Barriers to women in social enterprise
A report for Togetherworks
By Sarah Irving
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This report is intended to outline the current state of research on the barriers which prevent women entering or remaining in jobs in social enterprises, or which dissuade them from setting up their own social enterprises. It is also intended to help inform future practice by Togetherworks, by ensuring that the network is fully aware of the issues which women can face in the social enterprise sector, and recommended means of levelling the playing field for female participants in the social enterprise sector.

The government estimated in 2006 that there are 55,000 social enterprises in the UK, representing 5% of all businesses with employees and with a total turnover of nearly £27 billion.¹ The costs of excluding or disenfranchising women within this sector are, therefore, potentially huge. On the positive side, the social enterprise sector has a much better balance of male and female entrepreneurs and business owner-managers than the mainstream economy, and many women working in the sector do report that they find employers, colleagues or co-operators more understanding, democratic and aware of equality issues than in mainstream companies.² Nevertheless, the research summarised below, and the comments of women working in social enterprises, suggest that there are still significant barriers to be overcome to achieve gender equality amongst women founding and working in social enterprises. At senior levels, women in the charitable and voluntary sector are seeing the gap between their pay and that of men widen,³ while the effects of the credit crunch mean that fears about insecurity and unemployment will be increasing amongst all workers – including those in social enterprises.

A number of sources cite the importance of women's paid work in not only empowering women economically and socially, but also in evidence that it significantly improves likely economic, educational and health outcomes for their children and wider families.⁴ Government policy has promoted social enterprise as a means to attract especially socially marginalised women – from a range of ethnic minorities and low-income areas – into the job and training markets. In the light of these trends, however, it is vital that the constraints on women being fully active in establishing or working in social enterprises are better understood and acted upon.

Summary

There are two main populations addressed in this report. One is that of women who set up social enterprises, and the second is that of women who work for or are members of social enterprises. These two groups face different barriers to achieving their aspirations, and need different types of support to progressing in the social enterprise sector.

¹ Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: Social Enterprise in the UK, 2006
There are a number of common themes which appear in much of the research available on barriers to women in social enterprises. Barriers to women setting up successful social enterprises included:

- discrimination in finance, including from private banks, and support/advice provision from advisers with limited knowledge of or empathy for both social enterprise practitioners and woman entrepreneurs;
- Lack of confidence in their abilities to set up or successfully run a business;
- lack of awareness of the concept of social enterprise, or that their initiative might be considered a social enterprise, thereby cutting them off from possible funding and support;
- lack of skills such as business planning and financial management, or lack of formal qualifications for practical and professional skills possessed;

Barriers and problems faced by women within social enterprises included:

- poor administration of maternity provisions, leading to loss of experienced staff and in-house skills and knowledge and discrimination against women – both against women parents who receive poor treatment and non-parents who may face not being taken on by employers fearful of 'losing' staff to pregnancy;
- low and insecure incomes and concentration of women in low-status stereotyped ‘female’ professions such as childcare and healthcare;
- difficulties faced by small social enterprises in offering flexible and part-time terms to staff with young children, and a lack of opportunity for part-time workers (and therefore many mothers) to achieve promotion;
- pressure to work long hours and potentially to give up unpaid time in order to 'demonstrate commitment' to an organisation, with greater difficulties for women with family commitments;
- difficulty in accessing training and education due to lack of time and resources in organisations, with possible gender complexities such as the lower confidence of women in asking for training or facing colleagues' criticism for taking time 'out' for training;
- in some organisations, discriminatory male cultures including sexist jokes and boozy social environments and an 'old boy network.'

**Solutions and best practices suggested by the various research projects include:**

**For women entrepreneurs setting up social enterprises:**

- better training for mainstream business advisers on the specific needs of women, especially BAME women, and social entrepreneurs;
- use of social enterprise and community organisations to act as a bridge between women and mainstream business support organisations which women often find intimidating, and use of community environments rather than intimidating business-oriented facilities to host events, adviser appointments etc;
- gender- and culture-appropriate networking events, including women-only networking events, and sensitive timing and placing of meetings, eg not involving alcohol, at sites which are perceived as safe for women and easily and safely accessible by public transport;
- promotion of networking and social enterprise start-up courses as a means of creating a mutual community of women at similar stages in their business progress, allowing
them to work through common issues and concerns;
• role models and inspirational figures in marketing and case studies can encourage women to believe that they can succeed, although this method needs using with care as there is also some evidence that they can be intimidating and disempowering if there is too much of a perceived gap between the 'role model' and audience. Evidence suggests that 'knowing an entrepreneur' is an important step to becoming one, and if 'role models' are approachable and local they can also serve this function;
• business support and information which is realistic about the challenges of self-employment and social entrepreneurship, in order to reduce disillusionment and disappointment further through the process, and which provides intensive support through an extended period of time and throughout a reasonable proportion of the social enterprise's trajectory, rather than a short period of encouragement which then leaves women entrepreneurs feeling abandoned;
• use of flexible support such as mentoring and coaching which can address personal confidence issues as well as signposting to sources of practical information on issues such as finance and legal obligations;
• use of face-to-face contacts and advice, eg community-based advisers, to promote social enterprise start-up and good practice, based on evidence that it is often more effective than online or printed materials alone;
• Creation of better targeted resources and signposting services to sources of accurate, up-to-date social enterprise support and advice, especially in areas such as how to approach funders and write funding applications.

For women working in social enterprises:
• training which is tailored towards the needs of women and social enterprises, bearing in mind various needs – for example, small social enterprises often find it hard to find the time to allow staff to attend external seminars and classroom-based courses, but some women find that these are valuable opportunities to meet other people in the sector and expand their knowledge and networks;
• better human resources training for managers in social enterprises so that they are aware of best practice, not only in relation to maternity but also issues such as sexism, harassment and how to encourage women to access training and apply for promotion, eg by providing secondments, job-shares and other opportunities;
• good-quality, easily accessible information for both women and employers on maternity rights, stressing the business case for accommodating women employees and providing practical tools such as in-time reminders for when inexperienced employers need to address issues such as performing health & safety audits and discussing return dates and terms;
• promotion of approachable role models within the same or similar businesses and concrete information on how other women have progressed through their careers in social enterprises;
• opportunities to meet and network with other women in social enterprises to build confidence and contacts;
• provision of workplace creches or information on possible childcare arrangements.

