to be marked. In terms of gender, social class appears neutral in this respect, in so far as both men and women from the higher social groups have benefited disproportionately from the expansion of higher education. While women have increased their participation in higher education at a faster rate than men, and this has taken place across all social groups, the extent of the increase among the higher social groups is pronounced.

**Figure 2.6: Mature students – the increase in degree holding between 1991 and 2001 for 12-16 year olds in 1981, by social class and gender**

**Males**



**Females**

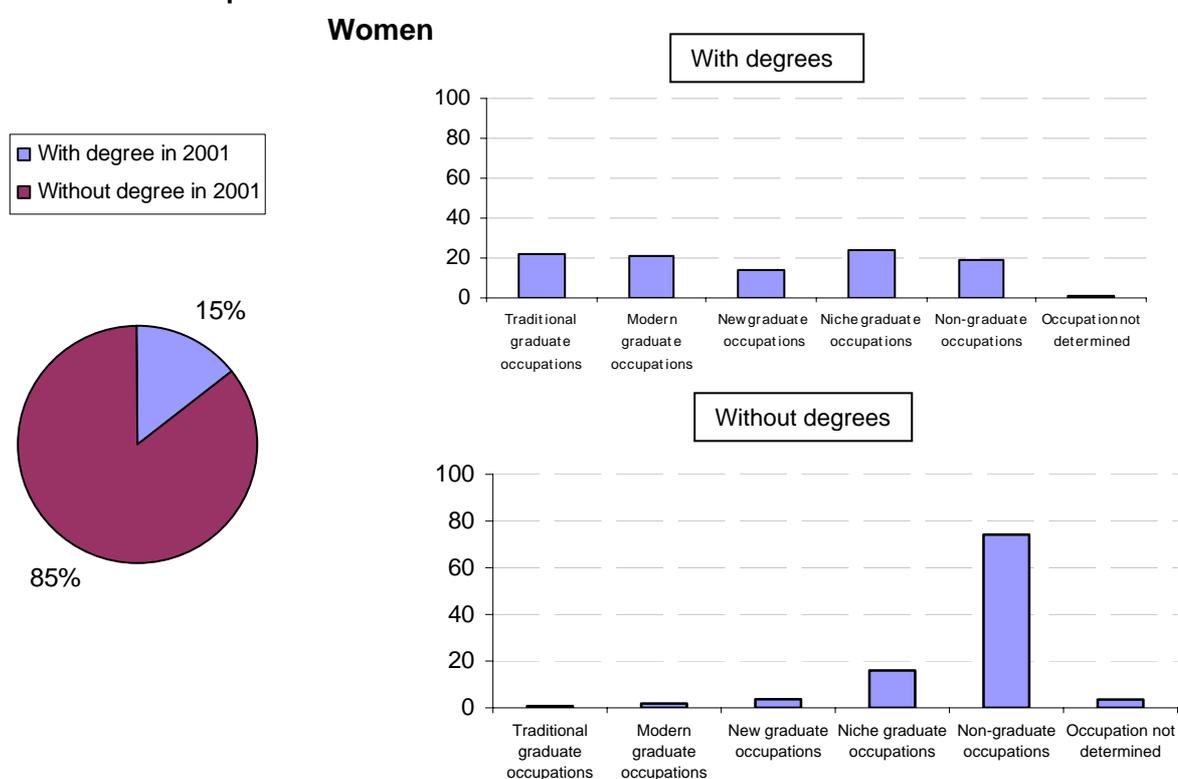


## 2.6 Gender, occupations and higher education

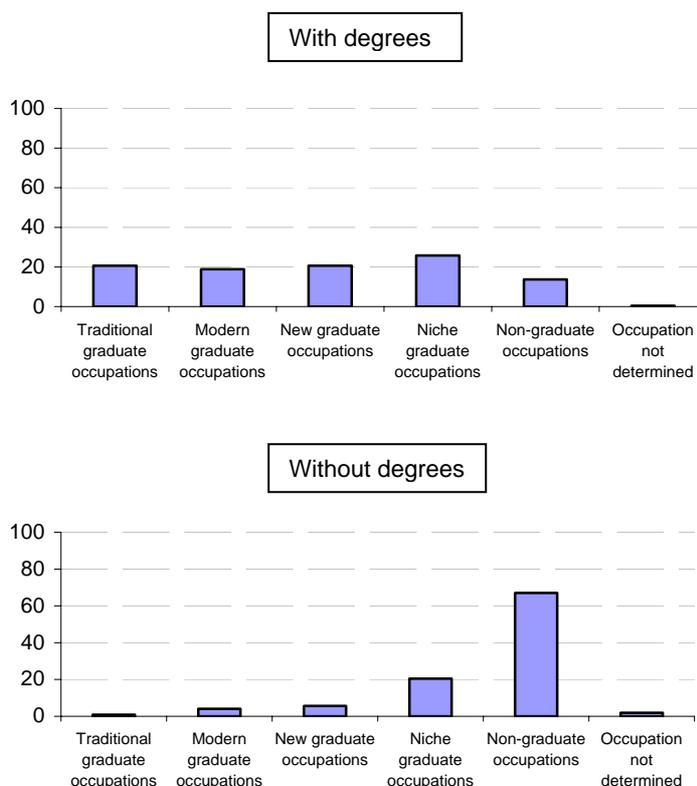
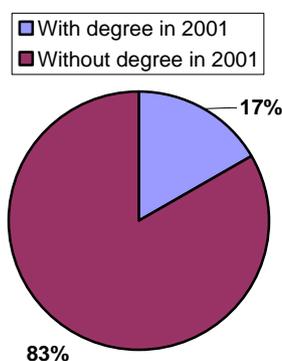
We turn now to an examination of the types of jobs held by those who had gained a degree by 2001. For this purpose we focus upon the cohort of 12-16 year olds in 1981 - many of whom had, as shown in Figure 2.4, participated in higher education throughout the period from 1981 to 2001. We classify the jobs they reported holding in 2001 into the four 'graduate job' categories of SOC(HE), the classification of graduate occupations described in section 2.2.

For this age group (32-36 years by 2001), 15 per cent of the women and 17 per cent of the men had a degree by 2001. For the graduates, their distribution across the four graduate categories of SOC(HE) is interesting. Traditional and modern graduate jobs were held by over 40 per cent of these graduates, with almost 20 per cent in non-graduate jobs, a somewhat higher proportion than that recorded in recent surveys of graduate careers conducted in 1998/9 and 2003/04 (Elias *et al.* 1999, Purcell *et al.* 2004). Niche graduate occupations accounted for up to 22 per cent of the jobs held, slightly higher than the proportion of those without a degree found in this same occupational category. The picture for men is similar, except for the fact that more male non-graduates in this age group found themselves in jobs classified as graduate jobs in 2001 and fewer male graduates were recorded as having non-graduate jobs.

**Figure 2.7** 12-16 year olds in 1981, by gender and whether or not has a degree and occupation held in 2001



## Men



### 2.7 Higher education, occupations and motherhood

In terms of the broad trends in access to higher education and subsequent entry into the labour market, the evidence revealed from the Census Longitudinal Study does not indicate that there are major differences in these patterns between men and women. Both men and women have shared in the increase in participation in higher education, particularly for the higher social groups, and by far the majority of both men and women graduates have gained access to graduate level jobs. However, there is a further important aspect to these longitudinal data that we can draw upon – the transition to motherhood for women<sup>11</sup>. Figure 2.8 shows the transition to motherhood for the cohort of 22-26 year olds in 1981, revealing the proportions that have had a child (or children) by 1991, when they are aged 32 to 36. Within this cohort, and for those who held a job at the time of the 1991 census, a distinction is made between those who have degrees and those who do not, and by type of occupation (SOC(HE)) held in 1991. Similar information is shown in Figure 2.9 for the same age group

<sup>11</sup> The Census Longitudinal Study records whether or not there are children present in the household at each census date. However, this is not a precise indicator of fertility, given that some children may live outside the parental home, and some may be adopted or fostered. A better indication is obtained from the records of births that are matched to the LS for all births to women LS members. This information was used to create a variable indicating whether or not a female LS member had had a live birth.

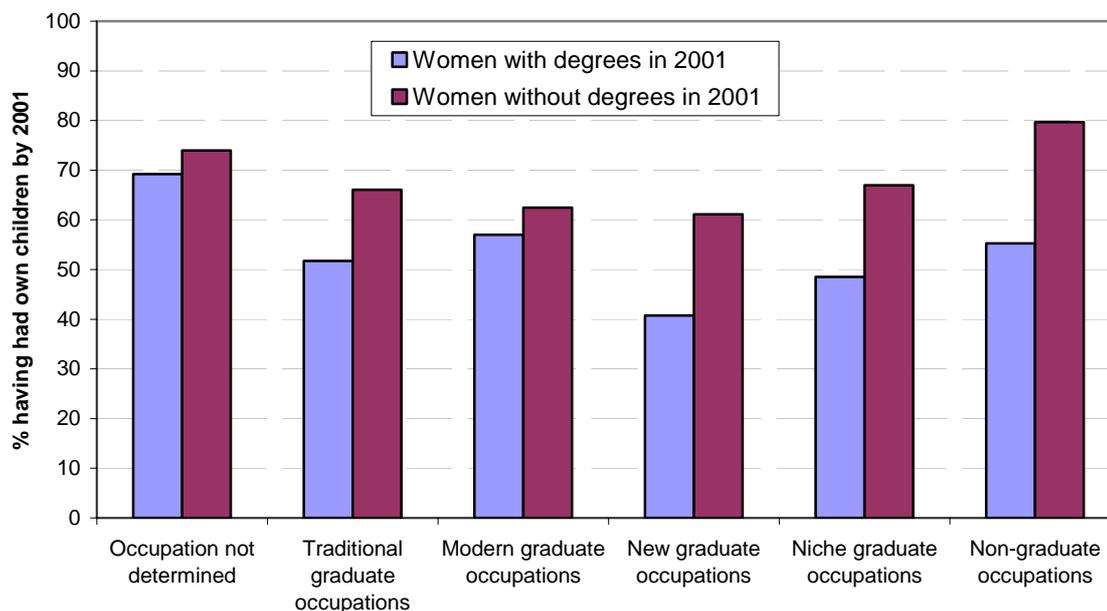
some ten years later – women aged 12-16 years in 1981, again showing whether or not they have had children by the time they are aged 32-36 years in 2001.

The most apparent feature revealed by this analysis is the lower rate of childbearing among women with degrees, typically some five to fifteen percentage points lower for women who have gained a degree than for those without. The lower rate of childbearing among graduates becomes more pronounced in the later cohort, those who were aged 32-36 in 2001. The proportion of graduates aged 32-36 years and without a birth has fallen considerably in this ten year period, by as much as 10 percentage points. The occupational distribution is also of interest, in that family formation rates are lowest among those women who are working in the 'new' graduate occupations. The highest rate of childbearing is among women who are working in non-graduate occupations and do not have degrees. For 32-36 year olds in 1991 and for this same age group in 2001, the rate remains the same at 80 per cent. Interestingly, for women who have a degree who are working in non-graduate occupations, family formation rates are 25 percentage points lower in 2001 than for women who do not have degrees.

**Figure 2.8: The transition to motherhood: 22-26 year old women in 1981 by whether or not have had own children by 1991, by degree and occupation**



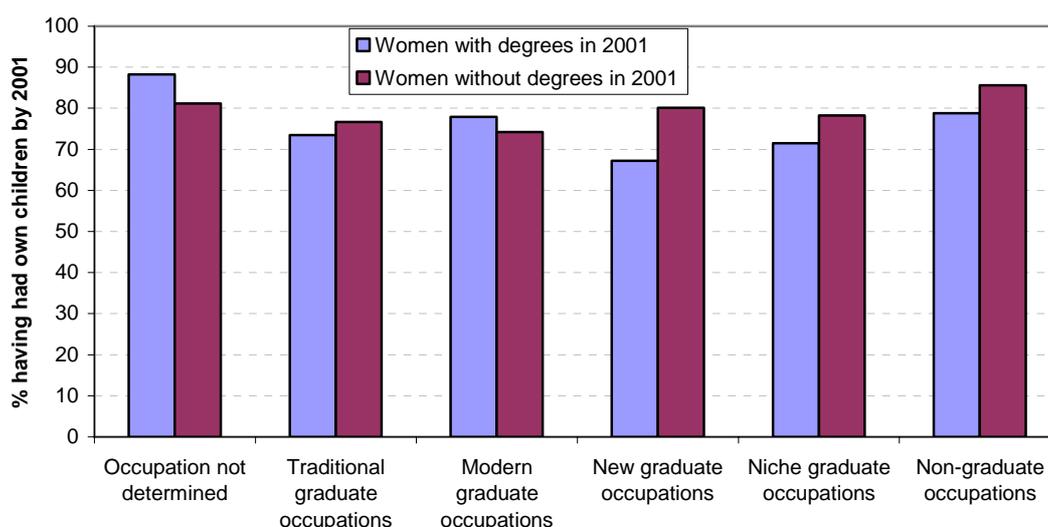
**Figure 2.9: The transition to motherhood: 12-16 year old women in 1981 by whether or not have had own children by 2001, by degree and occupation**



Finally, we investigate the issue of whether or not the observed lower rates of family formation among graduates are a consequence of postponing family formation to a later age, with a rapid period of family-building coming later in the fertile years. To shed light on this, we analyse information on the completion of motherhood for the cohort for whom this is a reasonable assumption – those who have reached 42-46 years by 2001. This is the cohort of women shown in Figure 2.8, observed ten years later at the time of the 2001 census. Recent research (Simpson 2006) indicates that, for all women in the UK currently reaching the end of their reproductive years (those born in 1958), around one in five remains childless, compared to one in ten of women born in the mid-1940s. Analysis of the Census Longitudinal Study for the cohort of women tracked in this study since they were first observed aged 12-16 years in 1981 (those born in the period 1965 to 1969) indicates that 25 per cent of those with a degree had not had children of their own. The comparable rate for non graduates was 16 per cent. However, we observe significant variations in this rate according to the type of job the woman reported that she held at the time of the census in 2001, as shown in Figure 2.10. For those who were not working at the time of the 2001 census (labelled as ‘occupation not determined’ in Figure 2.10), the rate of childlessness among 42-46 year old women in 2001 was 20 per cent for those without degrees, but is lower than this for those with degrees, indicating that there is some ‘catching up’ among older graduates in terms of fertility. However, this is a very small group, representing only 2.5 per cent of all women graduates in this age group in 2001. The rates of childlessness among those graduates who were working at the time of the 2001 Census remains surprisingly high, especially for those working in ‘new’ and ‘*niche*’ graduate occupations - jobs which form the bulk of the increase in graduate occupations. It is remarkable that one third of women graduates working in these jobs have not had children by

the time they are aged 42-46 years. The other occupational group showing a high rate of childlessness consists of those graduates working in *niche* graduate occupations, with 29 per cent not having had children of their own by the time they reached this age range. Taken together, 37 per cent of women graduates aged 42-46 years were working in these two occupational areas in 2001 and just over 30 per cent were without children of their own. Interestingly, the variations in childlessness across the different occupation groups are almost as wide as the variation between graduates and non-graduates. It appears to be the case, therefore, that the decision to undertake a higher education and to gain a degree undoubtedly leads to a general reduction in fertility. The more important observation made here though is that the type of work one does, and the nature of the employer, have almost as big an impact on fertility decisions as does the decision to participate in higher education – and the qualitative data discussed later in this report provides some clues as to why this might be the case.

**Figure 2.10: The completion of motherhood: 22-26 year old women in 1981 by whether or not have had own children by 2001, by degree and occupation**



## 2.8 Summary

This chapter sets the scene for subsequent research findings presented in this report. It indicates the extent of the rise in participation in higher education and the strong social class influence on such increased participation. Economic restructuring has two significant impacts over the past 20 years. First, it has led to a major increase in the number of jobs for which a high level education is an advantage. The expansion of the higher education system in the 1990s coincided with this significant shift in the structure of employment, away from manual jobs in heavy manufacturing to jobs in sectors which make use of graduate skills and knowledge, or build upon the qualities that graduates can bring to the labour market. Second,

it has shifted the social class structure away from the manual classes, thereby creating a greater pool of potential entrants to higher education. However, it would be incorrect to typify these changes as beneficial in terms of equitable access to higher education. The shift away from the manual class, while significant, still leaves more than half the population in the manual class categories. We do not observe any major differences between the sexes in these trends, apart from the more rapid rate of increase of women in higher education, to the point that they now outnumber men entering higher education.

The restructuring of the labour market has greatly facilitated the increased employment of women. Female employment in both full-time and part-time jobs rose rapidly throughout the period from 1980 to 2000. We show how the occupational structure has shifted over the last 25 years, with a strong growth in those occupational areas which can absorb the increased numbers of graduates. The main area of growth for women has been in the group of occupations we term 'new' graduate jobs – jobs which previously recruited non-graduates but which now require graduate skills and knowledge, not simply because of the greater supply of graduates, but because of the way in which the work involved in these jobs requires the variety of skills and expertise that graduates bring to the labour market. Many such jobs exist in both the public and private sectors, (e.g. social workers, sales managers)

The rise in participation in higher education has benefited women. Female participation in higher education now outstrips that of men. In the early stage of the rise in educational participation that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this was in part a process of women 'catching up' with men given their historically low rate of participation. But they now exceed men in terms of the proportions of the age cohort deciding to gain a university-level education, with little sign that this process will slow down.

The growth of participation in higher education has been concentrated within the higher social groups. Both men and women from the non-manual classes have benefited disproportionately from the growth of participation in higher education. While those from the lower social class backgrounds have seen some rise in the proportion of their children choosing to go to university, the increase has nowhere near approximated that observed among the higher social class groups.

While the evidence we now have on social class and educational participation is worrying, the finding was widely anticipated and will come as no surprise to those responsible for the admission of entrants to higher education. Where we do have new and striking evidence from the Census Longitudinal Study relates to the link between fertility and higher education. With declining fertility generally, recent research has estimated that approximately 20 per cent of women will remain childless. For those who gain a degree, we show evidence of the postponement of family formation but, more importantly, we show that the proportion who

were still without children when aged 42-46 years in 2001 was 25 per cent, compared with 16 per cent for non graduates. For those without a degree and working in the 'new' graduate occupations – the main source of jobs for many female graduates, the proportion was as high as 33 per cent. This is a remarkable finding, which brings into question the link between graduate skills and knowledge, the demands that particular types of work place on graduates and the problem of reconciling work and family life. For more than 30 per cent of women graduates who had just passed through their child-bearing period and who were working in new and *niche* graduate jobs (well over a third of all female graduates in this age range in 2001), the outcome was obvious and final. The question we must seek to answer in the later chapters of this report relates to the extent to which this was a preferred course of action, or a response to a situation that they could only avoid by remaining childless.

Looking through the glass ceiling

## Chapter 3

### Measuring equality

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the career outcomes of the graduates of 1995 and 1999, in particular focusing on the characteristics of jobs that respondents from these cohorts were doing at the time of the respective surveys. We examine outcomes for the cohorts as a whole but specifically present new data that evaluates outcomes for different groups within the cohort that make male/female comparisons more salient. For example, we examine the impact on outcomes according to different educational attainment, public or private sector employment, and look at differences among those entering a range of different professions.

#### **3.2 An 'index of access' to employment opportunities**

There is a range of mediating factors that influence employment outcome: some relatively objective, such as educational attainment and other formal qualifications; others more subjective, such as the value of work-related experience and social skills; and other even less tangible, such as gender itself and social class background. Individuals will have differing levels of access to employment opportunities based on the complex interplay of such factors. Since the focus of this report is to examine issues relating to career development into and beyond middle-level professional and managerial roles (sometimes characterised posts where the route to them is obstructed by a 'glass ceiling' which 'non-traditional' applicants such as women find hard to pass through. It is necessary to compare men and women with similar degrees of access to these 'top' jobs, or at least those who, in theory, have the formal prerequisites to be considered as potential applicants for them. To compare career and job attributes amongst highly-qualified men and women, we identified those graduates who had a wide range of career options and opportunities; to isolate those graduates who were attractive to a wide range of employers according to their credentials. We compare these graduates with those who fared less well in education and subsequently, were likely to have had fewer options on entering the labour market, in order to map access to different parts of the segmented graduate labour market. To better understand the labour market for men and women who achieved high levels of educational success and who, by this measure, have access to the widest range of employment opportunities post-graduation we have devised an 'index of access'.

At the point of graduation, educational experiences and credentials constitute the explicit capital that graduates take into the labour market. As a shorthand for one aspect of educational capital, that of tangible outcomes, we have combined the educational

achievement of the graduates in our sample, their degree class – known to be influential in employers' evaluation of degree quality – and the type of higher education institution (HEI) where the qualification was gained. Their achievement has been calculated using the tariff point system used by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and HEIs to assess the relative achievements and potential of course applicants. Although the current scoring formula was not in operation when the classes of '99 and '95 completed their secondary education, the relative value of their qualifications can be scored - and this usefully enables us to compare GCE 'A' level and SCE Higher results on a single scale. For our purpose, 'non-standard' entry qualifications, such as BTEC, HND or foundation degrees have not been incorporated into this 'tariff' classification because those graduates who gained entry into higher education via the attainment of these qualifications tend to be a qualitatively different group from those that who a more traditional route, in terms of characteristics such as age, and also in terms of the opportunities they had and the significance of the decision to enter HE, usually as a mature student. This group is therefore defined simply as 'non-standard'. The 'unclassifiable' group are, in general, those graduates who gained entry to their 1995 or 1999 undergraduate courses on the basis of more exceptional routes such as prior attainment of an undergraduate degree. The gender distribution of prior educational attainment according to our classification is presented in Table 1.

**Table 3.1: Prior educational attainment by gender, young graduates only<sup>12</sup>**

	1999 Graduates		1995 Graduates	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
285 UCAS tariff points or more	41.3	42.6	37.2	36.5
201 to 284 UCAS tariff points	21.0	23.4	20.3	28.9
200 UCAS tariff points or less	19.1	17.7	29.8	27.5
Non-standard entry to HE	15.7	12.2	12.8	7.2
Unclassified	2.9	4.1	N/A	N/A

1999 Graduates - N=65272 (weighted); 1995 graduates - N=60395 (weighted)

Table 3.2 shows the distribution of degree class obtained, the second element used to calculate the index of access to employment opportunity.

**Table 3.2: Degree class by gender, young graduates only**

	1999 Graduates		1995 Graduates	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
First class honours	10.7	9.1	10.1	8.1
Upper second	46.0	56.4	47.1	53.6
Lower second	33.0	28.3	32.5	32
Third or lower	10.3	6.2	10.3	6.4

1999 Graduates - N=63460 (weighted); 1995 graduates - N=50849 (weighted)

<sup>12</sup> This chapter focuses only on those graduates from each cohort who graduated before the age of 24 – for older graduates there are likely to be more mediating factors associated with employment success such as prior work experience and family circumstances, which are likely to distort any analysis of differential employment outcomes by gender.

As a final means of differentiating between groups of differing levels of access to employment opportunities we consider the type of higher education institution attended. Previous analysis of these datasets and other research indicates that type of institution attended is likely to have a significant effect on employment outcomes (e.g. Elias *et al.* 2005). Table 3.3 shows the distribution of men and women in each cohort by type of institution, distinguishing between the most elite 'Russell Group' universities which tend to require higher entry grades, other 'old' universities established prior to the 1990s, the 'new' 1992 universities that were mainly established polytechnics and, finally, higher education colleges without (at the time of the survey) the ability to award their own degrees. Some of these last group have subsequently been awarded university status, but at the time of both the surveys discussed in this report, they had not done so.

**Table 3.3: Type of institution attended by gender, young graduates only**

	1999 Graduates		1995 Graduates	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
'Russell Group' University	32.1	29.3	28.7	28.1
Other 'Old' University	22.9	23.3	20.6	21.5
Post-1992 University	42.1	41.3	47.0	44.0
HE College	2.9	6.2	3.7	6.4

1999 Graduates - N=65273 (weighted); 1995 graduates - N=60394 (weighted)

By combining these three measures simply by awarding points according to each aspect of educational attainment (as shown in Table 3.4), graduates who achieved 10 points or more on a combined score<sup>13</sup> were classed as 'high access', the group with the widest range of employment options and the types of graduates actively sought by employers; those with 7-9 points were 'mid-access' labour market entrants and those with 6 points or less are defined as 'low access'.

**Table 3.4: Scoring system for index of access**

POINTS	Prior educational attainment	HE attainment (Degree class)	Type of HEI attended
4	285 UCAS tariff points or more	First	Russell Group University
3	201 to 284 UCAS tariff points	2:1	Other 'Old' University
2	200 UCAS tariff points or less	2:2	Post-1992 University
1	Non-standard entry to HE	Third or lower	HE College

There is a close relationship among these three variables, but although high points in one tend to be associated with high points in the others, there is a complex relationship between the three and none is, in itself, an infallible indicator of ability or outcomes at any stage. For example, the boundaries between 'Russell group', 'old' and new universities and HE colleges is far from caste-like, and depends considerably on subject of study - with some new

<sup>13</sup> For example, a graduate with over 285 UCAS points graduating from a Russell Group university with a first class honours degree would score 12 points.

university courses over-subscribed and requiring similar grades to those at the most prestigious HEIs.

The distribution of graduates according to this index for both cohorts is shown in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5: Distribution of 1999 and 1995 graduates according to 'index of access', young graduates only**

	1999 Graduates		1995 Graduates	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
High Access	32.9	33.5	29.9	31.2
Mid Access	27.8	30.7	43.9	49
Low Access	39.3	35.8	26.3	19.9

1999 Graduates - N=63460 (weighted); 1995 graduates - N=56921 (weighted)

The next section of this chapter is an analysis of the two cohorts by gender utilising this measure of employment opportunity according to education attainment. We focus principally on the 1995 cohort but where appropriate, compare their experiences with those from 1999. In particular, we use the data collected from the equivalent 1999 cohort to investigate whether patterns of inequality change as graduates move further into their careers.

### 3.3 Job quality and employment outcomes

We begin by comparing the job characteristics of male and female graduates from the 1995 cohort, specifically according to the 'index of access' outlined above. We are mainly concerned with those graduates who we deem to be 'high access; those for whom the widest range of potential employment opportunities are available according to their educational capital. Where appropriate we compare this group with the 'mid-access' group to explore the impact of different levels of educational achievement on men and women.

Table 3.6 shows the mean earnings of men and women, from both the 1999 and 1995 cohorts, approximately four and seven years after graduation respectively, according to their level of educational attainment. This demonstrates the significant gender pay gap between men and women reported elsewhere (e.g. Elias *et al.* 2005, Purcell and Elias 2004) evident at all levels of educational attainment.

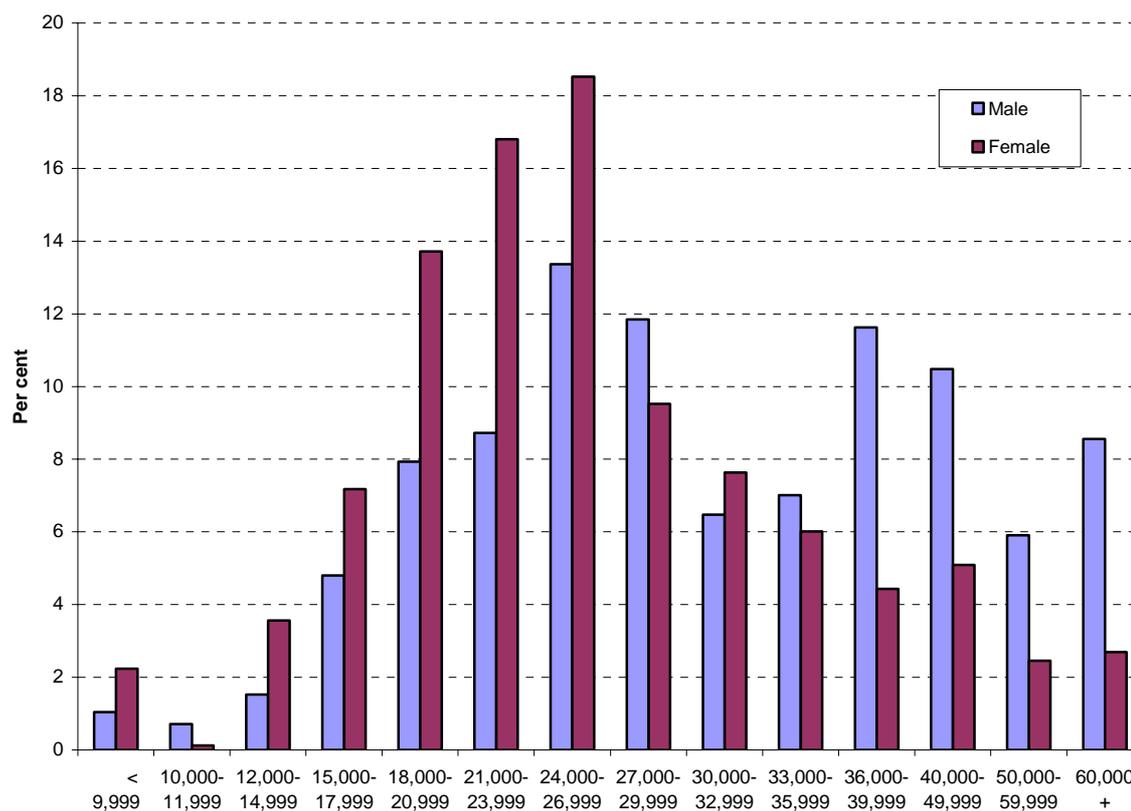
**Table 3.6: Mean earnings according to index of access and gender (Full-time employed, 'young' graduates only)**

	1999 Graduates		1995 Graduates	
	Male (£)	Female (£)	Male (£)	Female (£)
High Access	29250	23940	34116	27052
Mid-access	26167	22579	32754	26116
Low Access	23845	20599	29495	24405

1995 Graduates - N=45236

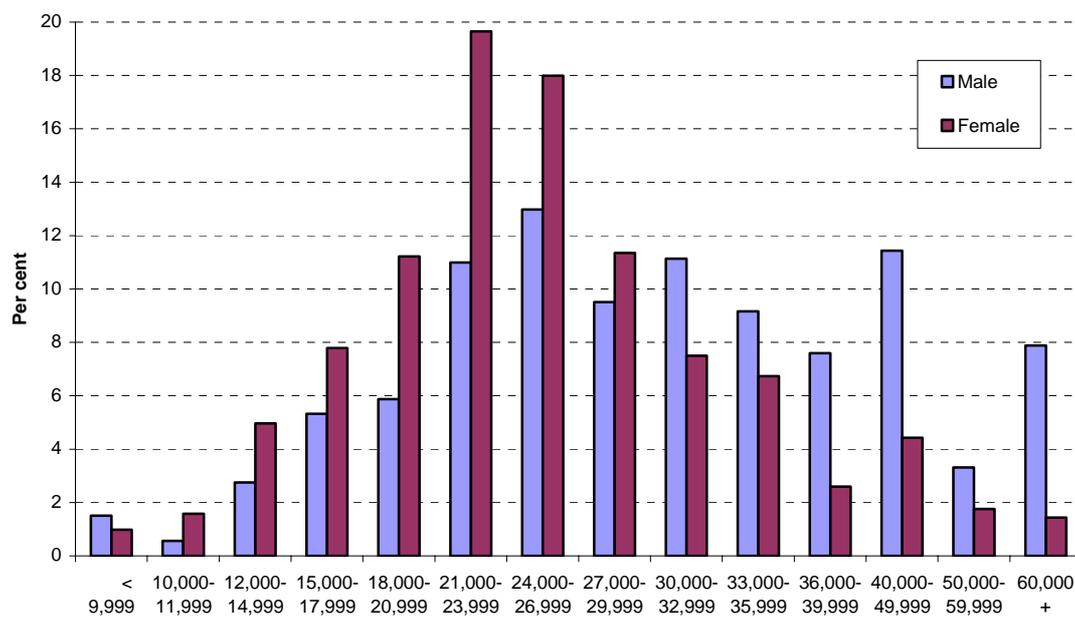
Figures 3.1a and 3.1b show the distribution of earnings of those 'high access' and 'mid-access' 1995 graduates in full-time employment at the time of the survey in 2002, comparing men and women. For both groups, we see a skewing of earnings for men towards the higher end of the scale. This indicates that even when we compare men and women at different levels of educational attainment there is significant disparity in both the distribution and average level of earnings.

**Figure 3.1a: Distribution of earnings of 'high access' 1995 graduates at the time of survey in 2002, comparing males and females**



N=12843 (weighted)

**Figure 3.1b: Distribution of earnings of 'mid-access' 1995 graduates at the time of survey in 2002, comparing males and females**



N=21279 (weighted)

As shown in previous research (Purcell et al. 2005, Purcell and Elias 2004) part of this inequality is likely to reflect the different gender distributions by sector of employment, in particular the greater propensity for women to be employed in the (typically lower-paying) public sector. Table 3.7 shows the broad sector of employment of graduates from both the 1995 and 1999 cohorts at the time of the respective surveys. Regardless of level of 'access' we see a very similar, and pronounced, propensity for women to be employed in the public sector. There is greater tendency for women to be employed in the public sector after seven years compared to four years after graduation. Comparison of the two cohorts shows that, 37 per cent of high access female 1999 graduates were working in the public sector four years after graduation, compared to 45 per cent for 1995 graduates after seven years. Any such movement is not evident for men, who have similar distributions by broad sector at both points. This suggests that there is a movement of female graduates into public sector employment over time, and our subsequent follow-up of a sub-sample of the 1995 sample supports this. A comparison of job characteristics and earnings of men and women contrasting the private and public sector is presented later in this chapter, including qualitative evidence of why some graduates chose to work in the public sector which appears to relate to gendered career choices.

**Table 3.7: Sector of employment of graduates according to index of access and gender (all 'young' graduates in employment)**

	1995 Graduates				1999 Graduates			
	High Access		Mid-access		High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Public sector	24.8	45.1	27.1	44.8	22.2	36.9	26.2	47.7
Private sector	69.5	46.8	68.9	47.9	74.4	53.6	70.5	44.7
Not-for-profit sector	5.7	8.1	4.0	7.3	3.1	8.2	2.4	5.8

N (1995 graduates) = 46664 (weighted); N (1999 graduates) = 58334

Table 3.8 shows a more detailed breakdown of sector of employment. It highlights a very similar pattern of distribution for women across sectors regardless of educational attainment, which is less evident for men. For example, high access men were more likely to work in business services and education than mid access men. For the 1999 cohort, the distribution of men and women in different sectors was largely similar.

**Table 3.8: Industry sector distribution of 1995 graduates according to index of access and gender (all 'young' graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture, mining, quarrying	1.5	1.5	1.0	1.2
Manufacturing	10.9	5.9	13.3	8.6
Electricity, gas, water supply	1.4	0.9	3.1	1.0
Construction (inc civil eng)	3.4	0.7	7.6	1.4
Distribution, hotels, catering	4.4	4.3	6.8	4.9
Transport	1.0	1.3	1.7	0.8
Information, communications tech	14.5	8.7	16.1	10.0
Banking, finance, insurance	15.0	9.4	10.8	6.5
Business services	15.6	13.6	11.5	12.3
Education	14.1	24.1	7.7	25.2
Other public services	13.9	23.6	14.6	23.1
Other	4.2	6.1	5.6	4.9

N=46688 (weighted)

To investigate the types of jobs that men and women enter after graduation we use a number of different classifications to explore occupational distribution. Firstly, we consider the 1995 sample using the major group classification of the standard UK occupational classification (SOC2000) used to monitor labour market change nationally (Table 3.9). In terms of the occupational 'level' of graduates in our sample there is little difference between men and women with apparently similar access, which suggests that there is no indication that men and women are working at different occupational levels likely to warrant different levels of remuneration. For the 1999 graduates, high access women were approximately twice as likely as men to be in administrative employment at this earlier stage. For mid-access graduates the most obvious disparity was the higher proportion of males working in

professional occupations and greater propensity of female graduates to be in associate professionals.

**Table 3.9: SOC2000 Major Group of 1995 graduates according to index of access and gender (All 'young' graduates in employment)**

	1995 Graduates				1999 Graduates			
	High Access		Mid-access		High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Managers and Senior Officials	18.3	17.8	20.9	17	14.9	12.5	16.0	9.7
Professional Occupations	49.3	45.3	38.1	43.6	50.2	44.4	44.5	35.8
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	22.4	22.0	28.2	27.9	26.3	29.4	25.5	37.5
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	5.4	7.0	7.1	7.5	5.7	10.1	8.6	11.1
Other Occupations	2.6	3.2	2.6	2.1	2.9	3.6	5.4	5.9

N (1995 graduates) =47005 (weighted); N (1999 graduates) = 55817 (weighted)

We next consider the occupational distribution of respondents according to the occupationally-based classification used since 2001 for all UK official statistics and surveys, the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NSSEC) as presented in Table 3.10. This classification is of limited analytical value given that the vast majority of graduates in the survey were employed in the highest group, but again we find that there was relative similarity between men and women according to their level of education attainment. However, for high access graduates there was a marginally higher proportion of men in managerial and professional occupations (although this was reversed for mid-access graduates) which undoubtedly reflects the different distribution of women and men in the professions (particularly the high proportion of female graduates who were teachers).

**Table 3.10: NSSEC classification of current job, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Managerial and professional occupations	88.4	83.1	82.5	85.5
Intermediate occupations	6.7	8.7	12.3	10
Small employers and own account workers	1.1	1.7	1.1	1.1
Lower supervisory and technical occupations	0.7	-	0.2	0.1
Semi-routine and routine occupations	1.0	1.9	1.0	1.4
Not determined	2.1	4.5	2.8	1.9

N=27357 (weighted)

Finally, we consider occupational distribution according to SOC(HE); the classification devised to analysis change in the graduate labour market and to differentiate between different types of graduate employment (for more details about the construction of this

classification, see Elias and Purcell 2004a). Here we find greater disparity between graduates of both genders according to their educational level (Table 3.11). Within the high access group there is a surprising degree of consistency of distribution for both men and women; surprising given the greater propensity of women to enter professions such as teaching. Greater disparity is evident for mid-access graduates where a significantly higher proportion of female graduates entered traditional graduate jobs, whereas men were more likely to have entered new graduate jobs. This goes some way to explaining income inequality, in that a significant proportion of traditional graduate jobs lead to public sector employment, for example, as secondary school teachers, higher educational, health service or public administration professionals, whereas new graduate jobs include many management positions in the private sector. Therefore, while male and female graduates with 'mid-access' employment opportunities appear to make somewhat different career choices post-graduation, men and women with 'high access' to jobs show more similar patterns of occupational choice (at least within these broad groupings). For this latter group, therefore, the occupational difference does not appear to explain the significant wage inequality.

**Table 3.11: SOC(HE) classification according to index of access and gender (all 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Traditional graduate job	30.6	33.2	17.9	28
Modern graduate job	25	23.0	25.1	23.6
New graduate job	24.1	22.8	29.7	25.9
Niche graduate job	9.3	9.9	16.2	11.3
Non-graduate job	11.0	11.0	11.2	11.3

N=45513 (weighted)

Comparing the same group of graduates, we find considerable difference in occupational distribution according to sector of employment (Table 3.12). Approximately three quarters of both male and female high access graduates in the public sector were in traditional or modern graduate jobs, compared to approximately 40 per cent of mid-access graduates. High access graduates working in the private sector were more widely spread across the range of occupations, but were again more likely to be working in traditional and modern graduate jobs. Almost one-third of both male and female mid-access graduates in the private sector were working in new graduate jobs.

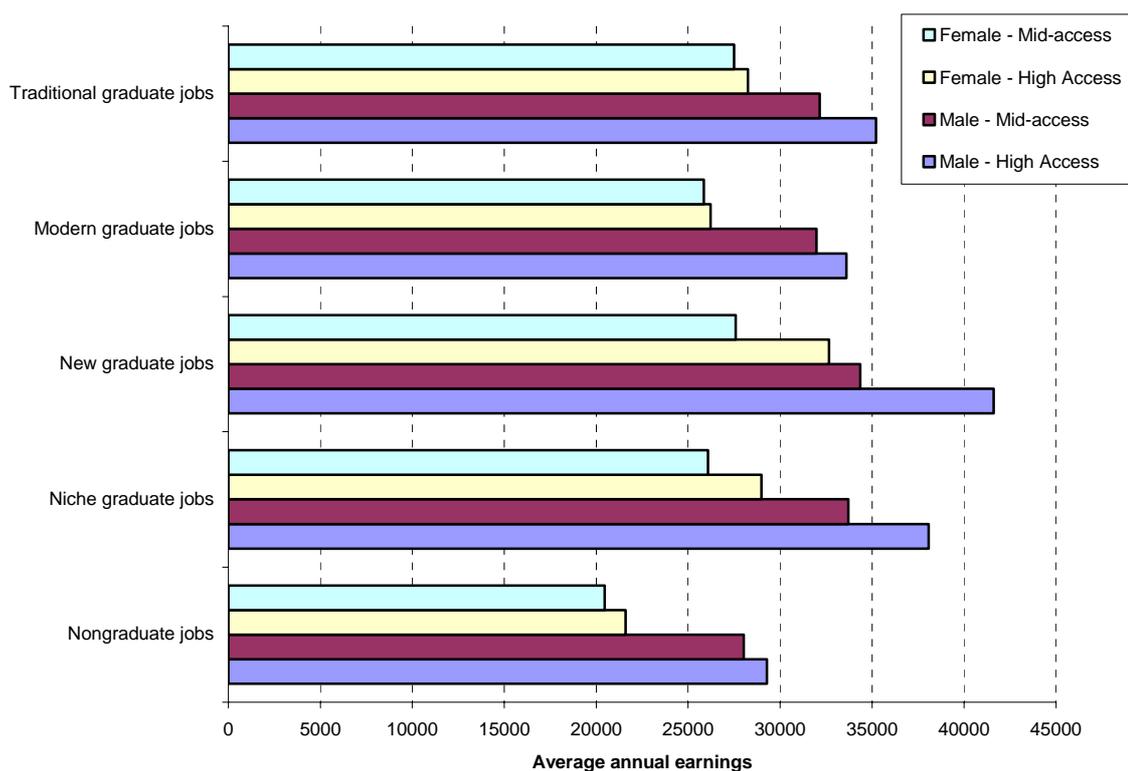
**Table 3.12: SOC(HE) classification according to index of access, gender and sector of employment (all 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access				Mid-access			
	Public Sector		Private Sector		Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Traditional graduate job	46.6	44.5	34.3	32.9	16.0	20.4	25.7	25.2
Modern graduate job	27.1	28.2	23.4	32.0	25.5	18.0	23.3	20
New graduate job	11.4	12.8	18.7	16.2	31.0	31.7	31.4	31.9
Niche graduate job	8.3	4.1	11.1	10.0	15.1	14.8	9	13.3
Non-graduate job	6.7	10.3	12.5	8.9	12.4	15.1	10.6	9.6

N=45513 (weighted)

Figure 3.2 shows the average annual earnings of high and mid-access graduates in full-time employment at the time of the survey according to SOC(HE) category. It shows that at all occupational levels there is a significant difference in the average earnings of men and women. It also shows that for different types of job, educational attainment appears to have a variable effect. For example, women in traditional and modern graduate jobs, reflect the greater concentration of female graduates in public sector employment, and in these occupations there was little disparity of earnings according to level of educational attainment. Perhaps not surprisingly, for those in non-graduate jobs, levels of educational attainment had little effect on average earnings. The greatest difference between high and mid-access graduates in average earnings was evident for those in new or niche graduate jobs (many of which were in the private sector). There was greater variability in earnings according to occupational type for high access graduates but for mid access graduates there was little difference in average earnings between the four groups of graduate job.

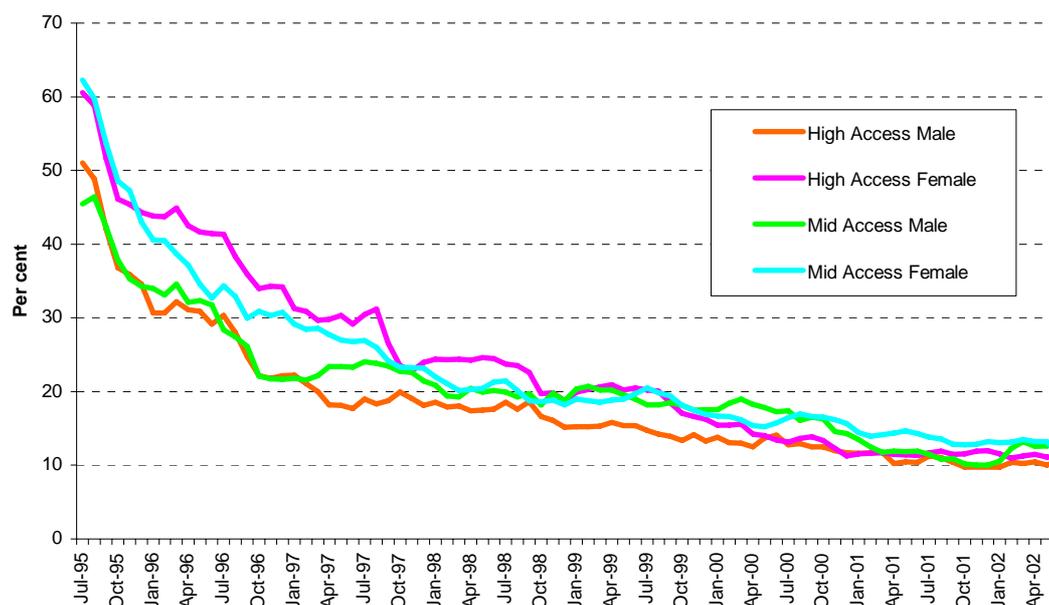
**Figure 3.2: Average annual earnings, by SOC(HE) and gender (all full-time employed 'young graduates')**



### 3.4 Career trajectories and subjective assessment of career development

Despite men and women being equally likely to be in non-graduate employment after seven years in the labour market, analysis of the work history data (Figure 3.3) suggests slower movement out of non-graduate employment for women and that it is not until almost five years after graduation that the proportions converged. Indeed, women were notably more likely to enter non-graduate employment, regardless of educational level, than men. This suggests that a partial explanation for unequal outcomes is that women experience slower integration into appropriate, graduate-level employment and are therefore playing catch-up with their male peers. This is supported by analysis of the 1999 cohort which suggests that women were more likely to be in non-graduate employment after four years in the labour market.

**Figure 3.3: Movement out of non-graduate jobs, according to gender and 'index of access', young, employed 1995 graduates only**



So does lower mean earnings for women in all both high and mid-access groups translate into lower levels of satisfaction, not only with pay itself but also with other aspects of employment? Tables 3.13a and 3.13b show the proportions of graduates in each group who reported being either satisfied or dissatisfied with different aspects of their employment.

**Table 3.13a: Proportion satisfied with selected aspects of current job\*, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Promotion prospects	52.6	45.4	53.1	48.6
The actual work	73.6	73.9	71.3	76
The total pay	54.5	48.0	53.7	47.7
Relations with sup./manager	72.4	71.4	71	72.9
Job security	64	66.4	67.7	72.1
Opportunity to use initiative	79.8	79.4	80.2	81.7
Number of hours worked	56.8	63	56.8	59.5

N=46554 (weighted)

\* Those scoring 5 or more on scale of 1-7

**Table 3.13b: Proportion dissatisfied with selected aspects of current job\*, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Promotion prospects	27.9	34.3	27.6	29.2
The actual work	13	11	10.7	10.8
The total pay	27.8	32.1	26.7	31.2
Relations with sup./manager	10.1	16.9	12.8	14.1
Job security	18.8	19.4	16	13.9
Opportunity to use initiative	7.8	7.7	10.8	6.8
Number of hours worked	28.1	23	23.2	24

N=46554 (weighted)

\* Those scoring 3 or less on scale of 1-7

For promotion prospects, we find that women in both groups were both less satisfied and more dissatisfied than comparative men. A similar pattern is evident for satisfaction with 'total pay' especially for high access graduates (mid-access male and female graduates show similar levels of satisfaction). The higher level of dissatisfaction with relations with supervisor/managers reported by high access and mid-access females may be related to their lower levels of satisfaction with promotion prospects. Satisfaction with the work itself appeared relatively consistent across all groups (apart from the higher reported satisfaction for mid-access females and lower satisfaction among high access males), as did that for job security and opportunity to use initiative. Finally, overall, men reported lower levels of satisfaction with their working hours.

So, how does this translate into overall job satisfaction? Table 3.14 shows that, overall, male and female high access graduates reported very similar levels of job satisfaction (mean scores for men and women were identical – as they were for the 1999 cohort). By comparison, mid-access female graduates report overall (marginally) higher levels of job satisfaction (although mean scores were 4.9 for men and 5 for women).

**Table 3.14: Overall job satisfaction according to index of access and gender (All 'young' graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not satisfied at all	0.7	1.9	1.4	1.4
2	3.6	1.6	4.4	2.1
3	6.0	7.9	7.4	6.7
4	13.9	15.7	12.8	13.3
5	40.8	37.8	41.2	39.9
6	29.7	29.7	28.7	32
Completely satisfied	5.3	5.4	4.1	4.6

N=46554 (weighted)

In terms of overall job satisfaction, we found evidence in the qualitative data to suggest that other criteria for job satisfaction not investigated in the longitudinal study were important for both male and female respondents: notably, an emphasis on work-life balance, in terms of what they expected of their jobs. A number of respondents had taken relatively dramatic steps in order to 'tick all the boxes' of what they wanted from a job in order to improve their overall job satisfaction. For example, one graduate frustrated by the demands placed on her time by her employer had set herself up as self-employed to regain control of her working life. Another had decided to go part-time in her highly successful job in ICT to embark on a completely different dual career as a self-employed spinal therapist in order to obtain all that she sought from employment:

*'The reason I like computing and the roles that I've had within [ICT employer], was really the challenge mentally: lot's of problem-solving, lots of organisation skills and dealing with people and the kind of challenge that I enjoy. That's really why I had to consider quite carefully whether or not to go for promotion because I also see promotion really as a way of getting new challenges and learning new things, to keep work a bit interesting because otherwise you could slip into the doldrums really. But the other flip side for me in my career and life generally is feeling like I add some value and that's where I think spinal therapy... I help one person's life to be a bit easier then it adds a bit more value for me than if I can make a bit more money'.*

[Interviewer: So you find that, on balance, more satisfying?]

*'I think I will, yes. The other reason for going part-time with [ICT employer] - I could have afforded a career break and done it full time for a year or eighteen months or something - really is to make sure I get enough of a mental challenge from doing it as well'.*

(Female Technical Project Manager in ICT sector, aged 31, living with partner)

Another interviewee reported how she had made 'some fundamental life decisions' in the course of the last year about personal fulfilment and job satisfaction and had decided to make a sideways move in the banking organisation for which she worked alongside taking on unpaid volunteer role as a counsellor. She felt that these two activities were intrinsic parts of 'how I want my career and what I want to do going forward' and explicitly saw the two roles as complementary in terms of overall personal fulfilment. She hoped to move to condensed hours in her paid work in order to devote more time her unpaid activity.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate on a scale of 1-7 how appropriate their job was for 'someone with their qualifications'. Within the high access group, the distributions of indicate that the overall pattern and mean scores were essentially similar (Table 3.15). For the mid-access group, however, men were significantly more likely to report inappropriate employment and less likely to give high ratings on this dimension. Indeed, the mean score for men is 4.6 compared to 5.3 for women.

**Table 3.15: Appropriateness of job, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very inappropriate	1.2	3.2	3.2	2.3
2	7.8	6.8	9.1	4.1
3	9.7	7.9	9.2	6.5
4	12.8	12.5	14.8	14.4
5	24.6	22.5	25.9	22.0
6	27.7	24	23.7	25.2
ideal	16.2	23	14.1	26.1

N=46544 (weighted)

### 3.5 Summary

In this chapter, we explored the graduate survey data to get beyond broad gender differences, to consider the variables that might contribute to differences in graduate career paths and outcomes. Our survey datasets enable us to compare women and men with very similar human capital - holding constant variables that might be expected to lead to the achievement of high rewards and high flying career development, and controlling for differences that might significantly affect such outcomes. We thus compared like with like - focusing on high and medium achieving highly-qualified young people of both sexes who were working in full-time employment seven years after graduation. We find that high educational and academic achievement leads to relative career advantage for both men and women - but gender pay gaps were apparent for both groups - and mid-achieving men earned higher salaries, on average, than high achieving women.

Continuing to focus on these groups, we explored the variables that we had established, in previous analyses, go some way to explaining the gender pay gap: broad sector and industry of employment, occupation - according to broad socio-economic category and according to SOC(HE) - the occupational classification devised to investigate the changing graduate labour market (Purcell and Elias 2006). We have thus been able to map where male and female graduates were employed seven years on, and more particularly, where those with the apparent attributes and access to career success had reached - and the rewards they had obtained. We find consistently that males in all sectors of employment earned substantially more than women - even women whose attributes might lead to the expectation that they would be among the most successful of their cohort. Women took longer to access appropriate employment for people with their skills and qualifications, and - most significantly - were considerably more likely to be employed in the public sector. The characteristics of their jobs, comparing men and women in similar sectors, were remarkably similar apart from *men's* propensity to be more satisfied with their promotion prospects and pay, and women's greater satisfaction with job security and hours worked. These variables tend to be closely

related to broad sector - with private sector jobs more highly paid on average - involving longer hours of work, but greater promotion prospects - and public sector jobs providing greater job security. Perhaps women are trading off the former for the latter? We find consistently that women evaluated their jobs as intrinsically more satisfactory - in terms of skills development, interesting and challenging work, long-term security and socially useful work. Men, in comparison, were significantly more likely to report that their job provided a competitive salary, opportunities for an international career, good promotion prospects and work conducted in a progressive and dynamic organisation. These relationships will be explored in more depth in the chapter that follows.

## Chapter 4

### Unequal or just different? Looking more closely at the jobs done by male and female graduates

#### 4.1 *Introduction*

So what about the content and characteristics of jobs being done by male and female graduates seven years after graduation? In this chapter, we look at in detail at the types of work being done by male and female graduates in the 1995 graduate sample. It compares the job characteristics reported by both high and mid-access graduates to explore whether the extent of gender differences in work content and context. We also compare the requirements respondents reported as having been important in getting the jobs they held at the time of the survey, to investigate whether different attributes; for example, credentials or prior experience, are more or less important for different groups of graduates. Given that women at all educational levels in our sample reported a greater propensity to be employed in the public sector, this chapter compares the characteristics of public sector employment with work in the private sector and also the characteristics of those who choose to enter these jobs and why.

#### 4.2 *Job characteristics*

Table 4.1 shows the proportion of respondents in each group who indicated that their job possessed particular characteristics. Consistent with the findings on earnings, men were notably more likely to indicate that their job provided competitive pay. This was also the case for 'opportunity to reach managerial level'. That men are more likely to indicate 'working in a progressive and dynamic organisation' and 'opportunity for an international career' is likely to be related to their greater propensity to be in private sector employment. Moreover, women report high levels of 'socially-useful work' and 'long-term job security' both of which are likely to be indicators of public sector work. Whilst overall higher proportions of respondents reported having these job characteristics seven years on, the gender response pattern was largely the same for the 1999 graduates. For example, 61 per cent of 1999 male graduates reported earning a 'competitive salary' compared to 48 per cent of women. The differences here might suggest that women may be trading extrinsic rewards for intrinsic satisfaction in employment.