Overall, it was also suggested by a number of reports that more research was needed into specific areas, such as the experiences of women working in social enterprises and their career paths and trajectories. Reports by GEM and Prowess also stressed the need for all government departments and business advice organisations to keep statistics
disaggregated by gender, as currently this does not happen in many instances which means that possible differences between male and female entrepreneurs and staff are being disguised. The latter is obviously beyond the scope of Togetherworks' capabilities, but is an issue which could be raised in policy and in relations with governmental partner organisations. Several reports also noted the need for research focused on specific groups such as BAME women and what successful services targeted at them might look like.

**Methodology**

This report is essentially a literature review of currently available research. As well as data collected specifically on women in social enterprises, which is not particularly plentiful, it also draws on research into the status of women in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and in the voluntary and charitable sectors, as both of these have some comparable features, for example in that many social enterprises started out and in some cases operate alongside and identify more with voluntary organisations than other businesses, and many social enterprises are also SMEs and relate to issues such as employment legislation, tax and commercial law in the same way as other small businesses.

Below a number of research reports, books and other publications tackling the issue of barriers faced by women in the social enterprise sector are summarised and their key findings noted. The reports come from academic sources, government departments and social enterprise support bodies; a number of other reports and articles were also examined, mainly those dealing with issues of women's entrepreneurship in mainstream economic sectors, but only those which seemed to have distinct information or analyses to add to the social enterprise material have been included. Each publication is described separately, in order to illustrate the extent to which different studies differ or agree, and the findings and recommendations of the reports are, where appropriate, presented separately and highlighted.

**Research reports and their findings**

1. **Social Entrepreneurship in the UK**  

GEM produce regular but not annual analyses of the state of entrepreneurial activity in countries around the world. The 2006 research on the UK included a report on social enterprise. Its main findings included:

- that women are slightly less likely to be active as social entrepreneurs than men, but that the gap is much narrower than it is for mainstream enterprises, where men are twice as likely as women to be owner-managers;
- the highest level of social entrepreneurial activity is amongst the youngest age group (4.4% of the population), aged 18-24, but this was the group amongst which men were most numerically dominant (5.6% vs 3.1%);
- There is no significant difference between men and women in terms of the likelihood
that they will be involved in baby social enterprise activity, but men are slightly more likely to be involved in both nascent and established social enterprises. There is some regional variation in this, with female social enterprise start-ups in the East of England and South-West being higher than male, and London having the highest rate of male start-up activity. Wales was reported to be around one-to-one.

- The report noted that gender differences should be 'treated with caution' but that the gap between male and female activity was smallest amongst White British social entrepreneurs;
- 35% of all nascent early stage entrepreneurs, those who have been involved with start-up activity for up to three months, are social entrepreneurs 5.5% of all established business owners in the UK are social owner-managers. Social entrepreneurial start-ups are also more common amongst Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, and social entrepreneurs were said to be less confident than their mainstream counterparts, with this gap widening the longer the business survived.
- Social entrepreneurship was said to be more common amongst people with higher levels of education and higher incomes, especially in the White British community, and that especially in this ethnic group attrition was lower amongst newer enterprises and that they were more likely to be started up alongside part-time employment.

The study suggested that, while women are involved in all sectors of social enterprise, the higher number of women in social enterprise than mainstream entrepreneurship might in part be accounted for by the high proportion of women in sectors where social enterprise set-up been very much encouraged by the government recently, such as education, childcare and healthcare.

Women social entrepreneurs were said to be more motivated than their male counterparts by social, community and environmental goals rather than by a profit motive, and the report noted that “further anecdotal and interview evidence for this report suggest that young men are taking a more philanthropic approach to their entrepreneurial activity, as outlined above but are classifying themselves as social entrepreneurs.” This is possibly also reflected in the fact that amongst social entrepreneurs, men were much more likely to expect to gain a large (>90%) share of their organisation’s income from trade rather than grants and other funding (33.1% vs 16.9%). Women’s social enterprises were more likely to have charitable status than be limited companies, CICs or other more commercial constitutions.

However, overall the study reported that there is a lack of systematic research into the challenges faced by social entrepreneurs and enterprises in areas such as accessing funding and finance, and this research needs to be disaggregated by gender, which is currently not being systematically done on a widespread basis.

The report concluded that the narrower differences between male and female start-ups in social enterprise than mainstream enterprise: "corroborates a general picture that has emerged over the last few years that policy should focus on encouraging socially motivated business activity amongst women as this might encourage more women into labour market engagement through enterprise. Similar arguments have been made for other under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities."

Main recommendations
This report was mainly a portrait of the situation as it stands rather than a source of
recommended actions, but two main points were:
• that more data disaggregated by gender is needed to understand patterns of start-up and continuation of social enterprises by women, and the possible challenges to this;
• that with levels of business closure amongst social enterprises double that of the general UK population, mentoring and coaching as well as access to finance through the growth process are important.

2. Social Enterprise: Making it Work for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Women
Government Equalities Office
2008

This reports builds on the policy position mentioned in the GEM report (above) that encouraging women into social enterprise is a good way of drawing them into the job market generally, and that this might particularly be true for BAME women. BAME women, the report notes, have amongst the highest rates of unemployment outside the home of any groups in the UK, and this is highest amongst Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Once in employment, however, BAME women are just as successful as White British women in reaching higher occupational levels – ie, the main barrier is in finding not succeeding in work. Work is presented in this policy framework as being a source of empowerment as well as economic benefit, and therefore posited as being of social use to the 63.9 per cent and 66.7 per cent respectively of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women who are classified as economically inactive.

Proposed measures to increase women’s participation in enterprise generally include:
• Piloting women’s business centres
• Enterprise support focused on women through Regional Development Agencies and Business Link;
• Offering enterprise advice through the Children’s Centres
• Establishment of a national women’s business mentoring network, and
• Establishment of a national centre to reinforce the economic case for supporting women’s enterprise.

Barriers identified against the participation of aspiring BAME social entrepreneurs included:
1. Low Level of Awareness of social enterprise as a concept or method, especially amongst BAME women and even amongst those with an expressed interest in entrepreneurial activity, but once awareness was created levels of start-up were high;
2. Pressures of Time: a number of the women in the report’s focus groups cited family obligations as a major limit on their time and a reason for failure to follow through business plans, especially in conversations which happened a substantial way through the process of start-up support, once women had seen how much time and effort was actually needed.
3. Securing Finance: a major concern for all aspiring entrepreneurs, but it is suggested that women face particular knowledge gaps such as how to identify potential funders; how to
apply for and secure funding; how to identify what resources they need funding for; and how to support oneself during the start-up stage of development. Research was cited suggesting that minority ethnic women appear to use formal business support less than their White counterparts. BAME women were said to be especially affected by inability to pay for business support services and the difficulty of expressing their ‘business case’ to potential lenders.