**Table 4.1: Proportion of 1995 graduates reporting that their job provided the following: according to index of access and gender (all 'young' graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Competitive salary	63.6	52.1	65.9	54.3
Continual skills development	70.5	73.7	67.9	78.8
Interesting/challenging work	84.1	87.1	85.2	88.5
Socially useful work	42.5	49.6	35.2	48.3
Long term security	48.8	56.3	52.2	57.8
Opportunities for international career	44.5	27.5	34.6	27.3
Opportunities to reach managerial levels	66	56.9	65.1	59.9
Progressive and dynamic organisation	41.4	33.5	43.8	36.7
Enjoy socialising with work people	58.1	56.1	54.9	58.7

N=47005 (weighted)

To obtain an insight into work orientations, the survey asked respondents to indicate which of these job characteristics was most important to them. Table 4.2 shows the responses to this question. Most markedly, we find that competitive salary was more important to men than women and the reverse was true for continuous skills development. There is less variation of response for other job attributes, although women were notably less likely to prioritise the opportunity to reach managerial level and more likely to have identified socially-useful work as the most important characteristics of their job.

**Table 4.2: Most important characteristic of job, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Competitive salary	15.8	8.7	16.4	9.0
Continual skills development	7.6	11.1	8.4	10.7
Interesting/challenging work	56.2	57.9	50.4	59.1
Socially useful work	4.7	6.9	2.6	5.5
Long term security	4.9	8.0	9.6	7.3
Opportunities for international career	2.1	2.1	1.7	1.3
Opportunities to reach managerial levels	5.3	2.9	5.8	3.5
Progressive and dynamic organisation	1.5	1.1	2.1	1.6
Enjoy socialising with work people	1.9	1.3	2.9	2.0

N=45252 (weighted)

Six of these job characteristics cited above (*Competitive salary, continual skills development, interesting and challenging work, long-term security, working in a progressive and dynamic organisation and working with people you enjoy socialising with*) were found to be useful common indicators of the 'quality' of jobs across the occupational spectrum, including an assessment of both earnings and non-pecuniary benefits. A scale was constructed by simply awarding one point when the respondent indicated that their job offered any one of the six items. This yielded a 'quality index' for the job with a minimum value of zero and a maximum value of six. Table 4.3 shows the distribution of job quality scores for the four groups. It is

apparent that men in both groups report higher levels of job quality; one-third of high access males reported a score of 5 or more compared to only 18.3 per cent of women and one-quarter of mid-access males compared to 18 per cent of comparative women. Overall, women were more likely to give scores in the mid-range.

**Table 4.3: Scores on the Index of Job Quality, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0	3.7	3.1	6.8	3.8
1	6.8	6.9	8.3	7.5
2	15.0	20.7	16.4	23.1
3	17.5	27.1	19.9	24.5
4	24.3	23.9	22.5	23.1
5	20.1	12.2	14.4	10.7
6	12.5	6.1	11.6	7.3

N=43429 (weighted)

Women reported lower levels of satisfaction with promotion prospects in their current jobs, but mid-access men and high access women were most likely to report being in 'dead end' jobs. Table 4.4 shows similar responses for both men and women, across educational attainment levels, to the question: 'What are your promotion prospects in your current job?'

**Table 4.4: Promotion prospects in current job, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Good within current organisation	47.9	44.7	51.2	47.1
Good, but expect to change employers	39.7	37.2	38.1	36.1
Have to change type of work	17.9	16.3	13.2	16.4
Current job is dead end	4.4	5.7	6.7	4.1
Don't know	6.3	4.8	3.6	5.4

N=47005 (weighted)

Table 4.5 shows the distribution of men and women according to the gender context in which they worked: whether they are employed in contexts where their jobs are primarily done by men or women. We find similar patterns for both high and mid-access graduates in that over half of jobs done by respondents were 'gendered' in that they were disproportionately done either by men or women. The 1999 graduates were distributed in a remarkably similar way.

**Table 4.5: Gender structure of organisational context: Response to statement ‘In my workplace, my type of job is done ...’ according to index of access and gender (All ‘young’ 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Almost exclusively by men	13.5	3.7	19.0	6.9
Mainly by men	33.7	15.4	36.8	15.4
Fairly equal mix	46.6	46.9	35.9	38.1
Mainly by women	6.2	25.7	7.4	30.9
Almost exclusively by women	0.0	8.4	0.8	8.7

N=46462 (weighted)

The above distributions of jobs by gender are likely to have a significant impact on pay. Table 4.6 outlines the mean earnings of men and women according to gender context. The highest mean earnings were apparent in jobs that were ‘mainly done by men’, both for women and men, but the widest disparity was also evident in such cases. The smallest gap was apparent in jobs which were ‘almost exclusively done by men’. The lowest earnings overall were in those jobs that were ‘almost exclusively done by women’. Again, the public-private effect is likely to contribute to this difference and is considered later in this chapter. We find a largely similar pattern for the 1999 cohort of graduates (although 1999 women appear to do better in jobs done ‘*almost exclusively by men*’; earning comparable salaries to men). This is reminiscent of established research findings on the impact of gender balance in workplaces on equal opportunities (Reskin and Padavic 1994, Cockburn 1991, Kanter 1977), which suggested that women in female-dominated or feminised occupational areas have tended to be less well rewarded than analogous work undertaken by male or more evenly mixed workforces.

**Table 4.6: Mean earnings of all young, full-time employed 1995 graduates according to the extent to which their jobs are ‘gendered’ (high and mid-access graduates)**

Mean Salary in current job (£s)		
Almost exclusively by men	Male	32,263
	Female	29,608
Mainly by men	Male	37,798
	Female	31,654
Fairly equal mix	Male	31,272
	Female	27,314
Mainly by women	Male	26,039
	Female	23,253
Almost exclusively by women	Male	29,742
	Female	21,817

N = 36644 (weighted)

Women working in predominantly male jobs, in comparison with all women in employment, were more likely to be working in new and *niche* graduate jobs, less likely to be working

modern graduate jobs and in professional occupations (24 per cent compared to 15 per cent of women generally). They displayed a greater propensity to be in the private sector (75 per cent compared to 44 per cent), specifically in manufacturing, construction, ICT and banking and finance. They were significantly less likely to be working in education. The data suggest that women working in predominantly male contexts were doing a variety of jobs but, a considerable proportion were working in ICT roles (- for example, IT security consultant, principal analyst/programmer and applications specialist), finance and consultancy roles, (- for example, financial planning and analysis director) and in scientific/technical positions - (for example, product development engineer, vehicle evaluation engineer and hydrogeologist). Occupational distribution was partially explicable by in the subjects studied among this subgroup. Women working in predominantly male jobs were more likely to have studied engineering, maths and computing, natural sciences and law. They were considerably less likely than other women to have studied education or medicine and related disciplines.

Conversely, compared to men in employment generally, men in predominantly female jobs were significantly more likely to have studied social sciences and education but significantly less likely to have studied maths and computing, engineering and other vocational disciplines. According to SOC(HE) they showed a greater propensity to be in non-graduate and modern graduate jobs but less likely to be in new and niche occupations. Men in predominantly female jobs were significantly more likely to be working in the public sector (68 per cent compared to 31 per cent of all men in employment). According to SOC2000, they were less likely to be working in managerial occupations but more likely to be in secretarial and administrative jobs. More detailed analysis of the job titles of those male graduates working in predominantly female occupations shows a high proportion working as teachers, both at primary and secondary level, and in health and social care (-for example, child and family social worker, physiotherapist, care manager and dental officer). The job titles also reflect the higher proportion of graduates in non-graduate jobs (-such as library assistant, sales advisor and administrative officer). This further exploration reveals some clues as to why women in gender atypical employment might earn relatively high salaries to reflect their gender atypical propensity to have relatively scarce (numerically-based) skills. It does not throw much light on why males in gender atypical occupational contexts have considerably higher average earnings than women in such contexts.

One aspect that might explain differential pay and other employment outcomes is likely to be the different skill requirements of different jobs or different patterns of working that differentiate between similar jobs in similar areas. One such aspect is the use of ICT. We have already seen that men were approximately one-third more likely to work in the ICT sector than women. Table 4.7 outlines the complexity of use of IT of the sample. It is evident that men, regardless of 'access credentials', were more approximately four times more likely to be in a job which required 'advanced' IT skills than women.

**Table 4.7: Use of computers in current job, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not at all	1.0	3.6	2.9	3.3
Routine	55.1	69.9	52.8	68.2
Complex	24	21.4	27.2	23.7
Advanced	18.9	5.2	17.1	4.7

N=46755 (weighted)

We found little difference in the propensity of men and women to be required to plan their own work. Overall, 85 per cent of high access men were required to plan their own work compared to 83 per cent of women and 80 per cent of mid-access males compared to 82 per cent of women. Similarly, in terms of task discretion, the extent to which respondents had influence in deciding what tasks to do was comparable between men and women at each level. For example, approximately 49 per cent of high access males had 'a great deal' of influence compared to 48 per cent of women.

Table 4.8 shows responses to a range of questions which sought to gain greater understanding about the context in which the 1995 graduates were working. Perhaps most notably, the survey suggests that men were more likely to be in employment where *'travel means long working days'* or where *'travel means time spent away from home overnight'*. The interviews conducted with a sub-sample of respondents both seven and ten years on indicate that the reasons why this might be the case are complex relating to both personal and family circumstances and commitments, but they also indicate an apparent greater commitment to (or requirement for) work-life balance amongst women.

**Table 4.8: Work contexts, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sometimes work at home	26.2	21.0	22.9	18.7
Two or more days/week at home	4.7	3.5	2.9	4.6
Room on own at work	12.9	18.2	13.9	15.7
Room shared with 1-6	24.7	30.2	27.5	31.4
Open plan area	55.8	44.5	53.4	43
Work on clients premises	7.9	8.6	14.5	9.7
Work in variety of locations	21.2	22.8	28.3	23.1
Work outdoors for significant prop.	7.0	4.2	8.7	5
Travel means long work days	28.8	18.4	25.1	15.9
Travel means away from home overnight	38.8	25.4	27.7	23.3
Other aspect of where job done	10.5	12.8	5.2	10.7

N=47005 (weighted)

On a similar note, Table 4.9 outlines the work patterns and responsibilities of the respondents in terms of those that *'mostly'* work in the stated manner. Most pronounced, is the difference between men and women who worked with customers or clients; approximately 45 per cent of women claimed to mostly do so, compared to approximately one-third of men. We also find that a greater proportion of 'high access' females reporting mostly supervising the work of others.

**Table 4.9: Work patterns – Proportion of respondents reporting their main work pattern according to index of access and gender (all 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Mostly work on my own	28	43.3	26.4	34.3
Mostly work as part of team	53	48.2	58.2	55.6
Mostly work in a virtual team	8.5	11.2	11.2	10.3
Mostly work with customers/clients	31.9	45.4	35.3	43.2
Mostly supervise the work of others	25.5	31.2	34.9	32.5
Mostly, own work is closely supervised	4.9	10.1	9.3	7.3

N=42962 (weighted)

Finally, in this section we address job complexity from the perspective of how long respondents estimate it took them to learn to do their jobs 'reasonably well'. Table 4.10 outlines the responses. Of most interest are those indicating significant job complexity, especially amongst 'high access' graduates. A quarter of men in this group claimed to have taken over a year to learn to do their job reasonably well compared to 15 per cent of women.

**Table 4.10: How long to learn to do job reasonably well, according to index of access and gender (All 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Less than 1 week	6	4.1	5.5	3.5
Less than 1 month	9.6	14.3	12.1	10.8
Over 1 up to 3 months	24.1	27.6	25	25.2
Over 3 up to 6 months	21.3	23.1	21.5	22.1
Over 6 months up to 1 year	14	16	16.1	20.4
Over 1 year up to 2 years	15.2	10.7	11.6	11.4
Over 2 years	9.7	4.3	8.1	6.4

N=46289 (weighted)

### 4.3 Requirements for jobs

One of the possible indicators of 'lower quality' work or lower salary is the lower credential requirements for certain jobs. Table 4.11 outlines responses to questions relating to the utility of the 1995 degree obtained by respondents in their current jobs. Importantly, in response to the question of whether a degree had been a requirement of their job at the time of the survey, men and women from the high access group reported having required a degree in

equal proportions. Women in the mid-access group showed a greater propensity to enter graduate employment by this measure (or have been subject to more strict selection criteria). It needs to be noted however that seven years after graduation it may be the case that possession of a degree may no longer be an explicit requirement for a job, even although that job may be appropriate employment for a graduate. For example, in some cases, the importance of credentials is likely to have been superceded by relevant experience. In terms of the use of knowledge and skills there is little to set apart any of the four groups.

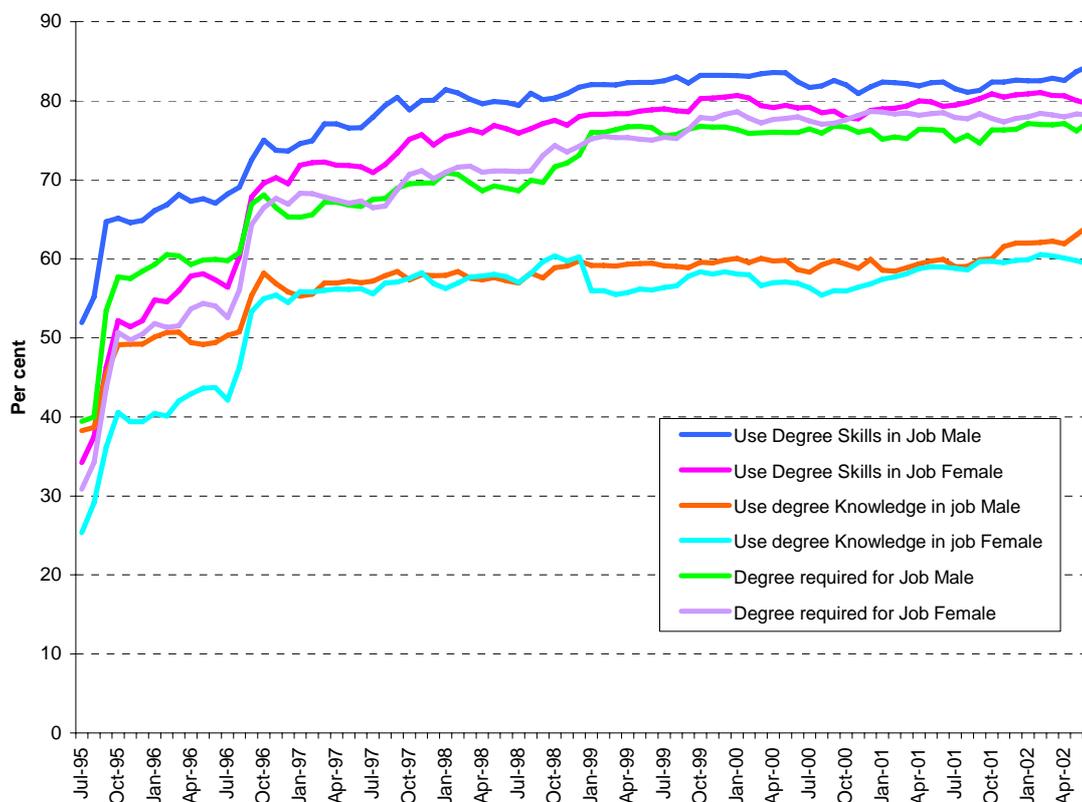
**Table 4.11: Positive responses to the questions: ‘Was a degree required for your current job?’, ‘Do you use the subject/discipline knowledge you acquired on your degree?’, and ‘Do you use the skills developed on your degree?’ according to index of access and gender (all ‘young’ 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Degree required for current/last job?	75.4	73.3	66	73.1
Use degree subject knowledge in current/last job?	60.7	56.5	62.7	64.5
Use skills acquired in 1995 course in current/last job?	80.7	76.1	79.8	82.6

N=46289 (weighted)

In the questionnaire we asked respondents to indicate whether they were using their degree skills and knowledge and whether a degree had been a requirement for each job they had held since graduation. Figure 4.1 shows the proportion of ‘high access’ graduates who responded positively over this seven year period. We see that despite entering into ‘graduate level’ employment according to each of these measures in different proportions immediately after graduation, men and women showed similar long-term trends, but men were more likely to be using their degree skills (and after a period of convergence of the sexes on this dimension, the difference appeared to be widening again around six years after graduation). The same pattern applied to their use of degree knowledge. Although women had taken longer to access jobs where a degree was required and exhibited similar trends to men on this criterion for most of the period analysed, they were slightly more likely to be in jobs for which a degree had been required. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this figure is the extent to which male proportions on all three dimensions considered were continuing to rise, while female proportions all appeared to be marginally declining. The *Ten Years On* interviews conducted in the course of this study, which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4, provide some indication of why this might be the case.

**Figure 4.1: Movement into employment, a) where degree was required, b) where degree-acquired skills used, c) where degree subject/discipline knowledge used, high access 1995 graduates in employment only**



N=13496 (weighted)

Table 4.12 outlines the specific attributes, beyond attainment of a degree, which respondents felt were relevant in enabling them to get their current job. Not surprisingly, grade of award had been more important for the high access group, although, interestingly, seen as less likely to have been relevant by women than by men. In terms of gender differences, we find that in most areas women assigned greater importance to credentials than did men, especially the attainment of professional qualifications and postgraduate degrees since 1995, although high access women also more often saw experience in another organisation as having been relevant, as did mid-access males.

**Table 4.12: Positive response to the question: Were the following relevant in enabling you to obtain your current job? According to index of access and gender (all 'young' 1995 graduates in employment)**

	High Access		Mid-access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Subject studied in 1995	52.6	53	56.5	61.2
Grade of 1995 award	48.5	39.2	25.1	25.3
Professional recognition of 1995 award	13.2	18.1	16.6	23
Postgraduate degree since 1995	27.1	36	17.5	21.1
Professional qualification since 1995	27.7	32.9	20	26.6
Experience in this organisation	20.8	21.8	23.1	24.8
Experience in other organisation	47.4	54.8	50.4	46.1
Other factor	4.3	4.2	3	1.8

N=41405 (weighted)

One contributory factor to an explanation of inequality of earnings between men and women is that, on average, men worked longer hours than women. Our survey findings for the 1995 cohort bear this out, as shown in Table 4.13. For the 1999 cohort, again men worked, on average, longer working hours (although average working hours for the 1995 sub-sample were lower than for 1999 graduates with four years experience in the labour market).

**Table 4.13: Working hours, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' 1995 graduates in full-time employment)**

	High Access		Mid Access	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
36 hours or less	10.1	17.8	8.3	15
37 to 40 hours	32.3	35.8	39.9	42.8
41 to 45 hours	24.7	20.5	22	20.1
46 to 50 hours	16.4	14.5	16.5	12.5
More than 50 hours	16.5	11.4	13.3	9.6

N=38908 (weighted)

So what effect did hours worked have on earnings in our sample? Table 4.14 compares mean earnings for male and female 'high access' graduates according to their average weekly hours. We, indeed, find that increased working hours are correlated with higher earnings for both men and women but importantly, we find that as working hours increase, so does the disparity between male and female pay. It seems that those women working the longest hours are those who are most disadvantaged compared to men working comparable hours.

**Table 4.14: Mean earnings, according to working hours and gender ('young' high access 1995 graduates in full-time employment)**

	Average earnings (£)	
	Male	Female
36 hours or less	29117	23662
37 to 40 hours	30207	25986
41 to 45 hours	37827	30698
46 to 50 hours	42994	33521
More than 50 hours	42910	33373

N = 15363 (Weighted)

#### 4.4 Gender and public/private sector employment

The following section compares the employment outcomes of male and female 'high access' graduates according to whether they were employed in the public or private sectors. We start by contrasting the types of employment done by men and women in each sector according to SOC2000 and then according to SOC(HE). Comparison by SOC2000 (Table 4.15) shows the expected difference in distribution amongst occupations in the private and public sector with greater proportions of professionals in the public sector. Approximately 60 per cent of 'high access' men and women working in the public sector were in professional occupations compared to 49 per cent of men and one-third of women in the private sector<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 4.15: SOC2000, by sector of employment and gender (high access 1995 graduates in employment only)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Managers and Senior Officials	11.4	7.3	22.1	27.8
Professional Occupations	57.9	61.4	48.8	33.2
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	24.2	17	19.3	26.7
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	3.9	7.9	4.9	5
Other	1.2	1.8	2.7	3.3

N=15083 (weighted)

Table 4.16 outlines the proportion of graduates who reported that each of a range of job characteristics was provided for in their current job. If we compare males and females working in the public sector in almost all areas, women were more likely to have indicated that their current job provided continual skills development, interesting/challenging work, socially-useful work and long-term security. However, men were more likely to have indicated that their job provided opportunities to reach managerial level. This difference was also found among private sector employees, but to a less marked degree. Both sexes in private sector employment were significantly more likely than those in the public sector to indicate that their job provided a competitive salary. For those in this sector, the gender difference in perceptions of having a competitive salary was borne out by actual earnings, as revealed by

<sup>14</sup> The distribution of high access graduates by SOC(HE) and sector of employment) was shown in Table 3.12.

Figure 3.4, which shows that a quarter of males earned over £50,000 per annum seven years after graduation.

**Table 4.16: Characteristics present in current job, by gender (High Access Graduates in Employment only)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Competitive salary	39.6	39.9	81.3	76
Continual skills development	72.7	81.1	76.7	76.4
Interesting/challenging work	87.4	92.4	87.1	87.3
Socially useful work	76.5	79.2	31.4	26.1
Long term security	74.4	76.6	48.1	49.1
Opportunities for international career	48	27	52.3	36.7
Opportunities to reach managerial levels	70	57.6	74.3	66.9
Progressive and dynamic organisation	30.7	23.8	52.9	49.5
Enjoy socialising with work people	61.5	58.9	63.6	64

N=14451 (weighted)

Table 4.17 shows the distribution of job quality scores for the four groups. It is perhaps most noticeable that of those working in the private sector, men were notably more likely to be in 'high quality' (scores of 5 or 6) jobs (39 per cent) than women (one quarter). This disparity was much less pronounced for public sector employees. In both distributions, female graduates were more greatly bunched around the mid-scores.

**Table 4.17: Scores on the Index of Job Quality, by sector of employment and gender (High Access Graduates in Employment only)**

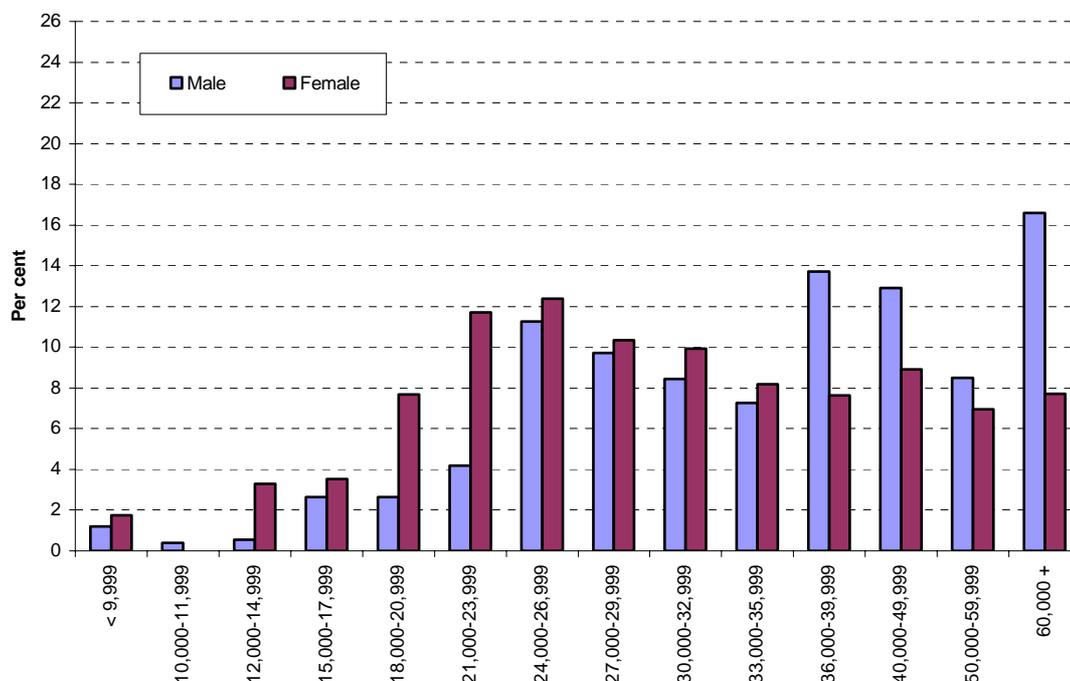
	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0	6.6	1.7	2	3.6
1	12.5	8.4	4.5	3.8
2	11.9	22.3	14.9	18.9
3	24.0	28.1	15.9	26.2
4	27.1	27.3	23.5	22.5
5	12.2	7.4	23.9	16.8
6	5.7	4.8	15.4	8.3

N=10855 (weighted)

A similar pattern is apparent if we compare the distribution of earnings for male and female graduates in both the public and private sector, as shown in Figures 4.2a and 4.2b. If we first compare male and female earnings for high access graduates in the private sector, we see a significantly higher propensity for male graduates to earning salaries over £35,000pa. A relatively greater proportion of women earning in the range between £18,000 and 33,000pa. In the public sector, where average earnings were significantly lower and the range reduced, we see more concentration of both male and female earnings, but males remained more likely to be at the higher earning end of the spectrum. Average earnings for high-access male

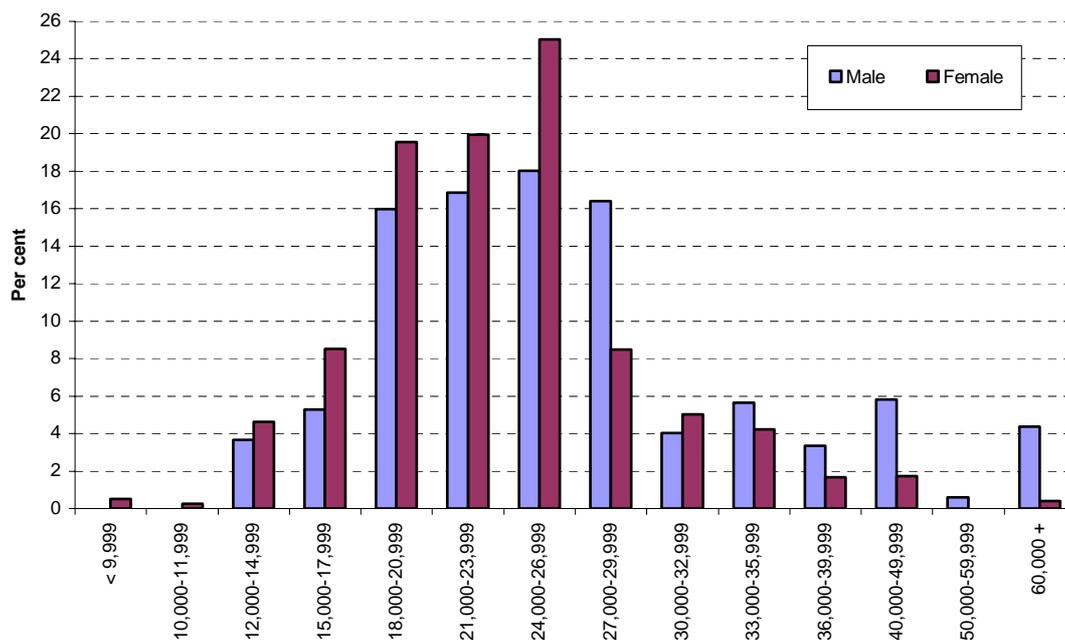
graduates in the private sector seven years after graduation were £40,080 and for women were £33,210. The gender gap between the comparable male average of £28,030 and female average of £23,780 among members of this sub-sample working in the public sector is predictably lower.

**Figure 4.2a: Distribution of earnings for private sector employees, high access graduates in full-time employment only**



N=9358 (weighted)

**Figure 4.2b: Distribution of earnings for public sector employees, high access graduates in full-time employment only**



N=4987 (weighted)

Does this mean that the gender context within which graduate work has less effect on public sector graduate earnings? Tables 4.18 and 4.19 shows that this is the case for both high access and mid-access graduates. In the private sector, at both levels of attainment, men earned notably higher salaries on average, even in jobs predominantly done by women. For graduates in both groups, male and female earnings were highest in jobs done mainly or almost exclusively by men in the private sector. For high access graduates, only in one area of employment, predominantly 'female' jobs in the private sector, did women outperform men. For mid-access graduates, women in public sector jobs done equally by men and women, earn more than their male counterparts of average. Again, we see greater compression of male and female earnings in the public sector.

**Table 4.18: Mean earnings of all young, full-time employed 'high access' respondents according to the extent to which their jobs are 'gendered', public versus private sector**

		Public Sector	Private Sector
Mainly or almost exclusively done by men	Male	32367	41687
	Female	26249	36330
By a fairly equal mixture of men and women	Male	27527	38406
	Female	25493	34187
Mainly or exclusively done by women	Male	20949	33457
	Female	21484	26724
N=14237 (weighted)			

**Table 4.19: Mean earnings of all young, full-time employed 'mid-access' respondents according to the extent to which their jobs are 'gendered', public versus private sector**

		Public Sector	Private Sector
Mainly or almost exclusively done by men	<b>Male</b>	27437	36896
	<b>Female</b>	24388	33425
By a fairly equal mixture of men and women	<b>Male</b>	23628	34866
	<b>Female</b>	24679	29315
Mainly or exclusively done by women	<b>Male</b>	24063	27935
	<b>Female</b>	23110	23208
N=22407 (weighted)			

Thus far, we find that when it comes to the very well paid and 'high quality' jobs in the private sector, these are disproportionately held by men. There is relatively less evidence of inequality within the public sector, although it is still evident. So what might explain this inequity? Perhaps men and women within these sectors enter into different types of employment where the credential and skills requirements are different, resulting in apparent inequality? Respondents were asked to indicate whether a degree had been a requirement of their current job. In the public sector, 81 per cent of women indicated their degree had been required for their current job compared to 71 per cent of men. In contrast, 70 per cent of women working in the private sector reported requiring a degree, compared to 78 per cent of

men. Similarly, we find that 70 per cent of women in the public sector were using their degree subject/discipline knowledge, compared to 62 per cent of men. Conversely, in the private sector, 58 per cent of men reported using their degree knowledge compared to only 47 per cent of women. Finally, in both the private and public sector, men were marginally more likely to be using the skills they had acquired on their 1995 degrees.

Table 4.20 outlines perceived promotion prospects of those working in the private and public sectors. Both men and women in the public sector were less likely than those in the private sector to consider their promotion prospects to be good within their current organisation, but less likely to perceive that they were in a dead-end job.

**Table 4.20: Promotion prospects in current job, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' high access graduates in employment)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Good within current organisation	45	46.9	59.7	56.1
Current job is 'dead end' job	2.7	4.1	5.9	6.5

N=14077 (weighted)

Interestingly, if we compare the job change activity of graduates over the seven years since graduation (Table 4.21) we find that the highest propensity to change jobs over the seven years covered by the survey was found amongst women in the private sector; almost half of female respondents reported having more than three jobs compared to one-third of those currently working in the public sector. Male job change activity appears greater in the public sector, where 37 per cent had had three or more jobs compared to 31 per cent of those currently working in private sector.

**Table 4.21: Job change activity, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' high access graduates in employment)**

	Public sector		Private sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
One or two jobs	60.8	64.5	65.3	49.6
Three or four jobs	32	26.9	26.8	40.9
Five or more jobs	4.8	6.5	4.7	8.5

N=15083 (weighted)

Finally, we compare levels of job satisfaction for men and women in the different sectors. Overall, those in the public sector reported high mean levels of job satisfaction: males at 5.2 and women at 5.1 (on a scale of 1-7), compared to 4.9 for both men and women in the private sector. Table 4.22 shows the distribution of scores on the satisfaction scale. In the public sector for those we class as satisfied (5 or above) there were remarkably similar proportions of both men and women. In the private sector, marginally high proportions of men fell into this group.

**Table 4.22: Job satisfaction, according to index of access and gender (all 'young' high access graduates in employment)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Not satisfied at all	1.2	1.7	1	2.2
2	0.6	0.7	6.1	1.8
3	1.6	7.0	7.1	7.2
4	14.2	10.6	13.3	19.3
5	39.3	38.3	39.3	39.4
6	37.9	35.1	27.6	27
Completely satisfied	5.3	6.4	5.6	3.1

N=14944 (weighted)

Table 4.23 compares the extent of satisfaction amongst respondents from the public and private sectors on a number of job attributes. Interestingly, given the higher proportion of women working in the public sector, satisfaction with promotion prospects was less evident than in the private sector, although this may relate to different types of careers in the public sector (e.g. education). However, men in the public sector did not seem as dissatisfied as their private sector peers. The level of satisfaction with pay is significantly higher in the private sector but appears closer among men and women in the public sector than in the private sector. Not surprisingly, satisfaction with job security was higher in the public sector for both sexes, and higher for women in both sectors than for men.

**Table 4.23: Satisfaction with aspects of current job (5 or more on scale of 1-7), according to index of access and gender (all 'young' high access graduates in employment)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Promotion Prospects	53.3	44.4	56.3	49.8
The Actual Work	81	81.3	69.4	67.8
The Total Pay	40.4	38.7	62.7	58.2
Relations with Supervisor/Manager	78.8	70.3	69.4	74.7
Job Security	72.8	76.9	57.3	60.4
Opportunity to use initiative	80.6	80.9	77.6	78.7
Number of hours worked	61.6	65.4	52.5	58

N=15050 (weighted)

The decision for many to work in the public sector, beyond any notion of socially-useful work or vocational choice, has traditionally been associated with particular benefits associated with such employment, including job security and other non-pay benefits and entitlements such as pensions, leave allowances, access to training and good terms and conditions of employment generally. This was commented on by several interviewees:

*'... I think the advantage of the health service at the moment are that the pension is relatively good compared to private sector pensions, the salary might*

*not be exactly the same but it's reasonable and the job security is very good... So I'm not considering moving at the moment'.*

(Male Scientific Officer working in the public sector, aged 32, married to primary teacher)

*'I mean, my pay is not that fantastic but I don't work weekends, I get six weeks leave a year and I get a non-contributory pension, [which] is around six grand a year on top of what you earn... I've got six month full pay maternity leave and I accrued my leave while I was off, plus the four bank holidays that I didn't work because I was on maternity leave I didn't take, so I got both that. So I've had forty eight days leave this year'.*

(Female Programme Formation Manager working in public sector, aged 32, husband non-employed)

In fact, the following account suggests that for some, working in the public sector at this stage in life represents a calculated choice for women seeking improved maternity benefits:

*'I am at the age [where] I am I'm very conscious of people wondering if I'm about to start a family and that's the next thing - that I'm expecting. All the girls around me my age have come to work for the organisation because they are about to start a family and they give you really good maternity leave and you get loads of money towards childcare and all that sort of thing so that's something I'm conscious of that is happening. Also people thinking...I mean no-one's exactly said it, but you can see them clocking, 'she's been here a year, so she'll probably have a baby in a year so do we want to put her on that project, or whatever'. That's so terrible!'*

[Interviewer: Is that based on their previous experience of people?]

*'I think it must be, because as I say, it's going on all around me and nobody in management has said it - but if I was in their position, I would have to be thinking the same thing as soon as they get in the door; you'll get two good years out of them before they go on maternity leave! Literally that's what's going to happen with a lot of people and some of the girls have said "so when are you planning it then?" And it's like, "What are you on about! What's that got to do with coming to work here?" But I was obviously naïve because that's what most people do'.*

(Female Project manager in the public sector, aged 31, married to secondary teacher)

We asked respondents to indicate to what extent they considered their job to be appropriate for someone with their qualifications. For private sector employees there was little difference between men and women in the distribution of responses. In the public sector, however, there was considerable disparity between the sexes. Most markedly, women were over twice as likely to report that their job was ideal for someone with their qualifications, reflecting the public sector location of most teaching and healthcare occupations (Table 4.24).

**Table 4.24: Appropriateness of current job (on a scale of 1-7), according to index of access and gender (all 'young' high access graduates in employment)**

	Public Sector		Private Sector	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Very inappropriate	0.5	2.7	1.5	3.1
2	5.5	4.5	9.2	6.4
3	7.7	5	6.9	10
4	11.5	9.2	12.1	14.3
5	30.1	19.7	24.3	26.1
6	28.5	25.4	28.8	23.9
ideal	16.3	33.4	17.3	16.1

N=14993 (weighted)

#### 4.5 Summary

The analysis presented in this chapter provides a more detailed picture of the jobs held by 1995 graduates seven years after graduation. We mainly focused on those male and female graduates who, by virtue of their high levels of educational attainment, had access to the 'best jobs' and could be described as those graduates most sought after by employers in the 'war for talent' (Brown and Hesketh 2005).

The most significant area of difference in employment characteristics was in work context. Over half of jobs held by respondents at the time of the survey were 'gendered' in that they are disproportionately done either by men or women, and this distribution of jobs has a significant impact on pay. For both men and women, the highest mean earnings were found in jobs that were 'mainly done by men', but also where the widest gender gap was evident. The lowest earnings overall were to be found in those jobs that are 'almost exclusively done by women'. The survey shows that, on average, men in the samples worked longer hours than women and that, for both men and women, increased working hours are correlated with higher earnings. Importantly, however, we find that as working hours increased so did the disparity between male and female pay. Taken together these two findings suggest that even where women enter male-dominated areas of employment and adopt male patterns of working (i.e. long hours) whilst they might have access to higher earnings relative to other women, they still appear to be at a disadvantage in comparison to male graduates.

The chapter revealed notable differences between men and women in job characteristics that tended to reflect both differences in values and priorities and the gendered propensity to enter particular types of employment. Overall, men at all levels of educational attainment reported higher levels of job quality and although there were no differences in degree of autonomy or discretion, there may have been in more complex jobs – in so far as they were more likely to have indicated taking over one year to learn how to do their job reasonably well.

This chapter showed that relatively, there was less evidence of gender inequality in public sector employment than in the private sector. However, there were differences between male and female employment within the sector. For example, women were more likely to have indicated that their current job provides continual skills development, interesting/challenging work, socially-useful work and long-term security, whilst men were more likely to have indicated that their job provided opportunities to reach managerial level. Seven years after graduation, in both the public and private sectors, for graduates at all levels of educational attainment, men were earning higher average salaries than women. For high access graduates, average earnings for both male and female graduates were significantly higher in the private sector than in the public sector, but this was also where the greatest gender pay gap was found reflecting the greater compression earnings in the public sector. Importantly, the gender context within which graduate work, was shown to have less effect on earnings in the public sector. Despite lower average earnings, there both male and female graduates working in the public sector reported higher levels of job satisfaction and job quality compared to their private sector peers. The qualitative data suggested some of the reasons for this, including the opportunity to do socially-useful work and satisfaction with the non-pecuniary benefits associated with the public sector.

We found no difference in the extent to which men and women were required to hold a degree to obtain their jobs. In fact, women assigned greater importance to credentials than did men in the factors they felt were relevant in enabling them to get their job. For 'high access' graduates, the long-term movement into employment for which a degree is a requirement and where degree skills and knowledge are utilised was similar for both men and women, but at the end of the period covered by the survey, the proportion of men entering into appropriate graduate employment was continuing to rise, while for women it appeared to be marginally declining.

Looking through the glass ceiling

## Chapter 5

### Gendered jobs and gendered contexts

#### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter compared private and public sector outcomes for the 1995 graduates and provided an indication of where in the labour market gender inequality was most apparent. In addition to broad sector of employment, a further explanation of gender inequality in employment outcomes is occupational segregation. The first part of this chapter, therefore, explores employment outcomes for men and women according to occupation or profession at the time of the survey. For this, we identify graduates working in four differently 'gendered' occupational groups; management, engineering, teaching and law. A further explanation of inequality between men and women is the differential distribution of scarce skills in the labour market. Previous research has suggested that despite the rapid growth of the graduate labour supply, employers continue to report an under-supply of graduates with particular skills, in particular numeracy skills (e.g. AGR 2006, Mason 1999). Having established that men are more likely to possess credentials which demonstrate high levels of numeracy skills, the second part of the chapter explores what the effect of this has on employment outcomes for male and female graduates.

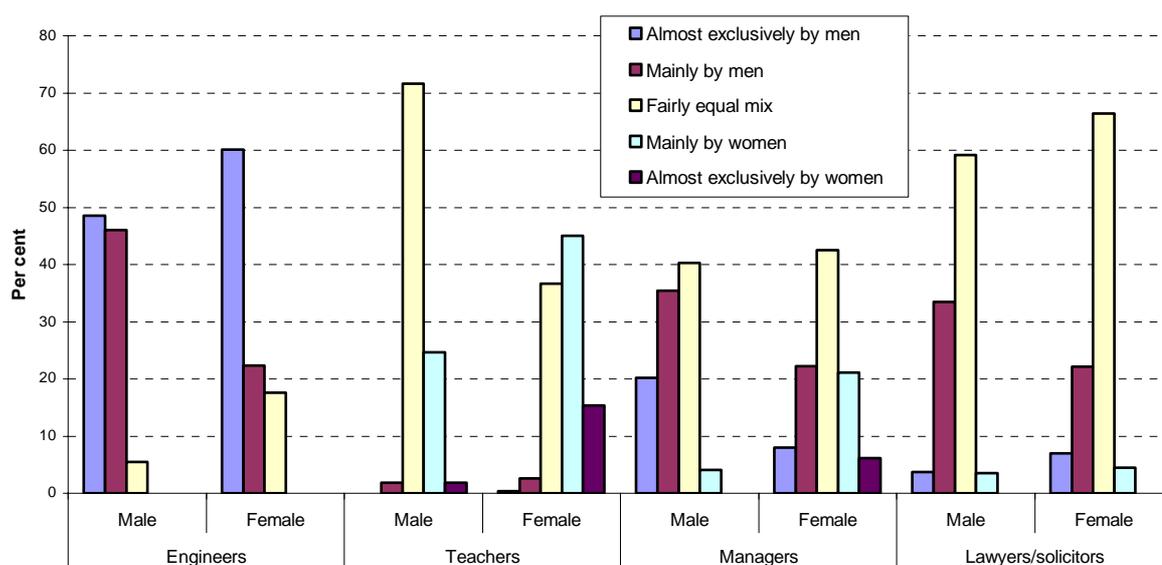
#### 5.2 Gendered jobs?

Segmented market theory suggests that certain areas of employment become identified as 'male' or 'female' work (Crompton and Sanderson 1990) and this segmentation arises either through sex-typing of job content (where jobs are assumed to be more accessible or attractive to women and men on the basis of biologically-based differences in aptitude and orientation) or because of differential accessibility to men and women deriving from social factors (primarily gender-related occupational prerequisites or the organisation of working arrangements). While the causes of segmentation remain debatable, subsequent 'overcrowding' (an excess of labour supply over labour demand) in 'low skill' jobs in segmented markets is associated with lower earnings of women (Bergmann 1996, Macpherson and Hirsch 1995, England 1992, 1982).

To explore this issue, four graduate-appropriate broadly-defined 'occupational groups' were selected, partly on the basis of the extent to which they are 'gendered'. Engineering is both a predominantly male profession and subject of study in higher education. Twelve per cent of our sample of young graduates studied engineering and only 16 per cent of those currently working as engineers were women. Conversely, teaching is a predominantly female profession (especially at primary school level). Approximately, one-fifth of those in the sample who studied education and an equal proportion of those working as teachers at the

time of the survey were men. We also identified those graduates working as managers, and this group tended to be more gender-balanced with 43 per cent of this group being female (the same proportion as those having studied for a business/management degree). Law was similarly balanced. 48 per cent of young graduates working as lawyers/solicitors were women (although a higher proportion, 53 per cent, actually studied law)<sup>15</sup>. The gendered nature of these jobs is reinforced if we examine Figure 5.1.

**Figure 5.1: Responses to the question: ‘In my place of work, my job is done...’ according to gender and occupation**



N=19347 (weighted)

By comparing outcomes for men and women in these four occupational groups we are able to better understand equality of outcomes for men and women in differently constructed (in terms of gender composition and occupational norms) occupational labour markets. We have already noted that women appear disadvantaged in terms of earnings and promotion prospects in general and previous analysis indicated that inequalities are more marked in particular industry and occupational sectors. Table 5.1 shows the mean earning of graduates in each occupation at the time of the survey and in their first main job after graduation. As might be expected, in teaching both first salary and salary seven years on were almost identical for men and women. For those working as managers, men fared better in their first salary and this disparity had increased considerably after seven years. For those working as lawyers/solicitors, despite relatively comparable starting salaries the gender difference had grown significantly by the time of the survey. For those graduates working as engineers, men were earning higher mean salaries in their first main job after graduation and this was still the

<sup>15</sup> Caution needs to be taken with generalising from these findings due to the size of sub-samples. Whilst the teaching and management samples are large enough to be reliable, those for engineering and, in particular, law are notably smaller.

case after seven years in the labour market, although the gender pay gap was narrower than for both managers and lawyers.

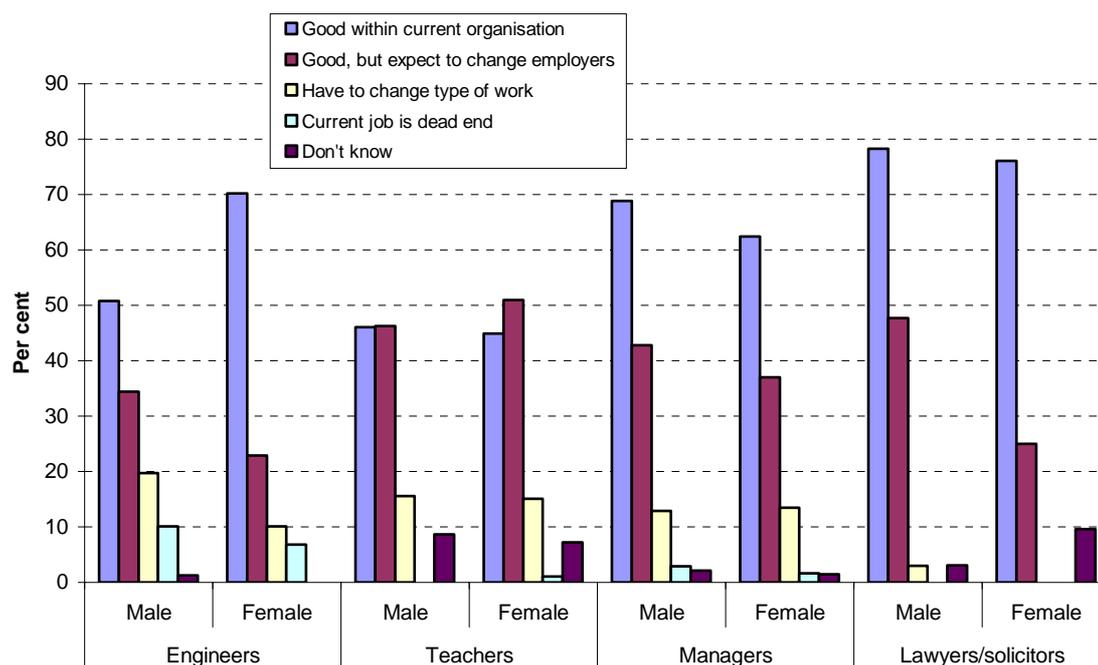
**Table 5.1: Mean earnings in first main job after graduation and in job at time of survey, by gender and occupation (young, full-time employed graduates only)**

		Mean salary in first main job after graduation (£s)	Mean salary in job at the time of the survey (£s)
Engineers	Male	13437	29110
	Female	10079	26373
Teachers	Male	12208	24096
	Female	12627	24295
Managers	Male	13264	38197
	Female	11494	31938
Lawyers/solicitors	Male	13130	53719
	Female	12234	39540

N=18733 (weighted)

If we consider promotion prospects (Figure 5.2), female engineers are more likely than men to report good promotion prospects with their current organisation and less likely to report a likelihood of having to change the type of work they are doing to progress. Teachers, as with pay, report almost identical promotion prospects. This is also the case with male and female managers. There is greater disparity between male and female lawyers where women are less likely to be sure of their prospects.

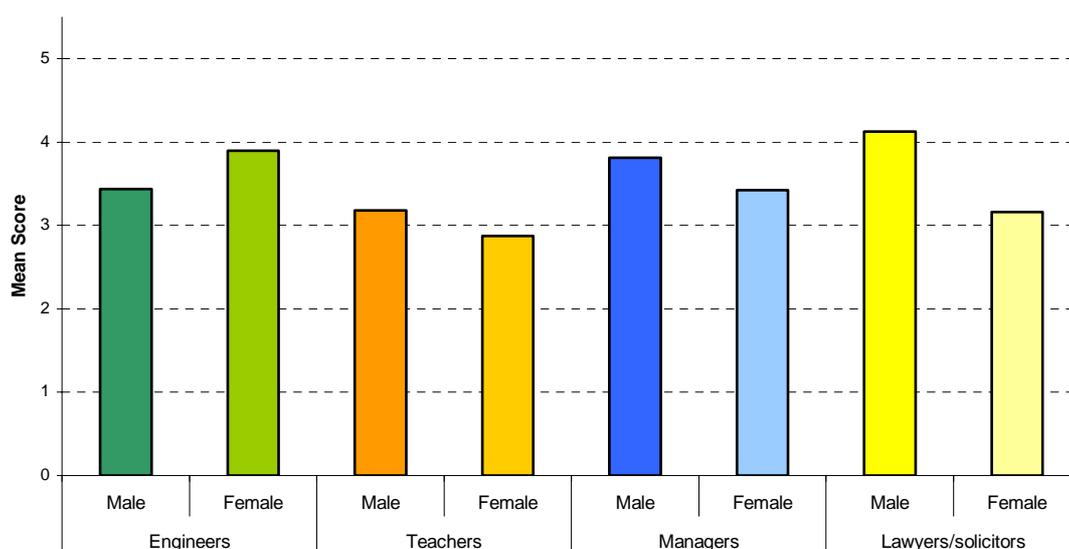
**Figure 5.2: Promotion prospects, by gender and occupation (young, employed graduates only)**



N=19347 (weighted)

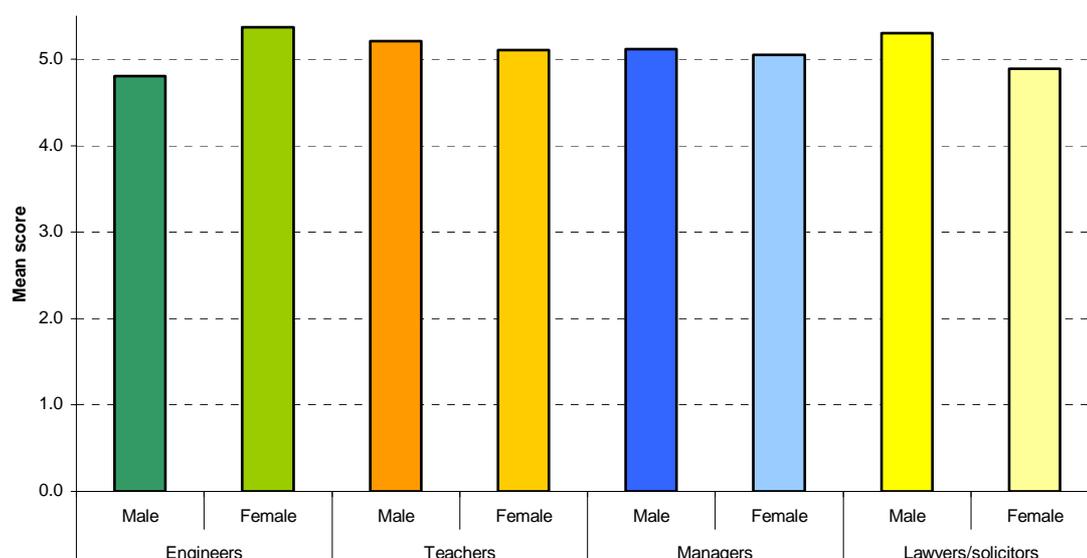
A very similar pattern is again apparent if we consider both mean job quality (Figure 5.3) and job satisfaction (Figure 5.4). In both instances, female engineering graduates reported higher scores for both, but in all other occupational groups men score more highly, most notably in the case of those working as lawyers/solicitors.

**Figure 5.3: Mean job quality, by gender and occupation (young, employed graduates only)**



N=19347 (weighted)

**Figure 5.4: Mean job satisfaction, by gender and occupation (young, employed graduates only)**



N=19347 (weighted)

Despite some positive findings, particularly regarding women in engineering occupations, research on gender in organisations suggests that women in gender atypical roles or working in areas where they are heavily outnumbered by men experience a range of difficulties in being valued which, although they may not be reflected in lower average earnings, might lead women to be less likely to find such work contexts to be comfortable places in which to develop careers (Marshall 1994). Indeed, research on women in engineering has repeatedly produced findings about women being undervalued, discouraged and generally being given a hard time by male colleagues (Evetts 1998, Devine 1992). In the interviews, particularly those conducted after seven years, women repeatedly described how they had to face up to particular challenges as women in gender atypical roles, particularly in male-dominated environments such as engineering and IT. This finding suggests that for women who persevere in such occupations tend to have access to greater earnings equality in many occupations but also experience difficulties in the workplace and in career development. In the interviews conducted ten years on, we had one account of sexual discrimination in the manufacturing sector where a female manager was discriminated against on the basis of salary and inappropriate treatment which resulted in successful claim for constructive dismissal. By the time of the interview, the respondent had set up as a self-employed consultant as a rejection of 'institutionalised sexism' experienced as an employee. Another account suggested that 'acceptance' into a male-dominated profession had only come with experience and the achievement of relative seniority, although her account illustrates the way in which age and gender discrimination are related at different career stages.

*'... I'm a bit older and I'm a girl and I'm in IT, the respect that I get from people is different than when I was twenty-three and a girl and a manager in IT. That's quite intriguing, it's not necessarily to do with this organisation, but that's something to do with age, I guess. I must obviously behave differently now because I have a lot of different experience, but there was definitely a lot of prejudice against a girl managing IT when I first graduated. I think the IT industry generally has matured and there are many, many more women in it, just like there's many, many more of lots of groups in IT, it's not just white males who do consultancy these days. I think there's a maturity in the marketplace, as well as the fact that my age obviously helps and it's not because I look like I'm 90 or anything, but there's much less...I come across people treating me frivolously much less than I used to, which was oh, don't worry about her type of thing. Also I have got much more confidence to say hang on a minute, who's signing your timesheets off or whatever, if anyone's going to be disrespectful, because I think I am obviously much more comfortable with my role as well. I've been around the block a few times and seen the way people do treat people and seen what people can get away with and what they shouldn't and how the world works, I guess'.*

(Female Project manager in the public sector, aged 31, married to secondary teacher)

Women working as lawyers also appear likely to experience gendered obstacles. Cook and Water (1998) argue, and provide evidence from qualitative research among private practice law firms, that such legal employers tend to be cynical and in some cases hostile to equal opportunities legislation, and although the numbers of women qualifying with degrees in law has increased substantially in recent years, women's progress to higher status and highly-paid jobs in mainstream law employment has not kept pace with this expansion (Hughes 1991, Horin 1992). One explanation put forward for this is the importance of tradition in mainstream legal practice and legal sector employers are notoriously conservative in their recruitment practices, where credentials provide a threshold for occupational entry but connections, networks (Cook and Waters 1998) and related cultural capital (Bourdieu 1973) are associated with success and failure in impressing the generally patriarchal gatekeepers (Walby 1990, Reskin and Padavic 1994).