4. Skills gap: a lack of knowledge of business development, legal structures and finance was identified as a major constraint for BAME women setting up businesses, and there was also a stress on the need for training in this to be followed up with information on marketing and promotion to help grow businesses beyond their immediate communities.

5. Low confidence and motivation, with initial enthusiasm often stifled by encounters with the difficulties of getting support, advice and funding, but with opportunities for enthusiasm to be reignited through education, networking and other activities. BAME women were said to have perceptions that they were likely to be turned down for funding and to be significantly discouraged if this happened.

6. Multiple disadvantage: many BAME women, especially in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, were said to be held back by cultural stereotyping from within and outside their communities, as well as by language barriers. Many women from these communities were also identified as having low educational attainment levels, often having young children, and as living in areas with high general unemployment levels.

Main Recommendations

- social enterprises need access to business support that “recognises and embraces the different way in which they do business” and which can be flexible and personal enough to meet particular needs for BAME and other women in social enterprise start-ups. Mentors were identified as a particularly useful means of support.
- Government departments such as the Office of the 3rd Sector, BERR and the RDAs should incorporate stronger gender and race focuses in their social enterprise strategies, ensuring better outreach and concentrating on collecting better data on these sections of the community. Government support for small businesses should take the needs of BAME women into account when redesigning support structures.
- Groups such as Prowess and the Social Enterprise Coalition should create better targeted resources and signposting services to social enterprise support bodies and resources, especially in the area of learning to approach funders and write funding applications.
- Case studies of women in social enterprises, especially BAME women, should be accumulated in order to better understand barriers and opportunities, and to provide inspirational examples for women thinking of entering the sector.
- Better cross-governmental networking should be used to create stronger support services and better policies encouraging BAME and other women into entrepreneurship. ‘Ambassador’ women should be identified to provide outreach and inspiration.
- Research should be carried out amongst BAME women across the country to see how their experiences tally with those in the groups studied in London and how best to target resources.
- Government should consider how spaces such as women’s centres and children’s centres could reach BAME women with information, education and resources for entrepreneurship.
3. Women's enterprise: a critical examination of national policies
Laura Wilson, University of Southampton, Geoff Whittam and David Deakins,
University of Paisley

Although this academic article does not deal specifically with women in social enterprises, it raised some points which might be useful in thinking about the kinds of conclusions and recommendations found in other reports.

The report noted that a general trend existed in government of encouraging women into enterprise, due to a perception that there were low rates of women's entrepreneurship and social benefits to be drawn from changing this situation. Points raised regarding various existing schemes included:

- the need for the positively received Women Into The Network scheme to refocus on start-up businesses and provide clear exit routes to mainstream networking and support groups, in order for women's enterprises not to be marginalised into women-only support structures'
- that there was confusion on the aims of a national microcredit programme, including an failure of some of those managing the programme to acknowledge that it was “not an appropriate funding conduit for all women who wished to start an enterprise.”
- that business support for women was extremely variable across the country, in levels of presence, quality, focus (eg networking, poverty alleviation etc). “Overall, in 2002 public enterprise support for women in England was not as comprehensive, quality controlled, or benchmarked as that provided through Scottish Enterprise.”
- that statistics which might give a clearer picture of the level of women's engagement in enterprise are not disaggregated to make this possible. It was suggested that this sometimes allows assumptions to govern policy making, in that for instance it is sometimes assumed by policy makers that even if women are listed as company directors at start-up, they are formal, silent directors co-opted by the husbands to fulfil legal requirements or tax avoidance aims.
- Banks were also said to have refused to provide gender disaggregated date which could have helped to make the general business situation clearer. It was claimed that a number of banks had said that they had no plans to make such data public, even though talk of targeting marketing campaigns at women suggested that disaggregation had been done.
- suggestions that recommendations by business advice organisations such as BusinessLink could be used as the foundation for more favourable attitudes from banks and other funders were questioned in that this could discriminate against women who did not use such services, which other data suggested were already more used by men.
- Concerns were raised that many sectors where women are already concentrated, such as childcare and healthcare, are widely seen as low status and often have poor rates of pay and conditions, and that excessive and uncritical promotion of these as arena for women's (social) enterprise could reinforce the role of women in economically disadvantageous sectors.
- Concerns were also raised that uncritically encouraging entrepreneurship amongst
women in deprived areas and with low levels of business experience or expertise could potentially worsen debt and poverty if such businesses were unsuccessful. It was noted that self-employment and entrepreneurship are at the best of times precarious and resource-intensive activities, and that promoting them in areas with, for instance, high dependence on benefits could be counter-productive.

- The article also noted that much of the support aimed at women entrepreneurs or possible entrepreneurs refers to improving confidence levels amongst women. However, it is noted that high failure rates amongst start-up enterprises might suggest that actually a level of concern about whether a business is likely to succeed is highly legitimate, and that confidence-building should be twinned with a realistic approach to business success and to the skills and experience of the entrepreneur involved. The notion of the prevalence of low self-confidence as a problem was said to be ‘highly anecdotal,’ and that in some circumstances risk-aversion could be a sensible reaction to economic situations and personal skills levels. In some countries, including Australia and Denmark, women’s businesses were said to be more likely to survive for long periods than those started by men and this, it was suggested, could be seen as meaning that lower expectations of success might act as a useful filtering mechanism for businesses that were destined for failure. Alternatively, it was suggested that men could be trained to give more honest and accurate assessments of their own skill levels.

- The article also pointed out that although issues such as equality are often mentioned in connection to entrepreneurship, the frameworks in which entrepreneurship is encouraged rarely actually challenge the sources of inequality and discrimination, but rely on individual entrepreneurs to find ways – such as alternative funding sources – to circumvent discrimination. Promoting entrepreneurship, it is suggested, should be combined with measures to challenge the barriers which do exist, by regulation such as outlawing of discriminatory practices by private banks.