In the case of teachers the relative equality of outcomes is surprising given previous research, but these averages may well mask different outcomes between men and women. Other studies (for example, Carrington 2002) have indicated that men in primary teaching are often promoted more quickly than women and Thornton and Bricheno (2000) reported that women teachers have increasingly sought and achieved high status in the profession, but that men *'once in post achieve well, acquiring a disproportionate number of high status/senior posts'* (p.187). DfES (2004) estimate<sup>16</sup> indicated that in 2003, 12 per cent of primary classroom teachers, almost a quarter of deputy heads and well over half of heads (57 per cent) were men and males were also disproportionately represented in senior positions in secondary teaching. Thornton and Bricheno (*ibid.*) found that female primary teachers were more likely to report perceived male 'advantage' in achieving senior positions than males, who appeared

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<sup>16</sup> Figures for maintained sector in England only, full-time regular qualified teachers.

less likely to suggest gender as being an issue in promotion. It may be that women remain less likely to aspire to posts of responsibility because of commitment to remain in classroom teaching or are reluctant to do so early in their careers when the demands of senior jobs may conflict with family-building plans (Purcell *et al.* 2005).

### 5.3 *Do women with quantitative skills do better in the graduate labour market than those without?*

As was discussed in Chapter 1 of this report, there has been considerable debate over whether the increased supply of graduates to the labour market is resulting in increased under-education and under-utilisation of skills. However, some studies still claim an under-supply of certain skills in the graduate labour supply, notably numeracy skills. If this is indeed the case, it stands to reason that those who have credentials that indicate the possession of such skills are likely to be in demand in the economy and therefore fare better in the graduate labour market. Typically, men are more likely to have achieved these qualifications both prior to and in the course of higher education. Therefore, can we find evidence to suggest that a partial explanation for inequality of outcomes is a greater propensity for men to possess this particular skill set that employers want? Equally, is it the case that women who have maths qualifications fare better in the labour market than those without? In order to explore this we identified those graduates who undertook maths or statistics at 'A' level or SCE Higher. Table 5.2 shows the proportions of men and women at each educational level who studied maths at 'A' level or SCE higher. For both men and women high access graduates were more likely to have studied maths prior to HE entry. As would be expected, we also find men more likely than women to have studied maths at this stage.

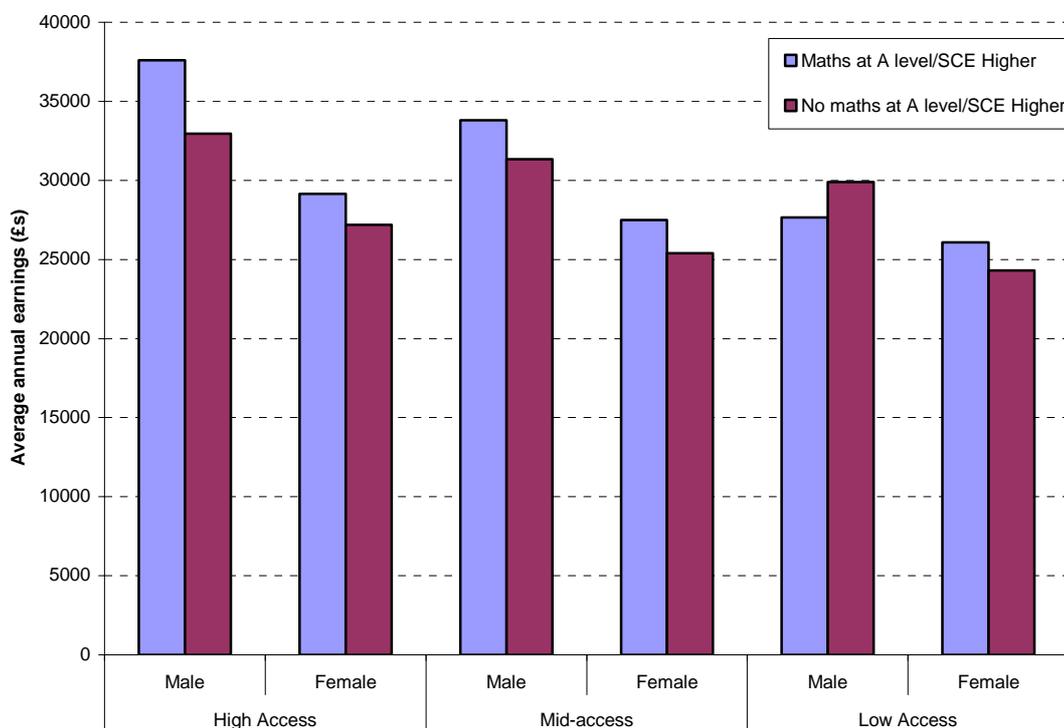
**Table 5.2: Proportion of 'young' graduates who had A-level/SCE Higher mathematics, all 1995 graduates**

	Male	Female
High Access	67.3	45.4
Mid-access	47.3	33.7
Low Access	27.3	15.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>34.3</b>

N=56921 (weighted)

Having identified those graduates who had maths qualifications, we are able to compare outcomes for this group compared to those who had not. Figure 5.5 shows that overall graduates with a maths qualification obtained prior to HE earn on average more than those that do not. We also find that for men this earnings differential increases with overall educational attainment. This is not the case for women where not only is the differential between graduates with maths and those without maths reduced but it also appears to be less related to overall pre-HE educational attainment. This pattern is also evident in analysis of the 1999 cohort.

**Figure 5.5: Mean earnings, comparing those respondents who studied or did not study maths at A-level/SCE Higher, by gender and index of access (young, full-time employed graduates only)**



N=51528

There is not, however, any overall correlation with mean levels of satisfaction other than women appear marginally more satisfied with their jobs overall and this is correlated to level of access (Table 5.3).

**Table 5.3: Mean job satisfaction, comparing those respondents who studied or did not study maths at A-level/SCE Higher, by gender and index of access (young, employed graduates only)**

		Maths at A level/SCE Higher	No maths at A level/SCE Higher
High Access	Male	4.9	5.1
	Female	5.2	4.8
Mid-access	Male	4.9	5.0
	Female	5	5.0
Low Access	Male	4.8	4.9
	Female	4.9	5.0

N=53265 (weighted)

There is some correlation however between having studied maths pre-HE and increased job quality, particularly for men in the high and mid-access groups (Table 5.4). For women having a maths qualification seems to have little impact other than for the 'low access' group.

Does this mean that having a maths qualification allows well-qualified male graduates more opportunities and access to greater job quality than other men, but does not have the same impact on otherwise well-qualified women?

**Table 5.4: Mean job quality, comparing those respondents who studied or did not study maths at A-level/SCE Higher, by gender and index of access**

		Maths at A level/SCE Higher	No maths at A level/SCE Higher
High Access	Male	3.8	3.4
	Female	3.2	3.2
Mid-access	Male	3.3	3.3
	Female	3.3	3.1
Low Access	Male	3.3	3.5
	Female	3.4	3.0

N=43429 (weighted)

#### 5.4 Summary

The previous chapter showed that employment outcomes for men and women working in the public sector were less divergent than for those graduates working in the private sector (although inequalities were still apparent). This finding is reinforced in the comparison of outcomes of graduates working as teachers at the time of the survey. Male and female teachers were found to earn similar salaries, both immediately after graduation and seven years later, to report similar promotion prospects, job quality and job satisfaction. Those graduates who were likely to be working in the private sector there was considerable difference in outcomes, but which varied between occupations. Most notably, female graduates working as lawyers/solicitors had significantly lower average earnings compared to their male peers, despite relatively comparable starting salaries, reported being less sure about their promotion prospects and reported lower job quality and job satisfaction. The figures for graduates working as managers followed a similar pattern. Interestingly, there was more variability on the findings for graduates working as engineers. Whilst men reported higher average earnings, the gender gap was less pronounced for this group. Moreover, female engineers also reported better promotion prospects and higher levels of job quality and job satisfaction.

The chapter also showed that men at all educational levels are more likely than women to have acquired credentials prior to higher education that demonstrate high-level numeracy skills and that there is an earnings (and job quality) premium associated with such qualifications. However, this advantage was shown to be more apparent for men than women.

Overall, this analysis reinforces the finding that women experience greatest inequality of employment outcomes in the private sector and whilst this inequality appears variable across

professions, earnings inequality in particular is universal in the areas of employment explored. Previous research also suggests that even in professions of apparent equality (such as teaching) longer-term disparities are evident later in careers.

## Chapter 6

### Choices, preferences and constraints in career development

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters we focused on the relative labour market outcomes of the 1995 graduate sample as revealed via their earnings, occupational status and the career paths they established in the seven-year period since graduating. This provided a clear picture of the differences and similarities in the gender profiles of sample members and also gave some indication of the structural and cultural variables that contribute to the gender pay gap and gender differences in career outcomes. The interviews conducted seven years after graduation suggested that many of the *Class of '99* were approaching a 'crossroads' in both their careers and personal lives; for example, those without clear career paths expressed a need to establish themselves, those who were not entirely satisfied with their jobs or career trajectory felt that time was running out if they wanted to change direction and, most consistently across the sample, most interviewees referred to an expectation of 'settling down', often with a view to starting a family.

Therefore, one objective of the research following up these same graduates ten years on was to explore how respondents and their partners were managing this transition into this next stage of their careers along with additional personal responsibilities and pressures. One of the central areas of interest was the interaction of the career and relationship processes in this transitional period when these dual-career couples, often firmly established in their respective labour markets, occupations or organisations, were faced with choices about work-life balance, family responsibility and, in some cases, the increasing demands of one or both jobs. The *Seven Years On* interviews had indicated that, for many graduates, early career up to that point had been a period when they were willing to devote themselves to their work but that they expected this to lead to opportunities to achieve a better work-life balance once established in a career or organisation and as an investment in future security:

*'The whole reason that I came to London to get a job and live that horrible life was primarily so I could get enough money so I didn't have to spend the rest of my life slaving away in some hideous job for a mortgage. And I've kind of done that because I bought a property and sold that so I've got that money stashed away ready. So I'm much more motivated by my private life now than any sort of career aspirations.'*

(Female, 31, Project manager in public services, married to secondary teacher)

One of the central aims of this stage of the research, consequently, was to examine the meanings attached to career and work within the context of individual values, attitudes and priorities: within the economic and personal circumstances of the dual-career couple; within

the context of transition and life stage; and in the wider context of apparent changes in organisations, careers and the nature of work.

## **6.2 Background**

It has been a taken-for-granted and sometimes explicit assumption in analyses of women's employment that women and men are faced with different options and choices in career development. More accurately, in the past, the majority of women have been required to choose between career development and parenthood. Previous research on dual career households has unanimously indicated that women in such partnerships took on the primary childcare and home-maker roles, except in a very small minority of cases and make significantly more accommodations to their career development than males as the family life-cycle proceeded (Moen 2003, Hochschild and Machung 1989, Bielby and Barron 1986, Herz 1986, Rappoport and Rappoport 1978). Women in previous generations very often adapted to their partner's careers by developing flexible, secondary careers that were characterised by adaptability and horizontal rather than vertical career progression, resulting in women's 'asynchronous' career development to cope with life-stage transitions (Sekaran and Hall 1989). This tended to reflect an essential 'trade off' to complement the more 'conventionally-synchronised' linear career of the breadwinner (Hardhill and Watson 2004, Bonney and Love 1991, Gallese 1985, Bruegel 1996). As a result, even 'career women' routinely appear to have made career concessions to accommodate family responsibilities (Karambaya and Reilly 1992), and male partners' careers have traditionally taken priority over those of the female partners (Valcour and Tolbert 2003). More recent research suggests that even where employees have access to family-friendly work arrangements this remains the case (Hochschild 1997). Highly-qualified female partners most often developed 'non-traditional' careers, creating or taking advantage of opportunities for working arrangements that could accommodate their caring responsibilities, often, indeed, developing less organisationally-bounded careers. Research on successful career women pursuing traditional organisationally-bounded careers (Marshall 1994, Wajcman 1998, Kanter 1977) indicates that the costs of career development for women have often been high, especially in senior management, the presumption being that the pursuit of a traditional organisational career is not easily compatible with responsible parenting.

Nevertheless, it might be expected that the women of the generation under investigation, who have grown up in a context where equal opportunities are enshrined in legislation and they have been encouraged to compete on equal terms with their male peers, would be resistant to reverting to a more gendered division of household labour. Furthermore, it might be expected that their expectations of marriage, partnership and parenting be expected to reflect these egalitarian ideals. As increasing numbers of women compete for professional and managerial work, and if it is true that opportunities for organisationally-unbounded careers

have been proliferating, it might be that the traditional gendered asymmetrical balance between equally-highly qualified partners might be changing. Dual career households form an increasing proportion of households in Britain and North America, recently estimated conservatively by Hakim (2000:111) to represent up to 20 per cent of all households. In Spring 2003, over three quarters of women between the ages of 25-49 in the UK were economically active. Young women currently developing careers in management and the professions have grown up in an environment where they were encouraged to take equal opportunities in education and employment for granted. Increasing numbers of younger women, especially those with higher education qualifications, appear to have been opting not to have children or to postpone reproduction until they have established a career (Blackwell and Bynner 2003). Their family-building, once started, appears to be increasingly compressed within a shorter time period (Rendall and Smallwood 2003). Other evidence suggests that, even among highly qualified, high achieving women, career decisions and working lives are likely to be modified or challenged by becoming parents, to a greater extent than is the case for men (Brannen 1999, Hochschild 1989). Particularly in traditionally 'male' jobs such as senior management, there is evidence that women still perceive themselves as having to choose between career development and family-building.

At the time of the study, the 1995 cohort were mainly in their early 30s, mainly living with a partner, and at an age when major life plans about career and family development are on their agendas: essentially Sekaran's (1989) 'young married' stage (although most are not formally wedded). They have reached adulthood in a socio-political context within which equal opportunities in education and employment are taken for granted - but uneasily, within a highly-gendered culture – but in which distinct differences between male and female career profiles remain evident and a gender pay gap persists. When surveyed seven years after graduation, achieving a satisfactory work/life balance was an increasingly high priority for most respondents of both sexes - and there was considerable evidence to support the contention that, far from being individual, a high proportion of graduate careers were essentially two-person careers where decisions about changing job, relocation, accepting or pursuing promotion were made in the context of partnership and household utilities. In this chapter we draw principally on the interviews conducted ten years after graduation with a sub-sample of the 1995 graduate cohort, selected as high flyers, who mainly but not exclusively had clearly begun to establish successful careers when they were interviewed seven years on. This chapter explores in detail the changing context of employment for these graduates; specifically how work and careers is consolidated with increasing personal responsibilities in the form of family-building and partnerships and changing values and attitudes.

### **6.3 Gender, values and attitudes**

On average, women and men tend to exhibit possession of certain employment-related 'skills' and traits such as ambition, competitiveness and empathy to a systematically different

degree. Such differences have been discussed in research on managers, where there is considerable evidence that women and men have different values that inform their approaches to their jobs and to organisational interaction (e.g. Orange 2003, Marshall 1994, Gilligan 1982). In the survey, we asked a range of questions designed to elicit attitudes to career development, ambitions and wider values, and we found evidence of well-established gender differences on a range of dimensions, summarised in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 6.1: Agreement with key attitude and expectation statements, by gender (young graduates only)**

Attitude Statement	Males (%)		Females (%)	
	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly	Agree somewhat
Career development important to me	38.1	49.9	25.7	55.4
I am extremely ambitious	17.8	52.4	10.2	46.7
High financial reward is important to me	20.9	55.4	10	54.3
I do not expect to get my main fulfilment from work	14.7	42.8	17.2	44.2
I expect to work continuously till retirement	20.9	37.5	9.5	25
I expect to take career breaks to raise children	1.1	6.8	28.3	31.2
I will expect my partner to take career breaks to raise children	10.9	32.2	1.5	9.6
I expect to change career several times	8.3	28.9	6.4	24.4
Doing socially useful work is important to me	10.1	28.2	18.6	39.5

\* These attitudinal items, in a series of questions, were scaled on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = Agree strongly and 5 = Disagree strongly. For this table, only the percentages in the first two columns are reported.

The items fall into two overlapping categories; attitudes to own career and work and expectations about future work/life balance. In the case of the former, we find males significantly more likely to agree strongly that career development is very important to them, and if we combine the proportions who agreed 'somewhat' or 'strongly' that it was important, the proportions are higher for males than for women - so men were more likely to regard career development as important, but perhaps an equally significant finding is that four out of five women did, and a quarter of them strongly agreed.

A slightly more substantial gender difference was evident between the male and female graduates concerning the extent to which they perceived themselves as ambitious. The question asked was simply 'How far do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *I am extremely ambitious*'. Respondents were asked to reply on a five point scale: 'Agree strongly'; 'Agree somewhat'; 'Not sure'; 'Disagree somewhat'; 'Disagree strongly'. 70 per cent

of the young male graduates stated that they 'agreed strongly' or 'agreed somewhat' with this statement, compared with 57 per cent of young female graduates. Research on previous generations of successful career women has indicated that they tended to attribute their success to serendipity rather than their own agency, and were reluctant to admit to being ambitious (e.g. Heilbrun 1988). More recent psychosocial work on the topic suggests that young highly-qualified women are less likely than their predecessors to fail to acknowledge their own efforts and abilities, but there was still a tendency to downplay them, related to a recognition of the uncertainties and conflicting options that they were faced with in the transition from young womanhood to maturity (Plunkett *op. cit*) - and the accounts given by our respondents provide a similar picture. Women were somewhat more likely than men to agree that they did not expect to get their main fulfilment from work.

As far as long-term values<sup>17</sup> were concerned, the order of importance was remarkably similar for women and men, but there were two interesting differences. Men were significantly more likely to consider high financial reward as very important, and women were significantly more likely to put a high value on doing socially-useful work. Both of these variables, of course, relate to the women's significantly greater propensity to be employed in the public sector: but are they cause or effect?

We asked respondents to indicate how important a range of fundamental attributes were to their sense of identity. Table 6.2 shows the proportion of graduates who reported that each of these was either important or very important, comparing men and women. It shows that the importance of social class and educational background to these highly-qualified male and female respondents, as a component of their overall identity, was essentially similar - as was, significantly, their job or plans for employment. However, women were significantly more likely to indicate 'being a man or a woman' was important and were also more likely to indicate that 'family relationships/being a parent' was important.

**Table 6.2: Responses to the question: 'How important to your sense of the identity are the following...?' Proportion of young graduates indicating very important or important**

	Male	Female
Your class background	33.1	34.8
Your being a man or a woman	43.4	66.5
Your educational level	80.9	83.4
Your job/plans for employment	82.2	81.5
Your family relationships/being a parent	70.3	81.3
N= 59908 (weighted)		

<sup>17</sup> This question asked about the importance of a number of facets of work and personal life, including career development, own personal development, family development, job satisfaction, high financial reward, job with status and respect and doing socially-useful work.

Other questions attempted to gain some insight into respondents' perceptions of future career and work/life continuity, and these revealed gender differences. Men were more likely to expect to work continuously until retirement (although only half of them did which suggests a marked change from previous generations). Around half of women, but only 7 per cent of men, expected to take career breaks to raise children and the men were less likely to have indicated such expectations, for themselves or their partners. We make the assumption that this reflects both tradition and change. It certainly suggests that less women will take such career breaks than they have in the past (and our analysis of census longitudinal data demonstrates that recent cohorts of highly-qualified women have been increasingly postponing or rejecting motherhood), although there is not a great deal of evidence of either 'new men' or women expecting to share 'new male' partnerships. It may or may not be relevant that the majority of respondents were living with a partner at the time of the survey and some already had dependent children: among those who had graduated under the age of 30, over 60 per cent of the women and over half of the men were living with a partner and/or dependent children at the time of the survey - and a significant sub-sample of those interviewed in the follow-up programme had subsequently embarked upon family-building or were considering doing so. Related to this we found evidence that greater gender awareness on the part of women co-existed with similar career-centred gender identities when we asked respondents about the relative importance of various aspects of their identity 'in terms of how you feel about yourself, as a person': social class, educational level, job or employment plans, family relationships/being a parent, ethnicity and gender. Gender was a significantly more important component of identity for women than men, family relationships/being a parent were slightly more often very important for the women, but the responses on the other dimensions - including job or employment plans - were similar for both sexes.

The findings so far are almost eerily reminiscent of findings from an earlier sample of 1960 graduates in women's lesser concern with 'extrinsic' rewards and greater concern with social values - 'human contact and being able to help people' (Fogarty *et al.* 1971:231). They also illustrate well-established socio-psychological findings about differences between women's and men's propensity to 'generativity' - concern with creativity and responsibility in both the public and private spheres (Stewart and Vandewater 1998, Erikson 1964) and socialised tendency to be 'other-directed' (Gilligan 1982, De Beauvoir 1952). We also find evidence in the qualitative data to indicate that women are more likely than men to prioritise work-life considerations and non-pecuniary job benefits over salary. The interview data suggest that the pursuit of high earnings or rapid career progression was often viewed as one half of an equation to be balanced against work-life balance considerations and other facets of work:

*'Have you seen the hours you have to work to earn the big money? And I really don't want to be working until seven, eight o'clock at night. I think, I mean, I suppose if I didn't have a family that I would probably think about it differently but once you have a family, even if you are a man, once you have a family you just don't want to be doing those sort of hours'.*

(Female, 32, programme formation manager in public services, married with children)

For some women it was explicit that they had made a conscious decision not to pursue high salary and hierarchical progression (or eschewed opportunities they had for doing so) if it was to be at the expense of other desirable aspects work or in favour of pursuing more personally fulfilling and satisfying work, often associated with an altruistic motive (as discussed later). In response to being asked about her move into her current position, one interviewee told how she had made an unusual internal move to a different job where she felt there was better fit between the role and what she wanted out of work:

*'[The move was] sideways, no difference in salary. I guess some people looking in might have thought that it was backwards, because... it's just a very, very different job but to me it certainly wasn't [backwards], it just fitted with what I wanted to get involved with... and I'd heard good things and it's a well-respected part of the business that is evolving and gets great credibility and this what I wanted to be doing. So, it was I guess... actually it was a sideways move, for me it was a good decision... I had been thinking about changing, I made some more fundamental life decisions, I think, towards the end of last year. I wasn't feeling fulfilled, [I was] not really enjoying [my job] as much, feeling that [my] involvement on piece of work... you don't really understand what the benefits are going to be at the end of it... the projects, they were worthwhile but from a personal perspective I found it quite frustrating. I just started thinking about what I really wanted to do and I really enjoyed... I wanted to get back into an HR world where you are giving advice to line managers, working much more closely with the front line... The centre I now work in is really about listening and giving advice to line managers on policy, running with cases, complex cases, complex grievances and I just wanted to get back into honing up listening skills, communication skills and helping out... because I need to feel like I'm doing some good and I want to feel at the end of the day of work that I've actually added a bit of value'.*

(Female, 30, HR consultant in banking and finance)

For many respondents, these changing priorities coincided with thinking about or actually starting a family. However, the relationship between a reassessment and re-evaluation of values and priorities does not seem as straightforward as it might appear. As discussed above, several female interviewees currently on maternity leave expressed a desire to change careers towards something more personally fulfilling and/or socially-useful. On the face of it, these events would appear very closely related: starting a family and a re-orientation towards 'other-directed' work. However, it is perhaps not so much the fact of starting a family which is important but the opportunity that it presents, a partially 'enforced' career break where a change of direction can be more easily made. The following interview extract is from a case in point:

Interviewer: In the previous interview... you talked about the feeling you had that you wanted to do something that was socially useful, it seemed you were getting tired of the rat race of the commercial world...

*'Yes, definitely. I think if I was to go back to work [after my maternity leave] then that [social work] would be the sort of thing that I'd be doing... I think if in the future I decided I wanted to go back to work I certainly would be looking at that kind of work rather than going back in to the commercial world'.  
(Female, 31, full-time homemaker, previously product manager in banking and finance)*

In another case, a female interviewee who had previously worked in financial services as a project assistant before being made redundant had decided to take a career break in order to re-evaluate her career and possibly train as a teacher. This effectively had the same impact as going on maternity leave:

*'I'm going [travelling] for five months with a friend. It just got to the point where I just thought I've completely lost my focus, I feel burnt out, I just need to go and have a break, I need to go and do something different, I need to broaden my horizons and go and appreciate people who aren't in as good a position as me. So part of my travelling is going to be doing a voluntary job for a month in India, going to do community work there and teaching English. I really, really want to change my life and get back some focus'.  
(Female, 30, administrator in primary sector)*

Evidently, the most notable change in priorities and attitude towards work amongst the sample of 1995 graduates between the interviews conducted after seven years and those after ten was the increased importance placed on work-life balance. This was significant through out the sample, both with male and female interviewees and those with and without families. The following extract is taken from an interview with a male respondent with no family commitments:

*'I think I have decided that in terms of career development I don't want to go much higher than what I'm aiming for now. I mean I've taken on more responsibility in the last couple of years and at the moment I don't feel I want a great deal more than maybe one step up to programme manager and I think that's purely because I've realized sometimes it can be more pressure and stress and I'd rather not feel that when I get home... I can see the kind of decisions my senior management have to make, because I'm fairly close to one or two of the senior managers here, and I don't like their lifestyle and even they say you know sometimes they hadn't bothered going up there. I've certainly realized that work-life balancing is very, very important to me and I do like to be able to come home at the weekend or even in the evening and kind of switch off. I don't aspire to have huge amounts of money and mansions and drive [an expensive car]'.  
(Male, 31, Lead project engineer in manufacturing)*

The following extract is taken from an interview with a male respondent with a young family and was his response to being asked whether his priorities had changed since the last interview; he had previously stated that competitive salary, challenging work and family development were most important to him:

*'I would say that probably in terms of pecking order, the financial one [competitive salary] has probably gone down to the bottom, the challenge one's [challenging work] in the middle and the top one is probably sort of balancing all three but a lot... a lot... much, much higher score now on the family sort of work-*

*life balance issues, I suspect. And I don't expect that will really change, really, going forwards, now having a family that is much more... I mean they're all important but probably that's at the moment... especially having such a young family: that is probably the most important one'.*

(Male, 31, tax and finance manager in banking and finance, married, children)

As the extract above suggests, as the *Class of '95* reached their late twenties, it appeared that the pursuit of particular 'traditional' career goals, such as progression and increased salary, were beginning to give way to a greater emphasis on other considerations such as work-life balance and increased flexibility. Analysing the *Seven Years On* interview findings, we cited respondents in high-flying jobs reflecting that their current workloads were not sustainable and would not be compatible with the lives they envisaged leading in the future (Purcell and Elias 2004 *op. cit.*). Analysing the *Ten Years On* interviews, when several of those we spoke to earlier have crossed over the threshold into parenthood, we found this anticipation had proved accurate. An increased emphasis on work-life balance amongst both men and women also almost certainly reflects the stage at which these graduates had reached in their careers and the growing realisation that graduate jobs tend to be occupations that spill over from work time into non-work time, and make significant demands on their incumbents that may not be compatible with other responsibilities and 'own life' activities.

*'I think most people would probably look at my career and probably go, "wow, you've done really, really well" and I have done really, really well. I've been successful in that I've earned a lot of money in a very short period of time, but I think now, probably my attitudes are changing a bit more. I see that my job I can't sustain it for another ten years. So I think now I need to maybe side step and look at something where I'm going to be able to sustain it, where I'm not going to need as much energy! Something that could be a bit more, maybe family friendly, I don't know. Just something that's a bit more flexible, I think'.*

(Female, 31, recruitment consultant in business services, married)

*'Yes I think it has. Probably the longer I've done my job, I think I started to realise that I could get completely swamped and become a complete workaholic and I did spend quite a lot of time thinking about that and thought, "well actually, it's not really what I want, not really the road I want to take". I think that - and the way I value my career - probably dipped slightly from when you last spoke to me. I think I probably think less of it now, I think there's a lot more important things. I thought that before I had a child and I think that even more now. I'm not saying I think it is still very important, but it's just not as important'.*

(Female, 31, Head of recycling in not-for-profit sector, married to civil servant, children)

For most, the apparent change in attitude, or reinforcement of previously held values, took place alongside changing personal circumstances such as marriage, co-habitation and family formation. But, this was not the case for all. For some there appeared to be a change in attitude which was more associated with different life phase independent of any change in personal circumstances. Moreover, these changes in attitudes and priorities appeared to manifest themselves differently in men and women.