- The article also challenged received wisdom that lack of appropriate childcare is a barrier to women’s entrepreneurship. The report cited a study “at the Wellpark Enterprise Centre, a managed workspace with a female business-owner focus. The female entrepreneurs who chose to locate to the workspace did not support the on-site, somewhat below market rate, childcare provided by a recognised not-for-profit operator. Presumably, the entrepreneurs preferred childcare strategies where appropriate that followed the route that many families choose (Belle and La Valle, 2003), a hierarchy that has informal, family arrangements first, local community support second, and paid-for childcare services offered by childcare organisations almost as a last resort.” Such findings, it was suggested, might have implications for both policies which seek to encourage women into enterprise through childcare provision, and enterprise support strategies which focus on childcare provision as a growth area for female entrepreneurs. That many women face childcare problems was not denied, but it was suggested that government solutions might be oversimplified and unrepresentative.

4. 3rd sector women in management: summary of research findings
Co-op College
2007
This was one of the few studies looking at the experiences of women working in or as members of social enterprises, rather than as individual entrepreneurs setting up businesses. Of the 89 women who responded to questionnaires (and some of whom then took part in focus groups), two-thirds had been in their various social enterprises for over 3 years, ie had substantial experience of conditions in co-operatives. Half of the respondents were said to work for the Co-operative Group, including the Bank, with the rest spread between a range of worker and retail co-operatives. Many cited the desire to work for an ethical or social organisation as important to them.

Around half of these reported no obstacles to their progression from their co-operative or from their home life. Of the half that did report obstacles, these included male attitudes, lack of money, lack of time, lack of opportunity, lack of encouragement and childcare and other domestic responsibilities. Where opportunities for progression were identified, many women said that they couldn’t take advantage of them due to other responsibilities, part-time hours or heavy workloads. Accessing training was identified as difficult due to lack of funds or time.

Nevertheless, co-operatives were identified by many of the respondents as being good places to work, with more open and democratic structures than many companies and a willingness to listen to suggestions, even if there weren’t the resources to take them up.

Specific issues pinpointed in focus groups included: a culture of long working hours; standard (ie low) maternity leave pay and benefits; managers recruited from outside (so that roads to promotion are not available); restricted career paths for specialists; flexible working hours are not available for everyone and can be unpopular with colleagues; training budgets are either very small or under-spent because training is seen as a place where savings can be made; a culture of men banding together; a culture of racist and sexist jokes and remarks; women experience some male managers as bullying; fear of being seen as someone who wants to leave; when women reluctant to apply for a job unless they can ‘tick all the boxes’, whilst men will apply anyway; poor HR structures and practices.

A significant problem was identified with the difficulties of progressing through organisations without being full-time, and often without also having to work over specified hours. Increasing numbers of flexible working requests were said to be coming from women with care responsibilities covering both elderly parents and children, with the result that their careers were impeded.

A further issue raised which could have bearing on planned support for women in social enterprises was a discussion of what kinds of training were most useful. While the constraints on time and resources meant that many social enterprises favoured informal, workplace-based training such as mentoring, skillshares etc, some women noted that more traditional classroom based learning provided opportunities for women to network, meet women and other workers from outside their own organisation or department, and get new information and perspectives.

Main recommendations (from questionnaires and focus groups)

- role models – male and female (several women mentioned that they had never had female managers)
- information on how women get to the top
• train managers to make them more aware of HR policies
• secondment to other parts of organisations
• opportunities for training in personal development and managerial skills
• supportive managers who believe in a person's abilities and potential
• women's networking opportunities
• organisation-wide lists of job share opportunities to give better access to flexible and part-time roles
• provision of workplace crèches
• talent identification rather than assuming that all jobs will go to outside expertise
• encouragement of women to apply for jobs (“jobs go to the people who want to move, not necessarily the best qualified”)
• flexible working at senior levels
• clearer and more defined career paths

5. Promoting the idea of women as co-operators, a review of research
Linda Mapp, Birmingham Business School, for Co-operativesUK
November 2005

This report explored studies which might throw light on the assumption that co-operative models of working might appeal to or benefit women. Studies cited identify educated, confident, already working women with an existing network of contacts as more likely to become and succeed as entrepreneurs. In terms of social enterprise, the proportion of women amongst social entrepreneurs was said to have increased since, for example, GEM started looking at the sector.

Reasons why co-operative models might attract women were suggested to include:
- less financial risk if more than one person involved in start-up
- better access to finance through grants and range of members
- opportunities to share knowledge and experience
- co-op values and principles

It is therefore possible that the co-operative model in itself lifts some of the barriers to women entrepreneurs, such as access to finance. Benefits identified as being specific to women included creating jobs specifically for women and providing on-going support; childcare provision; positive consideration of flexible and part-time working; and providing training and practice in entrepreneurship. However, most of the academic research done into the subject of barriers to women in starting or working in co-operatives has (with the exception of the Co-operative College described above) concentrated on Majority World rather than richer country settings, where issues such as the balance of ideology vs necessity may be very different.

Studies of wider social enterprise start-ups, including the Amazon Initiatives study discussed below, identified a similar range of problems to those facing mainstream entrepreneurs, but suggested that women entering social enterprise needed longer and more specialised, intensive and hands-on support than mainstream enterprises, and that social enterprises needed a longer than expected incubation period. Women were also found to be extremely reluctant to approach mainstream support agencies such as BusinessLink, seeing them as intimidating, alien and as not dealing with ‘their type of business’ or not knowing anything about what they might offer.
Main recommendations

- use social enterprise support agencies as intermediaries between BusinessLink and other mainstream support agencies, and new social entrepreneurs, to make the encounter less intimidating;
- use networking and support programmes to develop miniature 'communities' of mutual support and experience for new social entrepreneurs;
- create incubation environments where understanding of sectors in which women's businesses are common and where networking opportunities are geared to being welcoming and appropriate;
- use role models, mentors and training environments to raise awareness of co-operators and social entrepreneurship, based on evidence that 'knowing other entrepreneurs' is a key element in the process of becoming one;
- despite the growth of high-tech forms of information, studies of enterprise support organisations suggested that individual, face-to-face contact with other human beings was the most effective form of dispersing information about types of business model and awareness raising about 'non-traditional modes of business.'

6. West Midlands Women in Social Enterprise
Amazon Initiatives
2004

Amazon Initiatives, a social enterprise support organisation based in Coventry, conducted research amongst its client groups to investigate whether women would function better in social or community enterprises rather than mainstream ones. Working particularly with BAME women, the research also noted that small-scale and family enterprise was common in the BAME community, many of the enterprises set up by women were “often not structurally sound and we do not too see many Women from these groups setting up in mainstream business ventures, perhaps because of lack of proper planning and support at the initial stages or for financial reasons, or perhaps because they are attempting to set up enterprises that are out of their area of ... in-depth knowledge.”

Key findings included:
- that many women were not aware of the concept of social enterprise, and amongst the significant minority who were aware of the term, many only knew of limited aspects of the concept or attached it to the notion of more 'caring' business, preferring this to more economic formal terminology;
- that some women who had set up social enterprises failed to recognise themselves as such, potentially cutting them off from sources of help and advice;
- the main barriers identified by the women studied for the report were: Lack of knowledge of the social enterprise concept; Lack of relevant support; Lack of confidence; Lack of motivation; Cultural barriers
- women also often did not recognise the business aspect of their project, and therefore do not seek advice from business advice services or plan on standard business lines, affecting the sustainability of their project - “many wished to think of themselves in charitable terms, giving their time and energy for “free” but working elsewhere or surviving on benefits.”
- some women did see themselves in business terms but had little idea about how to
follow a business model or access support and resources such as volunteering structures;

- women found BusinessLink unapproachable, or found that mainstream business advisers did not understand the social elements of their projects;
- available support was identified as inadequate in that it: was insufficiently intensive; was too short; was not geared to social enterprise and could not advise properly on legal structures, sources of funding, volunteers etc; did not take family, language and cultural issues into account; was unsympathetic to women's lack of confidence; tended to be based in premises with a 'business' rather than a 'community' feel, making women feel that they did not belong.
- When specific social enterprise support was available, eg the Co-operative Development Agency, women were not aware of it or found that it did not address gender, cultural or language needs
- women were fearful of whether their projects would work, about their financial security, of formal business issues and of the possible repercussions of failure, and were frustrated by the lack of accessible support;
- women often lost motivation as a result of: loneliness, unrealistic views of the time and input needed to set up a business; being thwarted by a lack of qualifications or legal requirements; lack of clear aim to move from a community to a business model;
- poor understanding of the concept of social enterprise by both mainstream business advisers and not-for-profit practitioners meant that opportunities for social enterprise constitution and support went unrecognised by both founders and advisers;
- women committed to the community aspect of their initiatives often felt uncomfortable about the idea of income generation from them;
- women who drop out of support processes early, often citing lack of time, are most likely to drop out of set-up process or to make mistakes which cause the business to fail early.

Main recommendations

- better training of business advisers in the legal and practical aspects of social enterprise so that opportunities are recognised and practitioners given proper advice;
- awareness-raising amongst entrepreneurs of social enterprise models, their applicability in different settings and the opportunities for funding and support associated with them;
- awareness-raising in the third sector and community organisations of the possibilities of business models;
- strengthening of intensive, flexible social-enterprise-specific support, including availability for occasional questions and contacts after the more intensive start-up phase;
- use of social enterprise advisers who are able to build strong interpersonal relationships with women, especially BAME women, and who are able to empathise with not-for-profit and community motivations and understand cultural issues;
- use of friendly, community-based settings for support rather than forbidding business environments;
- networking of new social enterprise founders with each to build a sense of community between people new to the sector who are less likely to appear intimidating and can share experiences and problems;
- women should be warned of some of the challenges they will face early in the process
so that they go into it with realistic expectations and established means of facing some of the likely difficulties;

- strengthening of cultural and language specific support services, using interpreters or multilingual advisers and signposting women to ESOL resources if necessary;
- use of resources such as start-up check-lists, proforma business plans and funding bid support to ensure that businesses are started out on the right track.

7: Prowess/Dr Rebecca Harding (Delta Economics)
State of Women’s Enterprise in the UK
2007

By the same authors as the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor report on social enterprise, this 2007 report looked at levels of general entrepreneurship by women in the UK and argued that “existing women-led businesses need more appropriate assistance towards greater long-term sustainability. It argues that although much has been achieved over the last four years to support female entrepreneurs at a national and at a regional level, female entrepreneurship remains resolutely low at just under half of male entrepreneurial activity and this represents a real challenge for all those engaged in raising the profile of women’s enterprise in the UK.” although the section on social enterprise acknowledged that this sector is not as polarised as mainstream enterprise, it still offered some insights into possible barriers to women in the sector.

Key findings relevant to social enterprise included:

- that women are most likely to move from employment to self-employment in certain sectors, especially education, healthcare and community work, and the rate at which they make this shift has increased since 1990 in most sectors except finance and education;
- although women are more likely to fear failure than the general population, their responses are 'more complex' and should not be oversimplified, and this needs to be taken into account in government attempts to rationalise business support services generally;
- women are more likely than men to regard the social, environmental and ethical aspects of business as significant, raising important issues for the role of women in the growing area of sustainable business;
- care needs to be taken when looking at ideas about women’s entrepreneurship side-by-side with social entrepreneurship. On one hand, many women’s enterprises address community or social needs, but this does not necessarily signify that they have growth potential as businesses. On the other, it is important not to bracket all such start-ups with voluntary or charitable schemes which imply that they have no growth potential – or to put it another way, enterprises may need to be taken on a case-by-case basis to establish which model they fit better;
- much higher levels of female transition have taken place into self-employment in public administration, health, education and community work. These are also the sectors in which nationally there have been moves in public policy towards decentralisation and the establishment of social enterprises, and this may be the cause of much of the statistical strength of female involvement in social enterprise.
Main recommendations

- much public policy has focused on the early stages of entrepreneurship, but support along the ‘enterprise journey,’ combining both supply-side interventions with demand-side support and mentoring help to address process issues;
- more research on how women's enterprises grow and their trajectories, as well as how they start up, and where different groups of women get their entrepreneurial knowledge and beliefs about;
- greater disaggregation of data at all levels of government;
- greater gender focus in social enterprise strategy, policy, information and support;
- increased women's awareness of social enterprise as a model;
- innovative forms of business support need to be explored, such as community-based business advisers;
- promotional campaigns need to balance use of inspirational role models with women-friendly support such as mentoring and training, to balance any intimidating and anxiety-inducing effects of using images of success that may appear unattainable;
- government social enterprise strategies need to incorporate specific gender strands;
- encouragement of entrepreneurship in low income neighbourhoods needs comprehensive packages of support and investment to encourage the start-up and growth of indigenous enterprise, including social enterprise, which in turn is seen as encouraging further entrepreneurial behaviour, education and job-seeking behaviour. Needs identified include access to finance, access to training, national and local accreditation schemes, supply chain development, public sector contract capacity and promotion of social enterprises to public sector policy and decision makers;
- gender training for mainstream and social enterprise support advisers, changes to gender focus in marketing and information material, offering the option of female advisers, making the start times of events family and woman-friendly.