*'I think things get different importance in life as you get a bit older and it's not all career-career anymore, it's kind of like, actually, what do I want to do with my real life?'*

(Female Project manager in Public Sector, 31, married to secondary teacher)

In certain circumstances this is as a result of having achieved considerable success in the labour market during the course of their twenties and being in a position to be able to reprioritise in favour of a more balanced personal and work life. The following extract is from the interview with the sample respondent as above:

*'Things have definitely changed like that and the choices I make in my career are based on my home life really, I wouldn't take a job... That's another reason not to go contracting, because I would have to be prepared to work anywhere in the UK and I don't think I am prepared to do that anymore. Yes, absolutely, that's the choices I've made and that's the reason why I'm working where I am doing the job I'm doing: it's not because necessarily it's a great job, it's a happy medium between having the life at home that I want and some sort of rewarding career, so I've gone for something interesting at work to do... well interesting is probably not the right word, but something meaningful at work and less money.'*

[Interviewer: So it has been a situation that's evolved rather than ...was it a definitive decision to make those changes and accept the fact you would be earning less?]

*'Absolutely, yes, it was a positive decision. Initially I thought I could take the job because that will give me three months off, so the initial decision was definitely because I want time at home and we'd moved into a new house and I wanted to have a summer off with my husband because he's a teacher. So that was all definitely a choice. Then once I got there and, "Oh God, I actually can have so much time off". Actually I can understand that this money is OK. No, they have definitely been positive decisions. Also, the alternative was to leave and go contracting and I'm not really prepared to do that.'*

[Interviewer: Would it have been a natural progression for you to have gone contracting when you left your previous employer?]

*Yes, definitely. I don't know any ...None of the people I have met in my career since leaving university who do project management, none of them work in a permanent position because you can earn eight hundred pounds a day as a contract project manager, why would you work for forty [£000s]? You wouldn't do it, would you? £800 a day! You could work three days a month and take home what I take home. It's amazing how easy it is to not do it when everything logically is saying you really should do it, it's free money. People are getting free money out there doing bad jobs and we're employing most of them!'*

(Female, Project manager in the Public Sector, married to secondary teacher)

There was sense from some interviewees that the early phase of their careers – one of striving for career progression and increased salary and making personal sacrifice (for example in terms of location of working, mobility and working hours) – was coming to an end and a new phase of consolidation was beginning. However, despite this 'slowing down' there was still considerable emphasis placed on continual professional development and personal development but outside of any overt participation in the 'rat race':

*'I guess within my role, generally the answer you'd expect here is I expect to make it to financial controller and then financial director and then that's it, as some of my peers all have done. But I guess more and more because I'm getting this work-life balance and readdressing what I really want from life, I would actually be very happy staying at this level. If I was at this level in twenty years' time and just, you know... even in the same company... I would be extremely happy because I can get everything I want in terms of work-life balance, I can go off on holiday and have a nice holiday, the money, as I say, is more than adequate or more than I ever expected. So, for me, I don't see an onwards and upwards approach for me. I do see it much more of a... perhaps, moving to a different company but doing the same thing... That's what I see for my future'.*

[Interviewer: Right. But it sounds from what you've said previously that you still need to make sure that you are kind of developing in a role in terms of kind of personal development, not necessarily kind of moving up the ladder, as it were...]

*'Yes, I was just thinking that because what do you do once you... Do you ever get fully developed, are you ever going to feel, "Well, that's good, I'm now ready to retire" you know? I don't actually know, I've never really thought of it that way. I just know that on a day to day basis, I like to feel as though I've achieved things, not just, "Oh, I've managed to tick my list off" but, you know, I've achieved something else'.*

(Female, 31, Divisional accounting manager in business services, living with partner)

Moreover, new priorities associated with variety, creativity and personal fulfilment appeared to be emerging in discussions with these graduates ten years on.

*'I'm now looking for something that will allow me to be a bit more creative and just not stick in the same old rut that I've always been in. So I'm really after variety because I don't want to get bored, and yes, I would like to earn as much money as possible, but it's not the be all and end all, as long as I have enough to pay for everything I need to pay for, then I'm not too fussed beyond that... I mean the whole point for me, the last two years [undertaking an MBA] was getting out of that rat race; so why would I put myself back in it? I know people who are doing those kinds of jobs and who are working all the hours God sends and I just think - why? I don't care how good a company is, I'm just not up for it. I think I've done my fair share of that'.*

(Female, 30, Management consultant, Self-employed, living with partner)

#### **6.4 'Giving something back': socially-useful work and life stage**

As touched on in previous sections, we found in the interviews conducted ten years on an increased tendency or desire to be involved in work that was in some way 'socially-useful'; most notably in the interviews amongst women but both those who had or were planning on starting a family and those who were not. This 'other-orientation' was a dominant theme in a number of interviews. For some interviewees, of course, such values were long-term and deeply held and had informed their career decisions from an early stage, intrinsic to their motivation and job satisfaction.

*'I'd probably say now that doing a socially-useful job is sort of at the top [in terms of priorities] and even if I'm not entirely happy and satisfied, that's more important to me. So even the fact that actually it's really exhausting and knackered, I'll know that I'm making a difference... I mean, I do want to be satisfied in my work but I don't do it to be satisfied, I do it because I think it's important, I'm making a difference... and also I'm a great believer that everybody has gifts and those gifts are there to contribute to society and it's important to find a niche in which they can then contribute to society... So, for me partly the satisfaction is in doing what I'm good at but to do that in a socially useful way... I might earn much more money, for example, [doing something else] but I'm not interested in that'.*

(Female, 31, secondary school teacher)

For others interviewed, the desire to undertake socially-useful work was a reaction to - personal circumstances, for example, where motherhood acted as a catalyst towards this ideological shift or provided an opportunity to reassess their priorities and values during a career break.

*'I'm quite keen to retrain and go down a different career route...I'm quite excited about the prospect of doing something new and I think if I had returned to [previous employer] then I might not have done that for a lot longer. [Previous employer] was a cushy number really, I knew my way around very well, I had been there a suitably long period of time in the company, everybody knew me, I worked on interesting stuff, but it didn't feel like a vocation and I think particularly after the experience we had when my daughter was in hospital in intensive care and we met nurses who were just so amazing and inspirational and committed to what they do. I don't want to become a nurse, I think I'd be a terrible nurse, but I'd never come across that dedication. I graduated and I went to work ...well you know about my career history, but I'd never come across that dedication that I met and faced in all of the nurses, without exception, when my daughter was in intensive care, and actually when she was off intensive care on the ward. That made me think, "oh gosh, there must be more to life than working in financial services and I'd like to do something that makes a difference". I'm looking at the moment at speech and language therapy courses and, having studied languages, I would be able to get onto a teaching and learning therapy course'.*

(Full-time homemaker, 31, formerly product manager in banking and finance, married with children)

However, we discerned increasingly altruistic motivations in many of the graduates' job choices or future plans that went beyond simply a reaction to changing family circumstances and seemed associated with life stage, perhaps a reaction against the self-orientation more evident in the early stages of career. The following extract is taken from an interview with a non-employed female with two children. On graduation she had entered onto an international training programme with a large global banking and finance organisation via the milkround which she subsequently left after five years to move overseas to get married.

*'I suppose you could say that I've lost all the ambitions that I had... I suppose, it's just different ambitions now. I want to feel that I'm contributing in helping others and being more personally fulfilled, much more than I was before actually. I just had different buttons before'.*

[Interviewer: What would you put that down to? Is it simply the fact that you have your own family now?]

*'I don't know if it's just that, or maybe in your twenties, you've just graduated and you want to put everything to use and you want to... you know, the world is at large and you just want to go out there and get everything you can and prove things to yourself. Then, when you have, you think, "oh, ok is that all it's cracked up to be?" Maybe do something for myself or something for other people, you know... when I say something for myself I mean personally fulfilling. Maybe that has something to do with it? Growing up and maturing a bit, realising the world doesn't revolve around you'.*

(Full-time homemaker, 35, married to marketing director, children)

A similar theme is expressed in the following extract from an interview with a female project manager working for a public sector organisation who had previously worked in the ICT sector.

[Interviewer: Is that something you quite enjoy, the fact that you're doing work that is socially useful?]

*'Definitely, that was a conscious decision as well. I did say that was the only job I applied for, but I did apply for it for a reason. It must have been about the time I talked to you last, my husband also was a project manager and we made a conscious decision that we didn't necessarily want to do what we were doing for the rest of our lives, because it wasn't really contributing anything to society. [My previous job] really wasn't contributing anything to society. My husband was doing something that was even worse... So he gave up his job and became a teacher and I supported him while he retrained and then as it came to the end of the time with [previous employer] we were deciding what to do, I thought I really wanted to look for something more... socially contributing... is that the right word? Definitely something that had a bit more meaning, because it's all very nice earning loads of money, but at the end of the day I was coming home and thinking, "right, I have just spent 14 hours of my life doing something that I really don't care about and won't make any difference to anybody". That can be quite soul destroying, even if the money is great, you do end up feeling slightly prostituted, or that you are doing it yourself, you are prostituting yourself. So this job was obviously contributing something and the kind of projects that I work on are really meaningful... You want to give something back. I don't know whether that's an age thing, or just a point where you... I don't know, when you leave university... I mean for me I was certainly driven to do the right thing to get a great job, to buy a house and do all the things that socially you are expected to do. But then all of a sudden you get quite a few of those things and you think – "well... what now?"'*

(Female, 31, project manager in public sector, married to secondary school teacher)

This changing attitude appeared to more prevalent among women, although this was by no means always the case. The following extract is taken from an interview with a marketing manager for a manufacturer of medical equipment who had previously worked for a manufacturer of consumer goods.

*'I love the fact that even if I have a crap day at the office, I still know that the products I am marketing are truly improving peoples' lives... Their lives have been really dramatically affected by coronary artery disease, yet through the products that my company is manufacturing, marketing and selling, their lives are dramatically transformed such that they can get out and live the life that they want to live again. So that for me is a massive difference. The company motto*

*is that every six seconds a life is improved and transformed through the products that we manufacture and market and sell that's a very motivating mission that I can completely buy into. So that for me is the biggest motivational change'.*

[Interviewer: Doing socially useful work, is that something that has become more important to you over the last few years?]

*'It is, it is, dramatically so and especially since I had kids. For me, that was a big trigger in my life. I remember doing [a personality-type test] prior to having kids and I came out as a thinker as opposed to feeler. It's an interesting exercise to do before and after having kids because I changed, in the space of a couple of months, from a thinker to a feeler. Much more emotional about how I was making decisions, I think, as opposed to rational and thinking just from a purely rational point of view. I think now, much more, I look at what I am doing and I get much more emotional satisfaction, much more emotional fulfilment from what I am doing as a job. I treat it much more as a job than as my life. Put that on one side and having kids on the other and really, yes, it has been a massive lifestyle change since having kids'.*

(Male, 32, marketing director in manufacturing, married, children,)

However, for men, this life-stage change appeared to be confined more tightly within the requirement to continue progressing and earning a good and ever increasing salary, especially for those who had started families but also for those who anticipated doing so. In many cases, there was articulation of a 'breadwinner' stereotype.

*'I think when you are younger - probably I was a bit naïve perhaps - you think, "Oh, I want to do just something that I enjoy all the time and I don't care about money", and then you realize, all your friends are buying houses and things and you think, "I can't do this on my salary..." Your priorities do change. If I was to have kids, then they'd change again, and I might be more ambitious than I am now in terms of wanting to increase my salary because I'd need to, take on a more stressful job'*

(Male, 32, statistical programmer, pharmaceuticals)

Therefore, whilst for several female interviewees the 'socially-useful' motivation was a primary driver, for men it was more likely to be seen as an added benefit; a satisfier by its presence, but less often a pre-requisite. For men, the fulfilment of doing socially-useful work appeared to be more often a post-rationalisation of choice, whereas for women it was more likely to have informed their decision-making.

## **6.5 Summary**

The evidence presented in this chapter highlights the persistence of gender asymmetries in employment and emotional partnerships, even among this generation raised in a context of increasing emphasis on gender equality in employment and education.

Highly-qualified women have historically been more likely than non-graduates to have continuous careers, reflecting both greater intrinsic commitment to employment and greater earning power and the ability to purchase domestic and childcare services to facilitate their participation in paid work. Women's dependency, resting on their greater propensity to earn

second-earner rather than breadwinner wages, has been a fundamental brake on the achievement of greater gender equity - but the women in our sample had accessed equal opportunities to earn above-average wages and many earned high wages; some higher than their partners. Yet, as previous analysis has shown, women in our sample tend to fare less well in the labour market, especially in terms of average earnings, and of those interviewed their careers tend to be secondary to their partners.

The principal point addressed in this chapter is whether female graduates, even where they have made similar choices of higher education course or career direction, have fundamentally different career aspirations to comparable males that go some way towards explaining different outcomes and earnings? Are women making rational choices to trade earnings for other advantages, in ways that reflect a different orientation to employment, career development, and the centrality of family roles (Hakim *op.cit.*) or to accommodate practical obstacles to the achievement of equal outcomes (Crompton and Lyonette 2005, McRae *op.cit.*, Ginn *et al. op.cit.*)? Seven years after graduation there was some indication from the survey and interview data that gendered attitudes and expectations - their own and, more often, those of their employers and other with whom they came into contact - had affected work experiences and career trajectories amongst our sample of graduates. This reflects Cockburn's (*op.cit.*) finding that 'soft' ideological variables can present a greater obstacle to change than apparently 'harder' material variables such as technology. The evidence from the qualitative data suggests that whilst attitudes and priorities appear to be changing for both men and women, at this transitional life stage where young adults are faced with key decisions about career, social integration and family-building, it is women who make most adjustments to accommodate non-work commitments and this goes some way towards explaining the gender pay gap and gendered career outcomes.

Seven years on, there was a relatively consistent message that, as the cohort moved into their thirties, they were experiencing, or anticipating, a shift in values, attitudes and priorities, specifically a greater recognition of the importance of being able to achieve work-life balance.

The interviews conducted ten years on suggested that the life stage reached by the 1995 graduates, certainly for female respondents but also for many males, appeared to have reinforced and amplified this, where many had embarked on a period of change - whether this meant starting a family or simply a reassessment of priorities and values. For many of the graduates in our sample, a central issue was finding a suitable response to the question of how best to achieve or maintain control over their careers and working lives in the face of changing values, attitudes and personal priorities. This control appeared to be multi-dimensional and included control in terms of the management of their 'time', but also control in the wider sense of control over career trajectory and the achievement of individual and collective ambition. It must be noted, however, that while for some women that we

interviewed, maternity had provided an opportunity to assess their careers to date and to perhaps re-orientate towards work that was more altruistic and socially-useful, or to opt out of 'the rat race' of 'high-flying' careers, for men this was not likely to have been experienced as an option. Whilst for women, this life phase offered an opportunity for change, for men it was more likely represent entrenchment and being 'locked-in' to a particular career and increased pressure to pursue more traditional career goals, such as increasing salary, even though there is clear evidence that they too were undergoing a period of re-evaluation of priorities. This is likely to lead to greater conflict between work and personal life. Previous research suggests that men are more likely to reach a comparable phase of 'generativity' later in life, towards the latter part of their careers when the pursuit of career goals is not so driven by necessity (Erikson *ibid.*). Our initial conclusion was that there was a tendency for female graduates to reach such a stage in their early thirties, but it may be that for men, a similar tendency is stifled by circumstantial pressures rather than absent.

## Chapter 7

### The impact of partnership and family-building on career development

#### 7.1 Introduction

Much of what has been discussed in this report thus far posits that when interviewed ten years after graduation many graduates in our sample had entered a transitory phase in their careers which was reflected in changing values, attitudes and priorities. Of course, much of this transition is related to changing personal circumstances, specifically the formation of partnerships and the advent of family-building. This chapter explores the impact of these developments on attitudes towards work and how women in particular accommodate being part of a dual-career partnership and starting a family with often demanding employment.

#### 7.2 Partnership

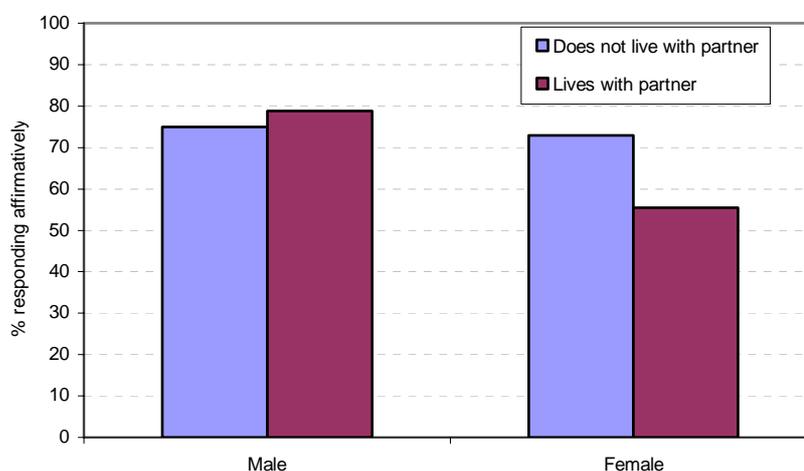
Seven years after graduating, the majority of survey respondents had been living with a partner and, of those graduates interviewed ten years on, the vast majority were in 2002/03. Although only 16 per cent of the 2002/03 survey sample had embarked upon parenthood, we found in discussion with the interview sub-sample that career decisions including, crucially, decisions not to change jobs, accept promotions that involved location change, or consider jobs in different parts of the country, had often been made as a couple rather than an individual. Importantly, in response to the question of why respondents had taken their current job, men and women were similarly likely to indicate the importance of compatibility with their partners' career. It became apparent that careers were consequently rarely constructed as individual, as the career literature suggests, but as members of a partnership or family and even young graduates at the outset of their careers who, at different stages of what sometimes turned out to be serial monogamy, were making decisions that maximised shared rather than individual utilities.

Research on dual-career partnerships has mainly been relatively small-scale qualitative research, focusing on such partnerships as implicitly atypical – but *all* partnerships involve two careers, in the broader meaning of the term. As marriage becomes less popular and cohabitation has increased, when (and if) individuals move from thinking of themselves as independent operators and the smallest social unit becomes a dyad, has never – as far as we are aware – been studied in relation to employment. It is incontrovertible, though, that just as equal pay inherently challenges the notion of a family wage, as discussed so presciently by Barrett and McIntosh (1980) a generation ago - so too do equal opportunities challenge not only 'breadwinner/home-maker' divisions of labour but also individualism and partnership. Graduates tend to set up partnerships with other graduates but in which, typically, the male partner is around two years older and consequently has accrued more employment

experience (Brynin and Francesconi 2002). This might be assumed to explain some gender asymmetries in 'traditional' partnerships - but do highly-qualified young people assortatively select partners who fit with their career and family-building preferences (Hakim 2000)? The women and men in the sample, in theory, have access to 'breadwinner' salaries, so the women, at this stage in their career development at least, are unlikely to be imprisoned in a relationship of economic dependency. In such couples, in general, the partners were equally likely to be highly qualified and have similar potential for career development. In fact, of our interview sample, the vast majority of the female respondents were considered to be highly-successful in terms of earnings and career progression.

In the interviews conducted seven years on, we asked respondents whether they regarded their careers or their partner's as more important, or whether they considered them of equal importance. Among these mostly pre-family-building respondents, the most common response was that their careers were of equal importance. Figure 7.1 nevertheless illustrates how living with a partner appeared to be correlated with lower expectations of career development for women, and had, if anything, a slight positive impact on men's expectations. We found that living with a partner was correlated, for women, with lower propensity to agree strongly or somewhat with the statement '*I am extremely ambitious*' and, as the figure shows, less likely to anticipate achieving a higher position within the next five years. In both cases, the reverse was the case for men.

**Figure 7.1: Whether respondents expected to achieve a higher position within the next five years, by gender and whether or not had a partner**



**Source: Seven Years On: a survey of the career paths of 1995 graduates**

An interesting gender difference in responses was evident, however, in *how* men and women who were the main breadwinner in the partnership referred to the issue of career precedence. In general, male respondents tended to take it as axiomatic, requiring no further rationalisation, that their career took precedence simply on the basis of earning a higher salary. Female respondents were much more inclined to define their relationship as

egalitarian even where they were the primary or sole earner in the household, rationalising equity, or even male career precedence, along the lines of, for example...

... the transferability of skills::

*'They're equally important in terms of... well... on one level, mine tends to be more important in terms of a regular wage: I've always been the main breadwinner. But, certainly in the sense of career, they're both equally important. In fact, I'd say that probably his is more important because that's all he can do, music, whereas I can transfer my skills to just about anything, just about any kind of business sector.'*

(Female, 32, ICT business manager, married to musician)

...job satisfaction:

[Interviewer: Do you regard you and your partner's careers as equally important, or would you say that one takes precedence over the other?]

*'That's a question I would take on different levels in that, financially, I earn almost twice as much as he does and therefore if one of us had to stop work it would be him - but neither of us would intend to do that. Job satisfaction is much more of an issue than finance. In terms of whose job is more important, neither is more important: we both love our jobs and work very hard at them. When, for example, someone's got to take a day off, we just take it in terms and share it.'*

(Female, 31, primary teacher married with children to self-employed engineer)

Overall, women regardless of financial factors were more likely to refer to equality. For those partnerships where traditional patterns of domestic responsibility had been eschewed this was not necessarily by design; rather a product of factors outside of the couple's control:

*'I did attempt to go part-time to look after my daughter but then my husband got made redundant - so he now looks after her and I work full time. And actually that has worked quite well. I think if we hadn't tried it.....until you try it you don't know, but actually, having done it, that's pretty much the way we'll carry on, so I can carry on developing my career ..... So actually, things will probably pretty much stay the way they were going, because I don't have to worry that when we have [child] number two, am I going to have to give up work? That's one side of things I don't have to worry about that, because we know that he's going to do it.'*

(Female, 28, sector analyst in public sector, married with children,)

One male respondent summed up the changed ideological context within which the *Class of '95* were developing their careers, where both partners are highly-qualified and successful and there is not necessarily any implicit or explicit precedence given to one partner's career or the other, in a way that was echoed or implicit in most of the responses of those who provided 'egalitarian partnership' indicator data:

*'The question [of whether I would move for my partner's career] on the face of it sounds very straightforward, but it's not, because with communications and availability of accommodation and everything, there's lots more options than just upping roots and moving home. I think the attitude of "a fellow has a decent job so the wife has to follow" is not necessarily an option nowadays. I think more*

*and more people are able to say, "OK a fellow has a decent job up in wherever, wife has a decent job down in wherever, what are the options?" The options include moving to one part of the country or another so they live together permanently, or having two homes and living separately during the week, or even commuting longer distances. If my wife got a job tomorrow up in Scotland, I couldn't tell you what our decision would be because we would have to weigh up the pros and cons of that job opportunity, what it meant long term, what it meant short term, etc. There would be a number of avenues and solutions we would consider to fulfil both of those opportunities'.*

(Male, 30, account director in business services, living with partner)

Perhaps reflective of the changed context of partnership and work, we found examples where career decisions were seen as negotiable and that career precedence was a fluctuating concept. For example, one couple had moved to Australia so that the male partner could accept an exciting job that would enable him to move from an accountancy job in UK to one where he used his accountancy skills to work in a sports company where he would be able to broaden his range of skills and do work that he would find considerably more interesting and fulfilling. His female partner, who was our respondent, gave up a job that she enjoyed in magazine production to go with him, and in Australia had a proof-reading job which was somewhat below her ability level and less satisfying than the job she had left. There had been an agreement, though, that after two years, should a suitable vacancy occur for her with her old employer, they would consider returning - and in fact, they were about to do so soon after the ten years on interview - to a situation where it is likely that he might be able to continue to work for the multinational company which currently employed him, in London. In this partnership, both careers were seen as equally important and the key priorities were to obtain compatible working arrangements, with equal willingness to accept compromise, and to achieve an enjoyable work/life balance.

In cases where the woman was the sole breadwinner, this was seen as temporary - a reflection of complementary careers where the partners had found that they could effectively alternate as breadwinner and, in one case, home-maker.

*'At the moment I guess mine is more important because I am earning all the money. He hasn't got a career if you like because he's not working at the moment. Can't say really, I guess mine is at the moment'.*

[Interviewer: Is that something you are quite happy with...that he's quite happy with?]

*'Yes. I think more and more we are seeing people of our age doing different things, more flexible working arrangements, career breaks, which is something people of say my father's generation just can't understand. We have a huge programme about work life balance here - "lifestyle friendly leave", where you can take up to three months unpaid leave in a five year period. So I too three months off and went travelling around South America. That was just before I got my promotion. I think it had a small impact [on my career], probably slowed it down a little bit, but for me it was a price worth paying. **It would have been more difficult to do that in the role I've got now**' [Researchers' emphasis].*

(Female, 32, Scientific team leader, pharmaceuticals, partner - also scientist - currently not in employment).

Even in a sample of interviewees who in general were in relationships with partners of equivalent educational background and often corresponding status in employment, we found a number of ways that individuals conceptualised and rationalised their 'economic relationship'. We found numerous examples of successful female graduates adhering to a 'male breadwinner' model of partnership where the male partner's career took primacy but for a variety of reasons. At the extreme, the following *Seven Years On* interview extract from a graduate who had recently left a fast-track career in the civil service to move location to follow her husband's career appears to illustrate the resilience of traditional gender stereotypes:

*'It comes down to priorities, really... You can do the dual career thing, if you are both qualified in something that you can both have good jobs in the same city, well that's great but actually, frequently it doesn't work like that... And I have to say, ultimately, do I want a really good marriage or do I want a really good career and if I can't have both which ultimately has to come first? Definitely the marriage because I've got enough skills and I've got enough broad experience and I'm motivated enough and I've got enough interests that I'll keep myself busy and I can earn some money doing a variety of things whereas finding the right man is quite a lot more difficult'.*

(Female, 31, part-time university tutor, married to university academic, children)

Another reflected a similarly traditional perspective as to male-female roles within a partnership had embarked on motherhood earlier and had two children at the time of the interview.

*'Right from the beginning, before we even got married... He's very, very good about this, he said "Look, I'd be more than happy to give up work if we had to and you wanted to stay at work", he's very, very into me having promotions in my career development if I want it. But from the start we always said, realistically speaking he will always have more earning potential than I will and I would have to have some time off if we're to have children because he can't actually do the having of the children. So, we agreed that would always take precedence ... not so much because he's the man, although that is part of it, obviously, because we're Christians and that's one of the things we believe in, that the husband is the head of the family, but because he's got more earning potential. In that way, then you could say that money was a factor but only in the sense of security for us'.*

(Female, 28, non-employed, married with children)

However, in both the above examples, the women saw *having a career* and *being able to use their knowledge and skills throughout life* as important, though secondary, priorities – and 'dominant' males' responses were in accord with this, as the following example illustrates:

*'I think mine has taken precedence over my wife's. I think that's true. But, we made a conscious decision before we had children that I was going to work more and she was going to stay at home more to look after the children. One's 18 months and the other's three and a half and so at the moment they still demand quite a lot of her time. It was a conscious decision before we had children that mine would take precedence over hers. But equally, I mentioned the flexibility*

*that I've got around childcare. That enables her to do something at least, to keep her hand in until the kids are old enough and she can go back and do more'.*

(Male, 32, scientific officer in public sector, married to primary teacher, children)

The above examples appear to illustrate the potential conflict between dual career partners, and between career development and family-building being resolved without apparent stress, along traditional lines. However, other respondents implying a similar partnership division of labour, indicated that the decision, even for those anticipating starting a family, could be difficult to make in the context of a dual-career partnership where, in potential to earn and commitment to career, both partners started out equally successfully: the traditional solution was acceded to rather than embraced.