December 2007
Dr. Julia Rouse, Natalie Sappleton, Dr. Debbie Ellen

This report involved a literature review of research on maternity cover and problems facing pregnant women in UK businesses, a review of small business support services in the North-west (excluding Merseyside) which looked at advice on provision for maternity leave amongst staff, and interviews with a small number of working mothers. Although it does not specifically deal with social enterprises, it does cover small businesses and their problems, with many Manchester social enterprises falling into similar categories for size and facing similar issues such as lack of human resources structures. Maternity cover and a paucity of HR systems were also one of the issues raised by the Co-operative College interviewees from amongst co-operative employees in the North-West and by the various women employees of social enterprises quoted in the final section of this report.

In 2004/5, an Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) investigation found that almost half of all pregnant women experience some form of disadvantage at work and some 30,000 (7% of the total) are forced out of their jobs each year. Current legislation is intended to protect both pregnant women and their employers, allowing employers to ask for ‘Keeping in Touch’ days during maternity leave and allowing businesses with NI payments of less
than £45,000 p.a. to recoup 104.5% of statutory maternity payments.

Of the four key policy recommendations, two of were addressed in the Work and Families Act 2006. A third - that small employers require greater support to manage maternity fairly and productively – was not by December 2007 met due to significant change to business support services. A fourth recommendation, to provide greater financial recompense to micro employers, has also not been taken forward.

The report raises the issue that as well as the impact on new mothers, losing staff through poor maternity provision is bad for companies, who may lose experienced staff and waste female talent and training, and for the wider economy, with women who lose their jobs in pregnancy six times more likely to consider not returning to work at all, increasing the risk of child poverty, increasing economic inactivity rates and disrupting the labour supply. Even if they do return to work, women with children can expect to earn 5% less than if they had not given birth, with this difference rising to 14% for women on low incomes to start with.

Poor management of maternity also puts all women of childbearing age in danger of being denied jobs by employers fearful of losing staff to pregnancy, with the EOC study citing evidence of discrimination by small employers against women job applicants due to the fear that they might take maternity leave.

Non-compliance with employment regulations on maternity is most common in micro and small firms, with only 19% of small employers having proper guidelines for managing maternity and many small workplaces operating from incomplete knowledge of rights and responsibilities. According to the report, “The EOC review concluded that some owner-managers display a fundamental ignorance of both the detail and spirit of maternity legislation.” Knowledge of the health and safety procedures which should be followed during pregnancy was particularly low, and such firms rarely had written human resources policies or formal systems which could be used for protection by either employers or employees. Many women interviewed for the MMU study also stated that they felt a loyalty to their place of work or colleagues which meant that even if their position was abused, they preferred not to pursue the matter.

Small employers were also more likely than larger ones to use free advice and support services which gave incomplete or out-of-date information, or to have to use expensive legal services with an inbuilt predisposition to resorting to legal action. Better intermediate levels of support for small businesses were therefore identified as a need, possibly delivered through local business networks, trade associations or accounts.

**Main recommendations**

- improving the information available through business support services, which was identified as largely inadequate and not geared towards practical implementation of maternity rights and responsibilities in a real-life situation. Suggestions in the report included developing an in-time element to toolkits, reminding employees or employers when documentation was due or discussions needed about roles or return to work; check-lists to allow the company and employee to brainstorm management of the maternity leave workload; encouraging regular reviews with returning employees to increase the chance of staff retention and satisfaction.
- improvement of tools such as BusinessLink’s online maternity advice tool to tailor them better to small businesses with low turnovers, and preferably promote the EOC Toolkit (see information sources, below) as the best practice tool;
- encouragement of small businesses to have formal written HR and particularly maternity policies, and to have a general process of having considered the issues so
that the initial reaction is not one of fear and panic, as cited by some interviewees and other studies;

- incorporation of discussions of maternity cover and re-induction processes, the fate of cover staff on return and how to manage flexible and part-time working into business planning and advice;
- small firms put forward information provision ideas including: web accessible checklists and case studies of how small businesses had worked through these issues; websites which offered different formats of advice – eg phonelines, packs posted out, so that different styles of learning could be accommodated; services offering face-to-face meetings in the workplace, instead of requiring staff to go to time-intensive seminars which took up even more company resources.

The MMU report produced an action plan to “support small businesses to manage maternity fairly and productively.” Its ten key action points were:

1. Concentrate resources on one integrated package of support (instead of the current multiplicity of duplicated sources of advice).
2. Create a permanent and live service, regularly updated to follow legislation and learning from evidence about the use of various styles of communication and information.
3. Future proof by incorporating paternity benefits and baby leave into information provision.
4. Utilise an existing innovation as the foundation of the new service, ie employ the EOC’s Pregnancy Toolkit as the foundation of any new package.
5. Integrate advice about managing flexible and part-time working into the Toolkit.
6. Offer support through a mixture of media, including an interactive toolkit online and on DVD, a paper version, face-to-face intervention linked to the toolkit, eg by external consultants through a voucher scheme, complementing BusinessLink’s brokerage system. Avoid seminars and other media which demand a large amount of time from small businesses.
7. Develop the intervention to be an in-time process, eg by email or phone calls to employers, allowing actions to be taken at appropriate times rather than expecting employers to absorb all their information at once.
8. Extend the toolkit to support productivity in the small firm, instead of focusing primarily on the rights of women and therefore making small business owners and managers feel that they are being asked to give without getting any benefits. Examples include information on the benefits of treating employees well such as skills retention, attractiveness to other and future staff, case studies of successful management and practical tools for guiding discussion and planning by the employer and pregnant woman and proposing creative ways of delegating and refocusing work.
9. Develop excellent channels for promoting the service through partnering agencies, BusinessLink and other enterprise advisers, NHS maternity consultations and search engine optimisation online.
10. Use the expertise gained through this review and the integrated service to inform future reviews of maternity and paternity legislation, including giving ACAS/BusinessLink new statutory information obligations, further consideration of support for micro firms and better cash flow of direct support to small firms.

9. Social Enterprise Coalition/ESRC
Social Enterprises: diversity and dynamics, contexts and contributions
2008

This is a general report looking at the levels of research into social enterprise in the UK and identifying gaps in knowledge about trends in social enterprises. In common with other studies covered in this report, SEC identified a lack of good research data on social enterprise although it also mentioned that due to government policy interest there was growing coverage of the sector amongst academics. However, it was noted that many of the studies had short time scales, used small samples and drew ‘questionable conclusions.’

It was also noted that the range of different types of business covered by the term ‘social enterprise’ can present difficulties for both research and policy, as there may be little in common between, for example, a small community-based organic food co-op and a large health provision organisation taking up NHS contracts.

The report noted that there was a trend of increasing numbers of social entrepreneurs from business backgrounds due to a wider social trend towards ‘downshifting’ from corporate jobs, but that the sector still tended to be dominated by the image of a ‘heroic’ single entrepreneur who inspired others and martyrs themselves to their social or environmental aims, and that this image – not actually borne out by research, which stresses the effectiveness of collective effort - could be both offputting for potential social enterprise founders or workers and an issue for social enterprise employees pressurised into giving up unpaid time and labour. Two-thirds of social enterprises were said to make use of at least some voluntary labour, allowing some to establish themselves with low levels of capital but presenting problems, for instance in the absence of specialist human resources professionals in most social enterprises and the difficulties of balancing paid and unpaid staff.

The report also problematised some of the assumptions often made in talking about social enterprises, such as the distinction between disadvantaged and non-disadvantage workers (men might be subject to racism or denied paternity leave or flexible working, women might have better educations and no need to access childcare). The language used to promote social enterprise to some communities, especially BAME groups, was criticised as implying that these communities lack entrepreneurial behaviour, when statistics demonstrate that many of them actually have very high levels of small business. The report also highlighted the danger of promoting social enterprise as a panacea which allowed communities to take charge of their own economic and social wellbeing, without structural issues of discrimination and economic marginalisation being addressed.

10. A Survey of Social Enterprises Across the UK
IFF Research Ltd/The Small Business Service
2005

This government-sponsored report confirms many of the patterns mentioned in the slightly later GEM and Prowess reports. It highlights the diversity of social enterprises, with one in five turning over >£1 million and one in five turning over <£100,000 per annum, and the consequent difficulty of talking about a 'typical' social enterprise or identifying a single set of needs. It also stressed the reliance (two-thirds of social enterprises) on volunteer workers and part-time workers – a third of all those employed by social enterprise, and
15% of social enterprises employing only part-time staff. 9% of social enterprises were (or had activities) aimed specifically at helping women into work. Beyond this, however, there was no breakdown of figures by gender and little comment on the proportions of women working in social enterprise.

11. Beyond Hierarchy: Gender, Sexuality and the Social Economy.
Sarah Oerton
Taylor & Francis 1996

Although this book is substantially older than most of the other reports surveyed, it was considered potentially useful in that it was one of the few broad surveys of working conditions within social economy organisations which went beyond co-operatives and the North-West. It comprised an academic literature review followed by empirical fieldwork findings based on interviews with 45 social enterprise workers from 45 different organisation. Its findings included:

- that women working in social enterprises tended to have lower incomes than men, which was often attributable to the fact that their male colleagues were more likely to have higher educational levels and to be full-time workers;
- that women working in smaller social enterprises frequently had to resort to ‘topping up’ their incomes through state benefits;
- although women workers often actually stayed longer in their jobs, they were more likely to perceive their jobs as insecure, possibly because they were more often part-time or formally temporary in nature, and because although men were more likely to be in formally permanent and full-time jobs, they had greater labour market mobility and more scope for moving both between social organisations and in and out of the mainstream labour market;
- the general workforce of social enterprises had a comparatively low representation of women with childcare commitments, suggesting that these did not feel that they could combine these roles and therefore left the sector temporarily or permanently. This seemed to counteract the conventional view that many women are happy to work in part-time and flexible work in the social economy because they are juggling childcare commitments;
- women were more likely than men to take on poorly remunerated, unpredictable and low-status out-of-hours work in social enterprises and to feel that it was assumed that they would do so;
- sexist joking, gendered assumptions about quality of work and social marginalisation of women workers was fairly common within social enterprises;
- whilst women-only social enterprises were often found to be emotionally and socially more satisfying places for women to work, attitudes to them from outside (other enterprises, funders and potential markets) tended to marginalise them;
- despite a range of negative points, the women and men sampled did both express the view that social enterprises and co-operatives tended to be more understanding, less pressurised environments to work than mainstream workplaces, and that social enterprises also often offered women a useful stepping stone into training and other forms of experience and employment that they would have been unable to access in mainstream enterprises.
12. Women Entrepreneurs:
Jumping the Corporate Ship or Gaining New Wings?
Nicola Patterson, Graduate Tutor, Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University
Institute for Small Business and Entrepreneurship conference paper, November 2007

This report, based on interviews with women entrepreneurs and business support advisers in the North-East of England, was aimed at examining the complex nature of women entrepreneurs motivations for becoming self-employed or setting up their own businesses, and how these related to personal and domestic circumstances and the desire to take control of lives and careers. It emphasised a pattern of women entrepreneurs seeing self-employment or setting up their own businesses as a way of escaping the entrenched gender relations and lack of flexibility of mainstream employment, but discovering that ‘old boy networks’ and ‘glass ceilings’ can still exist in small enterprise, through difficulties in breaking into new markets or accessing quality funding and advice. Women, according to the study, tended to end up exchanging the greater flexibility and empowerment of entrepreneurship for lower pay, longer hours and a perceived decreased professional status.

12. GEM reports

In 2005-6, Manchester Women's Network's Gender & Community Engagement in Manchester (GEM) project carried out research amongst a range of women and men in Whalley Range, East Manchester and other areas, identifying barriers to women's participation in community structures such as LSPs and community forums. Although the research did not strictly deal with social enterprise, some of its findings and conclusions are included here due to the community-based nature and informal origins of much social enterprise, and the insights it offers into ways of encouraging women's participation in activities outside the home.