*'By the sounds of things his takes preference but I suppose I fought it for a long time and I do believe I have to stand on my own two feet and that's why I have got a career but I think from a practical point of view( that is if we decide to have a family) it's logical that we have to make sure his career is fine and that's why we're [located] down here and why we will stay here for a while'.*

(Female, 28, development quality assurance specialist, pharmaceuticals, living with partner)

*'That's a bit of a vexed question because I've always fought very hard against one career being valued more than the other and I've never like the idea that his career should be more important than mine and I find it very difficult to acknowledge that it is. But I think we've both come to the conclusion that his career probably is more important than mine, in that he has a real career path and real career aims, much more than I have. And I think that definitely his career is going to be more important than mine in the long term in that he's aiming to be a deputy head and things like that in the relatively near future. Whilst I'm always going to have a career it's never going to be at that sort of level. In fact I would see it maybe not being as important in the future as it has been in the past'.*

(Female, 32, school secretary in public sector, married with children)

Two of the women in the sample who had graduated by the age of 25 had already been married and divorced. Both provided examples of the destructive effects of asymmetry in partners' expectations and asynchronicity in career development; in the context of individuals entering into a phase of transition after establishing themselves in a profession or organisation. One female respondent whose first pregnancy had ended in miscarriage illustrated this particularly clearly:

*[Our careers] were both equally important I guess, but he had a problem with that. After we lost the baby, it just went downhill from there, because he thought I should have been at home, I think. I don't share that opinion'.*

(Female, 28, HR and marketing manager in manufacturing)

### **7.3 Partnership 'status' and attitudes**

In this section, we focus principally on the interview sample of the *Seven Years On* study to further examine whether there was any notable relationship between an individual's 'status' within their partnership (in terms of both 'breadwinner' status and 'career precedence' within a

relationship) and their responses to a number of questions in the survey questionnaire associated with levels of ambition, the importance of career development, the centrality of work and the extent to which personal and family development was valued. We interviewed 52 female graduates<sup>18</sup> (the majority of whom were in full-time employment) and 44 male graduates who were living with a partner when interviewed. Nine of the female sub-sample had dependent children. In the interviews, we asked each respondent whether they, or their partner, were the 'main' income earner in the household and whether either partner's career took precedence over the other. Respondents were then scored out of three for each question according to their responses: three if they were the main breadwinner or their career took precedence; two if the relationship was perceived to operate on an equal basis, career-wise and/or earnings were similar for both partners; and one if they were the secondary earner or if their partners' career took precedence. By adding the scores for each question together we arrived at an overall score for 'partnership status' for each respondent; dominant (5 or 6), equal (3 or 4) or secondary (2). For example, if a respondent reported that they earned a higher salary than their partner (3), but that their careers were equally important (2), they would score 5. The sample of female graduates with partners was roughly split into three equal groups according to this variable. The propensity to have children at this stage, did not, in this small sample, vary across these three groups.

In terms of the relationship with a number of variables associated with values, attitudes and identity, we found, perhaps not surprisingly, that those respondents whose responses indicated that they were in the 'secondary' category gave a lower average score to the question asking how important their job or plans for employment were to their sense of identity and the reverse held for those who saw their career as having primacy. Similarly, the 'dominant' respondents gave the highest average response when asked to indicate the importance of career development. Conversely, a similar question required respondents to indicate how important their family relationships were to their sense of identity. The 'secondary' partners gave the highest average scores and this group was also likely to place higher importance on family development.

In response to the question: 'How far do you agree with the statement, "I am extremely ambitious"?' there appeared to be little difference in the responses of members of the three groups. In response to the question: 'How far do you agree with the statement, "I live to work"?' again there was little difference in response. In response to the question: 'How far do you agree with the statement, "I expect to change careers several times"?' the 'secondary' group had a higher average score. In response to the question: 'How far do you agree with the statement, "I do not expect to get my main fulfilment from work"?' 'dominant partner'

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<sup>18</sup> In this analysis we again focus only 'young' graduates who completed their studies before the age of 24 for the reasons outlined in Chapter 3.

women agreed to a lesser extent than both other groups, whose average responses were identical.

Only a quarter of male graduates gave responses that indicated an egalitarian partnership: the male career appeared to be perceived as being dominant in all other cases. Of the 44 respondents, only one male graduate reported that his partner's career took precedence, despite the fact that six indicated that they were the secondary earner in the partnership. Thirty three of the men said they earned more than their partners (75 per cent), of whom 15 said their careers took precedence (45 per cent). In comparison, 19 of the 52 women reported earning more than their partners (36 per cent), but only five of these said that their career took precedence (26 per cent). Women were twice as likely to report their partnerships as egalitarian, whatever the earnings ratios: exactly half of them did so; 18 reported that their partner's career took precedence. Both groups of men, those with high status within partnerships and those in egalitarian relationships, reported identical levels of importance attributed to job and plans for employment to their sense of identity. This score was also identical to that of 'dominant partner' women. The two male groups also recorded very similar responses for the importance of career development. All groups, male or female, reported very similar levels of importance placed on personal development. For both males and females the expectation of several career changes throughout their working lives was higher amongst 'secondary role' partners.

As discussed, 'dominant partner' women were less likely than others to have allocated high importance to family relationships in terms of their personal identity, but the opposite was true of 'dominant partner' males. Those in egalitarian relationships reported placing less importance on this compared to those with high status. Does this support Hakim's contention that partnerships reflect prior orientations related to predisposition towards or away from 'traditional' gendered roles?

#### **7.4 *Family-building and the impact of parenthood***

Moen and Sweet (2003) have drawn attention to the fact that, in two-parent households, parenthood is a watershed challenge to partnerships, replacing two jobs - his and hers - with an inescapable third set of responsibilities which, in effect, constitute a third job (culturally assumed to be allocated primarily to the mother). They suggest that managing dual career households is essentially about managing time and timing: of family formation, making decisions about paid working hours and patterns of work, day-to-day balancing of public and private responsibilities and scheduling of conflicting demands. In terms of family formation, Cramer (1980) argued that the amount of time women spend in the labour force affects their propensity to have children and there is some evidence that delayed childbearing has contributed to the reduction in the birth rates of most developed countries, particularly among highly qualified women (Altucher and Williams 2003, Rendall and Smallwood 2003, Hewlett

2002). We discussed recent UK patterns, which support this in Chapter 2. Moen (2003), in analysing data from dual earner couples in the USA, presents a strong case for a rethinking of working hours and responsibilities that allow for greater flexibility in household divisions of labour. The study identified a range of different work/life balance arrangements and divisions of labour among the couples sampled, and we found similar diversity among the 1995 young graduate parents. We found evidence that illustrates the complex way in which women's and couple's decisions to start a family were directly related to work patterns, and what they perceived as available or appropriate options for their subsequent household division of labour.

All the women interviewed ten years on had either had their first child, were expecting their first child or stated that having children was something they envisaged doing in the future, although a few women saw it as a possibility rather than something they definitely aspired to do. All but one of the men had become fathers or anticipated becoming fathers and only one male respondent has stated that parenthood was definitely not something on the agenda for himself or his wife. Among those who have had children, we interviewed full-time homemakers, women who have reduced their working hours, women who have become self-employed and women who have remained in full-time employment. We interviewed both men and women who regard themselves as part of a joint household career enterprise, but where one partner's career (normally that of the male partner) is regarded as more important - normally because he has greater earning power - thus constituting 'neo-traditional careers'.

*'I'm not thinking of going back to work at least until [my child] goes to school, so that's a good four or five years and then if we have more children that's going to be a few years after that. So all that time, his career is going to be the most important one and I guess mine is on the back burner at the moment. I don't really know about the future. I can't imagine me going back into something that was earning the money that I was earning when I was working at [ICT company]...it's more likely going to be back into the kind of social services side of things, which is part time and not as well paid as the commercial side of things.*

(Full-time homemaker, 32, formerly sales and marketing director in ICT, married to accountant, children)

However, the majority of the high-flying female graduates interviewed for the ten years on investigation had so far continued in employment and aspire to continue their career development. A substantial minority earned as much as, or more than, their partners, and this included those who had become mothers. It is important to note that all of those who were successfully balancing motherhood and employment were invariably doing so in contexts where they (normally) or their partners had been able to modify their work patterns, by negotiating a measure of flexibility with their employers. We label these 'complex careers', because although the incumbents mainly aspired - in the longer term - to a relatively traditional linear career - they considered that in the short term at least, non-traditional

adjustments were necessary. We interviewed several women who had 'put their careers on the back burner' to concentrate on motherhood:

*'I'd kept my options open initially. When I'd had the babies [twins] I wasn't at all sure: before I'd had them, I was quite sure I wasn't going to go back to work but for one reason or another I was quite unsure for the first couple of months. I was quite a tough time. One of my babies was born with a heart condition. I'd worked very hard at [my company] and... I realised I couldn't invest that amount of attention and energy to work in the short term, while my babies needed me..... I was working on a really interesting project at the [European] Commission, representing [the company I worked for] and I really loved it, it was just the kind of work I wanted to do and yes, I guess the intellectual stimulus, the debates we had in the meetings....it was stretching me and I enjoyed it. But I think that just because I've stopped doesn't mean I won't be able to start again. I have that confidence, I feel I might have to start off a bit lower down the rungs and work my way up, but that doesn't worry me either, because I think in many ways, that's fair. I've made a life decision to take a break and invest that time in my family.'*

(Full-time homemaker, 31, formerly product manager in banking and finance, married with children)

As suggested previously, we also found the impending motherhood had sometimes acted as a convenient point at which to leave an unsatisfactory job or career path and to re-evaluate career aspirations:

*'I had been [in an increasingly high-flying, well-paid job] in [an ICT company] for about seven years and I'd just outgrown the company and not only that but I wanted to be doing something that was a bit more people orientated rather than consumer based. I left in April last year I think it was, and worked my four weeks notice, and by the time I'd finished my four weeks notice I then realised I was pregnant - so a little bit funny timing. Not unexpectedly pregnant, but just happened quicker than we thought!'*

(Full-time homemaker, 32, formerly sales and marketing director in ICT, married to accountant, children)

One graduate who had taken the decision to exit employment while her children were very young began by explaining that although she had loved her job as a teacher, she had felt that it was important to prioritise her family - but in the course of the interview, it became clear that her decision had been influenced by her negative experience of the response to her pregnancy at work, and illustrates the reflexive relationship between work and household considerations in making work/life balance decisions.

*'At the second school I'd been at, the one I left after having a baby, I felt totally and utterly unvalued by my employer. What can I say legally? [The Head] was very autocratic... she focused very much on the negative. I think it was worse for me because at my first school the principal was so supportive; he was just the other end of the spectrum from her. I think now, well, if I was at my first school and I'd had my son would I have been tempted to go back part-time there? Well possibly I would've done, because I know they are supportive of families and I know the principal is a father, he has a family - whereas this Head, she didn't seem to appreciate people's family commitment and concerns'.*

[Female, 31, primary school teacher, married to GP]

All of the women cited above made it clear that they expected to return to employment within a few years, although only the teacher was clear that she would return to the same career, both others making reference to the desire to move to more socially-useful and less time-consuming occupations. This reflects a common theme in the interviews with female graduates: dissatisfaction with 'high flying' work that was not solely related to the pressures it exerted on them, and not necessarily related to the desire or anticipation of the need for more family-friendly working conditions: the desire to do 'socially useful' work or, as one respondent put it '*work that has an impact on people's lives*', as discussed in Chapter 6.

All of the male interviewees with children were in full-time employment and whose careers had continued in a straightforward linear manner despite becoming fathers. We did find, however, several examples of men who have modified their career aspirations or adapted their working hours to accommodate their partner's career or to share childcare; for example, the respondents who told us:

*'I work flexibly...: for example, if I work nine till twelve or nine till one then I'm willing to go back in at four o'clock in the afternoon and work on till the evening then that's quite a popular option and it means I can do some childcare in the afternoon. ...Both of us would put the children quite high up the agenda and if it means that our careers suffer a little bit then so be it: family comes first, I would say.'*

(Male, 32, scientific officer, married to primary school teacher, children)

*'I attended what was called a senior management development workshop where effectively you are put through a bit of an assessment over two days and they identify your development areas and then they make suggestions for recommended moves in order to plug the gap so to speak. My feedback was very much "You need to do something that's a bit left field, that's not directly sales related", which gave me a little bit of a dilemma because the company is predominantly based in [the Midlands] and I wasn't willing to relocate... [because] my partner has a good job and we're not too far away from her family and I'm close to my family..'*

(Male, 31, development manager, manufacturing, engaged to a solicitor)

Finally, it is worth considering the accounts of two of the highest paid and most successful women interviewed in the course of the ten years on investigation. The first of these is a single parent working for one of the 'big four' financial consultancies as a senior manager - an exceptionally able graduate in Mathematics and Computing who obtained her first job with her current employer as a mature graduate who had returned to university in her mid-20s as a single parent and subsequently had an accelerated career in a job that she loves.

[Interviewer: 'Last time I spoke to you, you were living with your mum and your son, is that still the case?']

*'Yes. She's baby minder and I'm bread winner. I couldn't do it if I hadn't got her, it wouldn't be fair to my son, so it makes it possible. She looks after the house and I walk in the house and do pretty much nothing, and it works.'*

[Interviewer: Would you say that you've managed to achieve a satisfactory work/life balance?]

*'I don't have a satisfactory work/life balance! No, no, I don't! It's one thing we accept, everything is a compromise, isn't it? I like what I do, you have to put in the effort and to be honest, you don't get the best out, you don't get the satisfaction if you don't put in. Plus **there's an expectation** [researchers' emphasis] that if you're there, you're there without leaving, and therefore you will put in the hours. So no, I don't have a proper balance, but I won't work weekends any more, so that is [my son's] time. I will work every hour God sends during the week if I can have a bit of free time at weekends: weekends are my time.'*

[Interviewer: 'Would it be possible to do your job on a part time basis?]

*'Impossible because... well yes, I believe it would be impossible [respondent's emphasis]. We do have a female senior manager who is actually on maternity leave at the moment with her second baby. After the first one, she came back in January after her first maternity leave and has now gone off on the second. She worked for us about nine months between the two pregnancies on a part time basis - she worked full days, but did 8-4, because 8-4 and 9-5 on paper appears to be the same job, but she was quite strict on her 8-4 where there's huge flexibility on our 9-5. She probably felt it worked, but the rest of the team didn't. It meant that she had to be local as well [i.e. she couldn't be away from the office for extended periods].'*

[Interviewer: She wasn't actually part time, was she? In theory, that was a full time job?]

*'Well she worked 8-4, but we probably do another 4-5 hours a day on top of that, which is why I was saying it wasn't quite a... In theory it was a full time job: in reality, compared to other senior team members, it was part time hours.'*

[Interviewer: 'So what she was doing might technically be called working to rule?]

*'Yes, to us it's like working to rule.'*

The second example is a woman who had just been promoted to a directorship at an international retail company at the age of 32, having had her first child a couple of years ago and now expecting her second. Asked how satisfied she was with her current job, she was initially enthusiastic.

*'Umm, I'm pretty satisfied. I really enjoy my job. My challenge is my work/life balance, that's always very difficult. Part of me wishes that I wasn't quite as senior, because when I got this promotion, if I hadn't had a family I think I would have been ecstatic because it would have been - "How far can I go?" But I almost felt more pressure on now trying to really...it was going to be harder again to keep that work/life balance going...*

*I am on a four day week. I always say I will do everything I can, but I cannot leave...you have to give me time to plan it. I cannot be spontaneous.. Lots of my peers now don't have children and that, sometimes I find quite difficult because over the years I've put in a lot of hours and worked very late and lots of the guys in my team work very long hours, but I have to leave by 5:45 every night at the latest, **so I do sometimes feel I am leaving them in the lurch...** [researchers' emphasis]... I know that. Like this week for example, I have to get one late night in, so I have to get my husband one night a week to give me an*

*opportunity [sic] to work late and then I will work until about eight o'clock at night just to make up for all the other bits, and I work on a Sunday night for a couple of hours and I usually do a couple of hours on a Friday night, just picking up emails and responding to the team... my only thing is **a more personal aspect** [researchers' emphasis] because I think...I don't know how I am going to be able to do this with two children. My husband works away a lot as well and his job is doing really well and he travels quite a lot. So a lot of the time I am doing that on my own'.*

This female manager provides an example of the pattern described by Wajcman (1998) of a woman in a demanding job with a partner in an equally demanding job, working largely alongside male peers who tend to be supported by non-working or part-time working partners who obviate their need for family-friendly hours of work. Other researchers have drawn attention to the relatively longer hours and inflexibility of management work compared to professional work (Moen and Sweet (*op.cit*) and that is apparent in our findings. It is revealing that the only woman interviewed who did not mention the lack of sustainability and stresses of senior management roles in industry and commerce was the penultimate respondent, whose mother played the wifely role of housekeeper for her.

## **7.5 Summary**

Perhaps the most interesting finding presented in this chapter is also the least surprising. Being part of a dual-career partnership was correlated with lower expectations of career development for women, but a slight positive impact on men's expectations and ambition. Of the interview sample, at both seven years and ten years on, men were significantly more inclined than women to report that their career took precedence over their partners', regardless of who was the main income earner. There was evidence to suggest, however, that career precedence within a partnership was a fluid and negotiable concept that was likely to change over time and that the economic relationship between individuals of equal educational and employment status was conceptualised in a number of ways.

Inevitably, much of the discussion of dual-career partnership cited in this chapter was underpinned by the issue of family-building. The interview data suggested that for partnerships those with children the traditional division of labour was the dominant model among the sample, although this domestic arrangement was not always a decision that was easily arrived at and was clearly negotiated within partnerships. Two threads appeared to run through the transition from dual-career partnership to dual-career parents. Women were most often those who had to make most accommodations to this new arrangement, giving up work entirely or, more often, working reduced hours. This was not, however, necessarily at the expense of ambition or desire for career progression; whether or not after a period of entrenchment at the outset of motherhood. For men, there appeared to be competing priorities; the first to fulfil the role of breadwinner and the second to fulfil the role of father and to participate in childcare responsibilities.

This chapter has shown clearly the difficult decisions that have to be taken within partnerships and the effort it takes to reconcile conflicting work and non-work responsibilities. Of course, this process does not take place inside a vacuum and employing organisations play a central role in the success of attempts by women (mainly) to manage these demands. The following chapter discusses this issue.

## Chapter 8

### Equal opportunities, career development and context: good and bad practice

#### 8.1 *Introduction*

The previous chapter has shown that many of the graduates had undergone or were experiencing a period of re-evaluation of values and priorities when interviewed ten years after graduation. Moreover, many of the graduates interviewed had begun family-building. As attitudes to work change and personal responsibilities increase, it is inevitable that the context of employment, the organisation, its management and culture, and work patterns come under increased scrutiny as employees seek to reconcile work and non-work commitments. Taken with the findings about the changing patterns of fertility and fecundity among highly qualified women over the last quarter of a century, the accounts provided by respondents who were faced with the challenges of breaking through the glass ceiling and, once in jobs on the other side, maintaining an 'own life' that had time for personal and community relationships, throw considerable light on the pressures they encountered and the hard choices they were faced with. This chapter draws on the qualitative data to assess the ways in which female graduates resolve the inevitable conflict between personal and work ambitions and competing demands and how organisations and management can aid or hinder this process.

#### 8.2 *Family-friendly employment?*

It is apparent from the interviews conducted with female graduates ten years after graduation that employers' policies, organisational culture and managerial attitudes are paramount in facilitating the return to work of recent mothers and ensuring a satisfactory work-life balance for employees with other commitments. This has important implications for both recruitment and retention strategies within organisations. Many of the female graduates we interviewed had recently started families and were at the early stages of striving to maintain and progress careers, in often highly-paid and responsible jobs, alongside taking primary responsibility for childcare. The majority of women had reduced their paid working hours to facilitate these dual roles, most often working a three or four day week and, for many, the change to different patterns of work had been successful. Some, however, had encountered difficulty in doing so. In particular, some found their employers more receptive to flexible working than others and, although it is clear from the accounts given that the role-balancing involved in maintaining demanding careers and parenthood is never easy, some organisations have made the prospects for women who aspire to break through 'the glass ceiling' less daunting than others. One manager described how her employer had agreed to a change from a 37.5 to 32 hour contract and works a four day week as opposed to a five day week.

*'When I first went back to work the first thing I said was that I wanted to do four days and have one day with my son. It was purely a selfish thing, it wasn't about a child minder or anything like that, it was just I want that day with him. They came straight back with thirty-two hours and there was no question about it. If anything, I think they've treated me... you know, they've valued me more since I've gone back, or it feels like that, with pay increases and this promotion, than when I was there doing a full-time job. I get the feeling that they value me'.*

[Interviewer: So they'll accommodate things that you would like in terms of your working life in order to make sure that they hang on to you...]

*'Yes, and there is flexibility in that if there are problems, you know if my son isn't very well, then they allow me to work from home and obviously there's the freedom to go and get him out of nursery if he's ill and there's no hard feelings about that at all, it's just a case of you're a mother now and you've got work to do as well as your family life. There's quite a good amount of flexibility and understanding'.*

[Interviewer: Was that something you knew about the organisation before you had your son and before you went on maternity leave?]

*'Yes I knew there would be the ability to have flexibility but I didn't realise they were quite so accommodating, but I guess that's... I put that down to my line manager, he's very good and he's a family man himself and understands the commitments. I just thought fine, I can do that, I can do my career and have a family as well'.*

[Interviewer: How satisfied are you in the role overall?]

*'Very happy, I'm much more career focused since having my son. I know that when I spoke to you last time] I was going on maternity leave and I was going to see how things went, there was the intention to go back to work, but I've actually become more focused on what I want and the career is what I want. They're saying I have the talent to get to a senior management role. The conversation we've had is all about how quickly I want to get there and we've talked about a five-year plan. But it all depends about having other children and I am expecting my second, but I expressed to the company that that doesn't get in the way of where I want to be in five years and if I have to work harder when I get back to get there, then that's fine. I don't want to be taken off the radar because I'm going back on maternity leave'.*

(Female, 31, Pensions manager, Manufacturing, married with children)

For other women, self-employment had provided a solution to the difficulties of continuing to operate at a high level in commerce. The director and joint owner of a growing public relations company had been able to negotiate with her business partner to work four days a week on her return from maternity leave and was enthusiastic about the quality of life that being self-employed afforded, in terms of flexibility and being her own boss. Her flexibility was further enhanced by her husband's occupation, in the police force, which meant that his shift-working frequently allowed him to be responsible for childcare during 'office hours'. Another graduate who had moved from employment to self-employment in order to improve her work/life balance was similarly pleased with the change.

[Interviewer: When we last spoke in December 2002, you were working as a technical manager for a food processing company....]

*'Goodness, that was the most terrible job on the planet! I was working 14 hour days, but it wasn't a very pleasant time, and in 2003 I decided it was time for radical action so I applied to an MBA course. I needed a bit of a quantum leap if I was going to change sectors or functions. It's worked out quite well....Now I have a nine to five job - it's a completely different ethos; I think the fact that it's a contract job and I'm not employed by the company, I don't have to deal with any of that nonsense that people have to deal with when they work within companies, like everyone's doing appraisals at the moment, and assessments and this, that and the other. I just go in, do the things that I do, leave, I don't have to fret or think about it on a night and I'm earning much better money than I would be if I was actually working for the company. And in the medium term, heading more towards having my own business with a wider portfolio of stuff going on...and in the longer term, I like to see it as having sufficient flexibility to do what I want to do, so if I want to have kids in two years, three years, five years, then I have a business that has given me sufficient cash to be able to only work three days a week or whatever I want to do.*

(Female, 32, Management consultant, self-employed, living with partner)

For some respondents, however, self-employment had failed to provide the flexibility that they had sought, instead requiring an unacceptable degree of flexibility *from* them which imposed the opposite of work/life balance:

[Interviewer: You mentioned in the previous interview trying to carve your own path in terms of becoming self-employed and that there might be possibly contract work with some of the clients you had been working for previously; did that not materialise? Was that part of the [ICT] downturn?]

*'It did and it didn't. There were a few bits and bobs but a lot of them wanted a proper support contract and when you're just one person you can't offer that kind of support contract. They want to have you available on the phone all the time and be there immediately if there is a problem. When you've got several people who all expect the same thing you can't be in all the places all the time and one of the problems I had [with my previous employer] was the exceptionally long hours I had to work, I didn't want to tie myself into contracts where I'd be expected to do that again because it made me extremely unhappy working for very long hours and I never got to see my partner and things like that. I could have gone and done contract work for banks and stuff, there's always work available for them, but it's doing shift work and you're working from seven in the morning until seven at night. I just took a conscious decision that it was going to be quality of life over money.'*

(Female, 31, Network engineer, National Social Welfare Charity, married)

As in the above cases, it was apparent in many interviews that central to the success of non-standard working patterns was individual control over when, how and where work was to be done<sup>19</sup>. Several interviewees reflected on the fact that being able to set the parameters by which they work was central to fulfilling both their domestic and work responsibilities. At the most fundamental level this specifically relates to working time and having the ability to work predictable hours. However, in high level jobs, attainment of control appears more difficult

<sup>19</sup> Reminiscent of earlier findings on the costs and benefits of employment flexibility (Purcell *et al.* 1999)

than simply having set 'clocking off' times and relates to job content, organisational culture and the attitude and understanding of immediate line management. Recent studies within organisations, following Kanter's (1977) work on gender ratios, support the finding that organisational cultures promote or present obstacles to equal opportunities, affect commitment and career development attitudes and practices - and that these are closely related to gender ratios within occupations (Wilson 1998, Maddock and Parkin 1993, Ashburner 1991, Acker 1990). In the interviews, we heard evidence of where reduced hours working had been highly successful and had contributed to career success but also of incidence where the blurring of work-life boundaries had resulted in a failure to balance competing priorities.

A successful transition to reduced hours working was found in the case of a female recruitment manager who had recently returned to work after maternity leave working three days a week. Upon returning to work she had moved to her current position from that of resource manager, partly because she wanted a new challenge but also because of the incompatibility of her previous role, which was largely reactive, with part-time working. The following extract encapsulates several of the different issues associated with control and successfully balancing competing priorities:

*'I'm doing recruitment [now]. It's really bringing external people into the business rather than focusing on internal resource management. That's the key difference... it's more manageable for me on a part-time basis because the resource role that I was doing I really needed to be there every day. But this... the recruitment side, I can manage my own diary and speak to external candidates when it suits me. And it's not very important for me to be there every day... It works well because I can manage my time and I know that, you know, I won't interview anyone after four o'clock because I've got to leave at five... it is down to me to manage my time effectively.'*

[Interviewer: So it sounds as though having quite a lot of control over what you do and when you do it and so on is actually very important in making this work effectively, the way you are working at the moment?]

*'Yes, it is. It's quite key to the role because as I say, my other role; I had control over it - but things changed constantly every day and somebody needed to be there to respond to them... whereas because I'm recruiting external people into the business it's OK for me not to be there everyday.'*

[Interviewer: It certainly doesn't sound as though you feel that your kind of career development or your opportunities for career development have been curtailed because of the way you are working?]

*'No, absolutely not. I've been very fortunate in that I had a new boss join at the beginning of the year and she was actually in the sort of same situation as me, she's got a toddler as well and she works four days. So, she is very aware of how, you know... giving me opportunities and being flexible and that kind of thing, so I think that had made a big difference, to be honest'.  
(Female, 31, resource manager in ICT, married, children)*

The above highlights the importance of both control and the subsequent 'predictability' of work, job content and the direction of work flow, in this case a proactive rather than reactive role, and the support of immediate line management. This latter point is reinforced in the following extract from an interview with another maternity returner working four days a week:

[Interviewer: [Did you know about possibility of working flexibly in the organisation before you had your son and before you went on maternity leave?]

*'Yes I knew there would be the ability to have flexibility but I didn't realise they were quite so accommodating, but I guess that's... I put that down to my line manager, he's very good and he's a family man himself and understands the commitments. I just thought, "Fine, I can do that, I can do my career and have a family as well".'*

(Female 31, pensions Manager in manufacturing, married, children)

This example reveals one of the core findings of the qualitative data analysis: there are some industry sectors where the achievement of working conditions and patterns of employment are conducive to a reasonable work/life balance and are, therefore, family-friendly and characterised by realisable equality of opportunity for women. However, the acceptance of flexible and non-standard working appears to be significantly more embedded in certain organisations and sectors than others. For example, the following indicates a culture of acceptance in this particular public sector organisation:

*'Both the guys that work the next level up, one now works a four day week, he has a Monday off, and my direct line manager, he works a nine-day fortnight... he works one Friday [at another site closer to his home] and then has the other Friday off. So he alternates between the two, so he'll only work four days actually at [my place of work]'.*

[Interviewer: So there's lots of scope for working non-standard hours?]

*'Yeah, there is, yeah. I think before July I was working a four day week but I was doing thirty two hours over four days and having the Friday off.'*

(Female, Programme Formation Manager in Public services, married with children, husband non-employed)

*'My department has another 30 people in Edinburgh and in the reward team there are another two part timers, so they're used to people with those kind of working arrangements'.*

[Interviewer: So in a sense culturally, working in that department, it's not problematic and you're not seen as different in any way?]

*'No, there are other people that have commitments [that] they have to leave on time for, as well. I guess it is OK. You will get some kind of martyrs to the cause always [but] it's not frowned upon if you go home having done your hours. I think it's just expected you will do what you need to do to get it done'.*

(Female, 32, rewards manager in banking and finance, married to civil servant, children)

Such a culture of embedded support and precedent for non-standard working is exemplified also in the following quote, from an interviewee working in a not-for-profit organisation:

*'[My employer] goes out of its way to be as accommodating and flexible as it possibly can be for people with...well, not just particularly with children, but for any other reason. We have members of staff who have illnesses in their family and we have to be very flexible for them to work. So, yes, I've been flexible with my staff and I knew very much that the director would be flexible, although we didn't particularly discuss it before when I was still there full-time, but he knew I think, that I would come back with some plan. The other head of department, the head of energy, also works flexible hours because she has young children as well, so there was already a precedent there.'*

(Female, 31, Head of recycling in not-for-profit sector, married to civil servant, children)

Paradoxically, the ICT industry and industries in which the graduate jobs held by our respondents are concerned with the manipulation of ICT appear to be among the worst, despite the fact that the new technologies inherently have the potential to make employment more flexible and adaptable to the needs of employees, and time less constraining. The account provided by one of our most enterprising respondents is instructive:

*'[My previous employer in the recruitment industry] wouldn't take me back part-time, so I was forced into self-employment in the April of 2003, worked for myself for about six months just doing a bit of headhunting, a bit of recruitment, bit of sales for my husband, whatever I could find really. Then I started working for a head-hunters down the road from here, very close by, who would let me work four days a week and I worked there for a year, but it became too tough to actually balance work and life, so I left there last November and now...I'm now self-employed and I sell property [overseas]. The guy who set up the business is a client of my husband and he asked me if I knew anyone that he could employ in the UK to set up a UK office, and I said "Yes - me!" I headhunted myself!*

*I think for me the real crux came in my last job was when my son had chicken pox and he needed to be off nursery for two weeks and I actually had to ask my sister to look after him because I wasn't allowed...**well, it was frowned upon** [researchers' emphasis] for me to take time off - and the most important thing in my life is my son, it's not work - but I had to choose work. That was very, very difficult and it was the nail in the coffin for employment for me and why I thought I really needed full flexibility. It was sales for a start, but also it's all client-driven and clients don't understand that you have to leave the office at five thirty and not five thirty five and things like that. There are a lot of pressures, but I think, because it's a sales environment as well, you get pressures from management to hit...and it's got to be every month you have to hit those targets and because your son's got chicken pox, it doesn't mean that you get some time off, because no-one else does. I understand the logic of that, but it puts you in a situation where you can't carry on'.*

*'The fact that I'm now self-employed means I can work to suit my needs and the fact that [my husband] is self-employed means that he's doing a lot more of the childcare as well now, so he goes to pick up and drop off as well as me, we share it. Because he works for himself he has a lot more flexibility, so that gives me more flexibility... but [having a child] is a completely life changing event, my life has been completely changed since. I haven't got time for a second child at the moment, I think it's not something we can do at the moment and that all comes down to work/life balance as well. Ideally I should be having another child because the gap is about right, but we can't actually do it for time reasons, to take time off to have another child, so the gap's going to have to be bigger. I*

*never thought family planning was like that, but I think it is more these days, when more women work’.*

(Female, 32, self-employed property agent, formerly project manager in recruitment company, husband also self-employed, children)

In contrast, the following extract comes from an interview with a female HR manager in the construction industry. It is perhaps in male-dominated sectors where a long hours working culture is most likely to exist and the most resistance to flexible working, especially to accommodate family considerations, to be found.

*‘I’m having to wind down now [because I am pregnant]... I have worked very long hours, working at weekends... But now I’m being forced to slow down and not sit here until seven or eight o’clock at night because I just physically can’t do it anymore. So, I mean, had I not got pregnant I’d probably still be sitting here at eight o’clock, nine o’clock on a Friday night finishing bits and bobs off, perhaps working at the weekend. I mean, in some ways this has been a good thing in that it made me think, “Now hang on a minute - if you go out of the office, if you leave the office at five o’clock - things aren’t going to fall around crashing by your ears!” I mean, it is a long-hours working culture here but I think people are sort of realizing, “Well, hang on a minute; things can wait until tomorrow or things can wait till Monday”’.*

[Interviewer: And that’s, as you say, that’s sort of embedded in the kind of culture of the organization to a certain extent?]

*‘Yeah. It’s not rare for me to receive e-mails from managers at sort of one or two o’clock in the morning’.*

(Female, 32, HR manager in construction, married)

It is apparent in several interviews with respondents in various sectors that the support and understanding of line management to the needs of those working non-standard hours or who have outside commitments is essential to the success of flexible work patterns, but unless this support is underpinned by a strong organisational commitment to flexible working, both culturally and in terms of explicit policy and practice, the capacity to accommodate non-work responsibilities and support in managing work-life balance is likely to be patchy. The following highlights this issue perfectly:

*‘... however other departments... I know this because my partner [who is] off at the moment on maternity leave... she is looking to return and her role is at the same level as mine [in the same employer] and she’s asked to go back on a job share basis, on a part time basis, and that request has not so far been met with acceptance really... they are not very positive about that, at the moment. So often, despite [name of employer] which is very committed to flexible working and stuff like that, it often depends who your line manager is really’.*

[Interviewer: So it’ll vary from department to department?]

*‘It can vary from department to department, absolutely’.*

(Male, 31, tax and finance manager in banking and finance, married, children)

The following describes the circumstances where one interviewee was forced to resign from her position as a recruitment consultant because of the incompatibility of demands made of

her both by her employer and clients. She had originally been recruited to work three days a week:

*'No one wants to wait for you for two days to come back to work. They don't understand why you only work part-time. So it just became quite hard, so eventually when [my son] was one, I decided to work four days a week and I thought everyone can wait one day. So I worked four days a week for a year and it worked really well in that, that one day I got with him, we actually just did stuff together, and I didn't do any work at all. But as time went on that started to break down a bit as well because my boss was a real workaholic and although he didn't want to say anything he really did struggle with it, and he was trying to be PC and saying 'no, it's fine' but he really, really struggled with the idea that I wasn't doing any work in one day. Basically I did a full time job in four days, I worked to the same targets as everyone else, absolutely everything, I just did it all in four days, which was really, really hard.'*

(Female, 32, self-employed property agent, formerly project manager in recruitment company, husband also self-employed, children)

The following case reinforces the importance of terms of job content and the type of work that an individual does in ensuring that not only are those working reduced hours able to fulfil both their family and work commitment, not only in terms of 'getting the work done' but also in terms of personal fulfilment and the assuaging of guilt; feeling that you are letting your colleagues down:

*'Lots of my other peers now don't have children and that, sometimes I find quite difficult because over the years I've put in a lot of hours and worked very late and lots of the guys in my team work very long hours, but I have to leave by 5:45 every night at the latest, so I do sometimes feel I am leaving them in the lurch.'*

[Interviewer: Is that you feeling that, or do you feel that you are getting some kind of negative response and resentment that you are leaving?]

*'I think it's me. I would say there's maybe ten per cent resentment sometimes when I walk out the door and some of the team are there until very late, I am sure there is. But I know when I've worked very late at their kind of level, anybody who gets to leave before you, you get a bit kind of miffed! ...it's a very demanding job and because the nature of the beast is that it's very responsive, like you know last week was half term, it's a very big retail trading week, it's the start for the build up to Christmas. If people go out and buy lots of stuff then you're fine, but if they don't it becomes very hectic and you can't plan your week easily, so you are constantly responding to what's happening the day before, the week before. So it does make it quite difficult to fit it all in, in one day. I get good weeks and bad weeks - I get weeks when I think I'm keeping ahead and other weeks where I feel like I'm drowning... I think if you are conscientious, you never feel like you're doing enough, do you?'*

(Female, 31, merchandising director in retail sector, married, husband self-employed, children)

The following provides the contrasting experience, where the nature of the work appears to positively facilitate reduced hours working. As opposed to a responsive role, a proactive 'project-based' mode of working allows this respondent to manage her workload more effectively to match her circumstances and working hours without having to feel guilty about letting her colleagues down. This also comes down to organisational culture where, *'it's not*

*frowned upon if you go home having done your hours*'. The following extract is in response to an enquiry as to how working a three-day week was working out. It highlights some of the frustrations but ultimately, due to organisational culture, the nature of the work itself and personal control enabled the respondent to work effectively without the level of stress reported by the previous respondent:

*'...I have times when I do need to bring work home and things go on without you on the days that you're not there etc... I guess in the majority of cases you work round it, but sometimes... you don't involved in things you should have been involved in. I guess, overall, **you** [researchers' emphasis] have to make it work and I have to manage my hours much more so, I have to leave the office at five or not long after, I can't stay till whenever at night, but then you sometimes find you then bring work home: but I don't think it's any worse than it was before [going part-time]... I think that's just the level of job that I've been doing, that there is sometimes an element of that. There are times I've had to be flexible in terms of doing a different day off in the week just to try and get meetings arranged and that kind of thing, but it's not been to the point that it really, really bothers me... I got one of the biggest projects the department gets in the year to manage when I went back [after maternity on part-time contract], so there's never been a question of give them all the duff stuff because you're only in three days a week! You know you hear some people maybe think they might have gone into a career limiting thing, but no. I suppose in some ways the way that my department is structured has changed, in that we work out of a project pool. Whereas before, you would have had a defined relationship and you did work for a specific part of the business, now it's very much project-based - but that really suits being part-time, because you only do as many projects as you can do in your three days. Given you are setting stuff up, or you are working with somebody from the start of a project plan, they know then what days to expect you in and plan the work around that, as opposed to you being there Monday to Friday for whatever comes up. So from that point of view, that's always been easier for me to settle back into it than it might have been previously*'.

[Interviewer: So there's no one that needs to take up the slack, as it were...?]

*'No, if I'm allocated to a project, it's just me doing that work. So there might be times when someone would have preferred to speak to me on one of my days off but I always tell them up front I can't do meetings on those days and then people are generally okay with that and then that means my colleagues aren't really having to pick up things generally in my absence*'.

(Female, Rewards Manager in Banking and Finance, married with children)

Although the issue of control was most often raised by working mothers working within specific parameters set by factors outside work, we also interviewed graduates who, in accordance with the idea of a life-stage change in priorities, felt that they had lost control of their working lives to the extent where it was significantly impinging on their personal lives; a sacrifice they were no longer prepared to make:

*'... over the past few months I have tended to work quite late, sort of seven or eight o'clock... because I only live ten minutes away so, it doesn't sort of eat in to my evening too much. But about three weeks ago I set myself a target to say, 'OK, I'm not staying at work past half past six' because most of my colleagues leave between half five and six and so I was kind of staying there until seven, eight and I'm kind of realising that the more you get sucked in, the more work people give you because they know you can get stuff done... But, I was finding*

*that I was getting home at eight o'clock, half past eight, watching the telly and going to bed and my whole evening had gone...'*

[Interviewer: So is there anything that brought that on... or was it simply that you got to the point where you thought, "Well, this isn't sustainable?"]

*'I think I was just getting really run down and just noticing that on one else was there when I was there... I was the last one to leave... and I kind of thought "Hang on a minute". So, I just kind of said, "Right". I'm going to make sure that I have some time to go and do some exercise and eat properly"... and all the things that I had kind of neglected for the last couple of years probably. I don't know what brought it on. I need to consider the fact that I have a life outside of work and so far it's been OK. There's been a couple of occasions where people have wanted things and I haven't done them and, you know, I've been able to push back and say, "Well, there's not enough hours in the day" and it's kind of gone OK so far, but it's not a nice feeling to say "No, I haven't done it, sorry" because I know if I'd stayed late it would have got done and I wouldn't have got a mouthful, so I'm kind of learning as I go'.*

[Interviewer: It sounds quite a challenge to come and claw back that element of control, if you like, in terms of the hours you are working?]

*'Yeah. I don't think people necessarily expect me to stay late, it's just because I always do the work that I need to do there's that expectation that's been set for the last probably five years since I've been at [employer] that I will get stuff done'.*

(Female, Senior HR Process Improvement Consultant in new media)

A point that has been made elsewhere is that organisations are more likely to be accommodating to the flexibility requirements of key staff or those with scarce skills or developmental potential in order to retain these employees. This was apparent in a number of cases, as exemplified in the following extract from an interviewee who had negotiated a three-day working week with her employer. In response, to the question of how this had come about, she said:

*'We had an adult conversation about [it] - well, you've got to see how it works. They are keen to try and make it work because they realise they'll probably lose me if they didn't, because I was keen to pursue [other interests]. I think they realised that they'd lose my skills if they didn't at least try. There aren't many people with the same skills as me, luckily for me, in the company. There's quite a few project managers that don't understand new technology in as much detail as I do. So I think I was, luckily... in a happy circumstance and in a bit of a strong position'.*

(Female, Technical Project Manager (part-time), in ICT)

Importantly, we also find evidence to support the business case for accommodating flexible working and reduced hours in that there are returns in the form of increased loyalty and motivation. One interviewee cited previously talked about the fact that since returning from maternity leave she had become more ambitious than she had previously been and linked this directly to the extent to which she believe her employer valued her. Whilst working reduced hours she had been promoted to a more senior role – clear evidence that her employer recognised her potential and was not blinkered by stereotypical thinking that

equated seniority with standard working hours (whatever these might be) and 'full-time-ness'. The technology-facilitated move in many sectors to 24/7 productivity has led many employers be increasingly creative in their approach to staffing. Once employers grasp the fact that *all* jobs are socially-constructed and that the boundaries between and jobs and around hours of work are not inflexible and, indeed, can be radically re-conceptualised, they are able to use their existing human resources and engage in workforce planning that has radical implications for gender relations at work and in households. Returning to the demographic trends discussed in Chapter 2, considered in tandem with the accounts provided by the graduates in the study, it can be argued that persuading employers to implement equal opportunities policies in a way that not only facilitates equal treatment but takes account of the different implications of work/life balance and family-building for women and men is not only morally desirable but also constitutes a social and welfare policy imperative. We deliberately mainly selected high flyers who, at the time of the *Seven Years On* study, were in partnerships, to enable us to explore the dynamics of the work/life choices that they were likely to be increasingly faced with – but in doing this, we may be underestimating the extent to which equally highly-qualified women are, through pursuing demanding careers, explicitly or implicitly making choices that are likely to lead to childlessness – the choice between career or motherhood that successful women have more often been faced with than their male colleagues (Wajcman 1998). This is a choice that should be open to all, but it is not in the interests of women or the community that it should be a choice imposed or drifted into as a result of unreasonable career maintenance pressures; nor should the costs of career success be higher for women than men. The demographic trends and emerging research findings (Altucher and Williams 2003, Hewlett 2002) suggest that the incompatibilities between the stereotypical 'normal careers' enshrined in many company cultures and 'normal family life' need to be addressed before equality of access to career development can be deemed to have been achieved.

### **8.3 Summary**

This chapter has outlined some of the challenges faced by graduates in the interview sample in attempting to maintain demanding careers alongside increasing non-work responsibilities and greater emphasis on work-life balance. The interviews highlight how organisational culture, work organisation and managerial attitudes are able to significantly assist this process but also how they can contribute to difficulties faced by employees. The difficulties faced by our respondents in managing not only their own careers in the context of individual and organisational expectations and pressures but also in the context of those of their partners and their expectations were similar to those reported by previous generations. These pressures are particularly acute in situations where both partners have established successful careers within organisations or occupations in the first few years after the completion of their education and for whom work and career contribute substantially to individual identity – but

given the tendency of people to choose partners with similar abilities and attitudes (Brynin and Francesconi 2002), it is not surprising that those who have benefited from higher education tend to find themselves faced by these dilemmas as their careers progress. As shown in the previous chapter, it is no accident that women are more likely to have developed careers in the public sector (where equal opportunities legislation is more firmly adhered to in spirit as well as theory than in the private – particularly, the commercial – sector) – or, it becomes apparent, that as far as general trends are concerned, women in new and *niche* graduate jobs – more often in the private sector – appear to be most likely to defer or reject parenthood. Many public sector occupations, conversely, are traditional professions or gendered graduate *niches* such as medicine, teaching and the law (all of which have established part-time and flexible career options); modern graduate jobs, interestingly...; whereas new graduate jobs are concentrated in management and in male-dominated contexts which, despite legislative changes and formal equal opportunities policies, are far from family-friendly (Sturges and Guest 2004).

The experiences of our interview respondents continuing their careers in the context of family-building and/or an increased emphasis on work-life balance highlight the variability of employers' willingness and ability to accommodate non-standard work patterns and recognise employee's personal commitments. Such accommodation is dependent not just on explicit policy and practice within organisations but also, perhaps more importantly, on organisational culture and the attitude and understanding of immediate line management. Our interviews indicate that where these successful graduates felt that they were no longer in control of their working lives for whatever reason, many sought to take steps to redress this balance and find or create employment opportunities that would allow them to align their career and personal aspirations, attitudes and values. The problem for employers is that this may lead to inefficient wastage of skills and experience, from their point of view, and unnecessary turnover increases recruitment and selection costs. Those organisations that had enabled their early-career graduates to accommodate family-building and other non-work responsibilities – which may have involved assessment of the costs and benefits of their policies on a medium rather than short-term basis – clearly were retaining and motivating their knowledge working staff more effectively than those that did not.

## Chapter 9

### Re-conceptualising the policy agenda

#### 9.1 *Assessing the evidence*

The strength of this project has been the combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, ranging from interrogation of census longitudinal data on changes in higher education participation, women's employment and family formation, to a programme of very detailed interviews, conducted seven and ten years after graduation with graduates of both sexes (and in some cases, their partners), to explore their experiences of higher education, career development, and decision-making related to both work and work/life balance issues.

Analysis of labour market trends over the twenty-five years indicates growth in those occupational groups that require skills and knowledge normally developed in higher education. The growing demand for highly-qualified employees has kept pace with the expansion of higher education and is projected to continue into the second decade of the 21st century - and that the most significant component of the increased supply of graduates since the early 1990s has been the expansion in women's higher education participation and investment in their human capital. The educational achievement of girls has been surpassing that of boys at all levels of education and recently this trend extended to achievement at undergraduate degree level. Nevertheless, although investment in higher education benefits women more than men, compared with women who do not obtain degrees, graduate women's earnings remain lower than men's at all stages of career development, with the gap in average earnings becoming progressively wider with age and experience – and career outcomes among this highly-qualified group remain gendered, reflecting different options, different choices and – in general - different paths taken by women and men.

By primarily focusing, for the purposes of this project, on graduates who had completed undergraduate degrees in 1995 when they were under 30 years of age and who were in full-time employment seven years after completing their degrees, it has been possible to illustrate the persistent inequalities of employment outcomes, financial returns to higher education, and career trajectories more broadly, between women and men with comparable qualifications and apparently similar access to career opportunities. It has also been possible to explore the complexities inherent in these differences, because it has been possible to investigate the interplay of formal and 'objective' variables such as subject of study, level of academic achievement, qualifications obtained, skills and knowledge acquired, occupation, sector of employment, socio-economic background - and more informal, subjective accounts of experiences, aspirations, opportunities, obstacles encountered and choices made.

## **9.2 Similarities and differences in the career outcomes of comparable male and female graduates**

Analysing the survey and interview data collected seven years after graduation, we found that there are a range of factors that determine women's access to high earnings, career opportunities and access to occupational roles above the glass ceiling. Some of these were incurred prior to labour market and even higher education entry, reflecting the gendered development of skills and gendered choices made by girls and young women as they progressed through the education system and beyond it, into employment. It is possible to account for the gender pay gap in terms of these prior choices and, conducting a multivariate analysis of job-related variables, levels of human capital development, educational achievement and other characteristics that might be expected to influence employment outcomes.

Confining the analysis to graduates who had completed their undergraduate courses before reaching the age of 30 and who were in full-time employment at the time they were surveyed in 2003/04, the most significant variables turned out to be hours worked, sector of employment and gender segmentation. Part of the explanation for why these highly qualified women were paid less, on average, than their male peers, appears to be because they worked fewer hours, were more likely to be employed in the public sector or in lower-paying industries and were more likely to work in contexts where others who did the same job as they did were mainly or exclusively women. Full-time employed men worked longer hours, were more likely to work in high-earning private sector industries such as Finance or Business Services, and – where they were working in organisations where most of those in their occupation were men, earned higher than average salaries. However, this reflects rather than explains gender difference. Analysis of the interview and attitudinal data, as discussed in the preceding chapters, revealed the following:

- There were differences in the explanations for different earnings and career outcomes from graduates in different sectors and occupations. The explanation for the gender pay gap in manufacturing, particularly among graduate engineers, was not the same as the explanation for the gender pay gap in legal practice, or among humanities graduates;
- Values and career orientations were largely similar for women and men. There were some significant differences in the proportions of men and women who agreed with key attitudes – for example, 87 per cent of men agreed that 'career development is important to me' and 67 per cent that 'I am extremely ambitious' compared to 79 and 54 per cent of women; 75 per cent of men compared to 66 per cent of women agreed that 'high financial reward is important to me'; 60 per cent of men and only 42 per cent of women expect to work continuously till retirement; and 49 per cent of women compared with only 7 per cent of men expected to take career breaks to raise

children. But despite the residual 'traditionally-gendered' differences, the convergence of responses, compared to the attitudes and behaviour of previous generations, is striking among this highly-qualified sample;

- A key explanation for particular obstacles to the achievement of equal opportunities for women and men lay in the micro-politics of the workplace; particularly, the realities of equal opportunities policies and practices, cultural values and expectations concerning long hours availability and mobility, and the incidence of gender stereotyping, sex discrimination (and sexual harassment in some contexts) revealed in the interviews illustrates the importance of organisational equal opportunities policies and practices and the extent to which organisational cultures can reinforce or impede progress towards greater equality of opportunities and outcomes;
- Finally, as the incidence of 'traditional' attitude responses cited above implies, we discovered evidence of the significance of partnership and its impact on earnings and career development of family-building on both women and men. These graduates, even in the early stages of their careers, were more likely to make career-related decisions on the basis of household considerations – in particular, as part of a couple – than to view their career as independent and pursue it in terms of individual income or career-development maximisation. As both their careers and family planning and building progressed, the divergence.

Ten years after gaining their first degrees, in the interviews conducted between 2004-06, we find the effect of these explanatory variables amplified, as the respondents reached their early thirties and a point in their career which, for many – particularly women – was reported to be experienced as a 'watershed' phase, where decisions about long-term values, lifestyle choices, and – in particular – work/life balance – were highlighted. For these interviews, female respondents were selected primarily on the basis that they were previously on record as being high educational and career achievers, ambitious, valuing employment and aspiring to career development. It was found that at the time of the fieldwork, many of them had already embarked upon family formation and the majority (– although not all) of the others aspired to do so<sup>20</sup>.

### **9.3 Key findings from the Ten Years On study**

The key findings are as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> However, a note of caution is required here, since we explicitly disproportionately targeted graduates with partners at the seven year interview stage and the census analysis discussed in Chapter 2 suggests that we may be under-representing those whose circumstances or choices lead them to be more predisposed to reject or miss out on family-building.

1. The glass ceiling remains a challenge for ambitious 'non-traditional' candidates in most organisations (and in most contexts, women constitute 'non-traditional' candidates for senior posts).
2. Discrimination and equality of opportunity are not randomly distributed in the graduate labour market.
3. In many instances, we found a gap between the graduates' perspectives of career and employers' perspectives of the staffing and performance management of career occupations in their organisations. Highly-qualified women (and couples) make career decisions based on medium to longer-term interests and household rather than individual income implications. Employers tend to confine staffing and staff development considerations to organisational short-term interests, which can be costly in the medium to-longer term.
4. The extent to which employers have adopted and promoted work/life balance policies is extremely diverse - and the research revealed that both men and women in the population sampled consider these crucial, recognising that the returns and rewards from work are wider than salary levels alone.
5. Career development that includes non-traditional work patterns and short career breaks is available in 'good practice' employment and led women to choose and remain in the organisations that offer it.
6. Family formation primarily impacts upon women's careers, even in partnerships where the couple regard each other's career as equally important. Male graduates reported modified aspirations and changed values as a result of becoming fathers, but it was apparent that household and family management problems, mainly (still) lead to women rather than men modifying their career engagement and aspirations.
7. Informal and cultural constraints and pressures remain the most significant brakes on graduate women's access to equality – most significantly, long hours culture and unwillingness on the part of employers to explore the logic of custom and practice – for example, the requirement for all employees to be willing to be geographically mobile, or to vary their working hours or locations at short notice.

#### **9.4 Policy implications**

- Employing organisations need to be persuaded to take gender mainstreaming seriously, in their organisational record-keeping, recruitment and selection procedures, promotion and retention policies, training and development practices, outsourcing activities, management structures, pay and conditions of employment, working practices, decision-making procedures and management structures. (addresses points 1 and 7 in particular, but important for all);

- Targeted action is required – and further research is required to determine the key areas of need and the approaches likely to make the most effective impact. This would involve working with industry and professional association bodies to encourage them to challenge obstructive policies, procedures and practices in member organisations and among their professional members. For example, the Engineering Council and engineering professional associations, and the Law Society, are obvious target organisations which have all, to a greater or lesser degree, taken previous action to improve women's participation and achievement. There is a need to build upon such efforts;
- Similarly, a campaign aimed at all employers to promote the medium to long term organisational and socio-economic advantages of effective equal opportunities practices, drawing on research findings such as those of this project, might involve liaison with management and industry bodies such as the CBI and CIPD;
- Further research is required to underpin these proposals. Its primary objective to identify 'good practice' organisations (and exemplary cases of employees within them) which have taken gender mainstreaming seriously, eschew 'the long hours culture', facilitate dual-career working and have been redefining informal expectations and attitudes within the workplace. Such organisations exist, and although they probably fall short of perfection on close inspection, we can identify some of them via the graduates' accounts and from other research on leading edge companies and preferred employers. The power of such 'role models' to inspire others to change should not be underestimated;
- A synthesis of relevant research, crossing the boundaries between management, employment relations, labour market and social welfare evidence, should be commissioned by the EOC. For example, international comparisons need to be highlighted - the lesser incidence of long-hours working in other, equally successful economies, for example, and the links between physical and mental health and productivity in particular national and sectoral contexts;
- The evidence, from the *Through the Glass Ceiling* research and a wealth of other sources over the last twenty years, suggests that change in the workplace leads to change in household divisions of labour - and conversely, that lack of equal opportunities reinforces gender inequalities beyond the workplace. The link between opportunities for flexible career management without career damage and change in household divisions of labour that facilitate greater equality of effort and reward in the home as well as at work can be, and needs to be, demonstrated.

Looking through the glass ceiling

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