Factors identified by Asian women in Whalley Range as to why they weren't involved in community engagement:
- family responsibilities and time, especially long, late meetings in areas where women do not feel safe or at times which are not culturally appropriate or which present childcare problems;
- lack of confidence, especially in terms of speaking in front of audiences/groups, with cross-cutting factors eg older women much less confident about attending and speaking at meetings;
- perceptions that engagement has no result, especially that no notice will be taken of them because of gender/ethnicity;
- lack of trust in councillors and local and government structures;
- lack of knowledge about processes, structures etc, which meetings to go to and where pressure might be applied;
- language;
- perception that meetings and processes are not relevant to them;
• cultural pressures against speaking out in public, going to public meetings etc;
• general sense that women especially have little say in decisions and can't influence them – not just from Asian women but strong trend amongst multi-ethnic interviews done, and with women showing much less faith in their ability to influence events and policy (82% little or no ability to influence issues);
• although interviews showed that women were generally more likely to be involved in volunteering etc than men, they were less represented at senior, paid or official levels in the organisations and structures that they were involved in.

Main recommendations:
• opportunities for women to network with each other before or instead of appearing in mixed public forums and to identify any issues that are specific to women;
• encourage women to come in small groups or pairs to avoid being in culturally inappropriate situation of being only woman, or intimidating situation of being only Asian women;
• possibility of structured workshops to allow women to meet and discuss issues in semi-formal atmosphere and where there is scope to provide translation;
• clearer information about community structures, processes and ways of engaging;
• targeted training, especially women-only, in specific skills eg public speaking;
• considering times and venues of meetings etc so that they don't deter women by being inappropriate, dangerous etc, scope for childcare to be provided, not in pubs or late at night during the winter when it's dark, places easily accessible by public transport;
• use members of both genders in carrying out research, publicising events etc, concentrating on ensuring use of gender least likely to attend;
• use a range of publicity and learning methods, as different types tend to appeal to different genders and other social segments, don't depend on the internet as this is still exclusive;
• use local venues or those easily accessible by good public transport, including in the evening;
• try to use shared facilitation/chairs so that both genders represented at the head of a meeting.

Sources of information, advice and support

Prowess and its social enterprise portal
http://www.prowess.org.uk/start/socialenterprise.html

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor UK reports

The Equal Opportunities Commission has now been superseded by the Equality & Human Rights Commission, and the EOC Toolkit for managing maternity, which is highly recommended by the Manchester Metropolitan University researchers in report number 8, can now be found at:
Information and government policy on social enterprise can be found at http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/social_enterprise.aspx

Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Enterprise has a small business research strand which covers a number of issues – including the managing maternity report presented above – of relevance to social enterprises. http://www.mmucfe.co.uk/research/

Co-operativesUK (www.cooperatives-uk.coop) produces a range of information and promotional materials encouraging women into the co-operative sector, as well as advising on co-operative structures.

**How women feel about social enterprise**

An admittedly unscientific email survey of women working in the social enterprise sector in Greater Manchester found that although most women already working in the sector were passionately committed to it, they were also frustrated by some of the conditions they had to accept in order to do meaningful jobs which they felt supported their communities or helped the environment. Others found it hard to even find jobs in the sector which could be structured in line with their childcare needs. Some of their experiences have been included below, in their own words.

All names have been changed.

*Cath, late 30s, 15 years experience in workers’ co-operatives in Merseyside, moved to Greater Manchester in 2004, 2 children. Remains involved on a very part-time basis in a small workers’ co-op.*

“I found it incredibly frustrating not to be able to find a local job where I could continue my commitment and contribution to the co-op sector. It seems such a waste of experience and skills. Pretty much everything part-time was either cleaning (which I feel I do enough of with the kids!), care work (ditto), or no-responsibility-type shop/café work. I was delighted to eventually get a job as a bathroom designer, which I had absolutely no experience or training in, but which was interesting, stimulating and fairly well suited to many of my skills. If it hadn’t closed down, I would still be there today, ’cos it least it was somewhere local and flexible, where my ability to learn and take on responsibility were recognised and valued. The biggest barrier I faced to my involvement in the social enterprise sector was geographical. After 15 years as a co-op member [in Merseyside], I moved to [an area on the rural edges of Greater Manchester, but within commuting distance] and found very, very few opportunities to remain in the co-op movement. I even worked on the deli counter at the local Co-op supermarket for a few months (very strange experience as a vegan!) in the hope that other, more suitable opportunities would reveal themselves, either within the Co-op or elsewhere.

Childcare was also an issue, since it seemed unlikely that I would be able to progress much within the Co-op as a part-time worker, and with the restrictions on time imposed by childcare availability. My desire to home-education, and intention therefore to remain part-time was also a factor in this.

The only other local co-op job available was in the local health food shop/café, where childcare was a significant problem. I worked there for a while, but they hadn’t been clear...
about the hours they wanted me to work, which turned out to be from late morning to early afternoon at least 4 days a week. This would have meant the kids being at the childminder for the whole day for each of these days, since it was only possible to arrange childcare on a half-day basis, not hourly. I had been clear about my availability, but I think they assumed that if I really wanted to work there I would soon give in. My experience [on Merseyside, at a women's co-operative] was entirely different, with a much more caring and accommodating attitude, where workers were seen as the co-ops most valuable resource.”

Jane, late 30s, two young children, works for a national charity with a trading arm and has worked in the public sector and as a freelance

“The general standard of personnel practice in the third sector is pretty dreadful and that has to have consequences for any group prone to discrimination in society, be it women, disabled people, particular ethnic groups or whatever. However much social enterprises might want to 'do the right thing' they rarely employ personnel professionals so just don't have the skills to recognise or correct the subtler ways in which employment practices affect different groups of people. The 'we'd love to, but as a charity (...etc...) we just can't afford it' defence is used all too frequently when it comes to things like maternity pay or flexible working. Obviously there are a small number of cases where it really is true but more often it's just a habit and a particular mindset, especially when the organisation is run by voluntary trustees or others who, though now paid, were once volunteers themselves. Women are well represented at senior levels across the third sector, which is a good thing in itself and also inspires women to progress in their own careers. However, when you consider the disproportionate number of women working in the sector as a whole, it becomes clear that, having entered the sector, men are still more likely than women to progress to the highest levels.”

Mary, early 30s, ten years’ experience in several Greater Manchester social enterprises in various sectors, also some time working in the public and private sectors. No children.

“I've found it frustrating losing good colleagues to the public sector or bigger companies because the social enterprise sector can't offer them the wages they need or conditions of employment to feel confident to support their children. On the other hand I also appreciate how disruptive it is for small businesses or organisations when key staff go on maternity leave – if you're IBM or Google it's ok, you have thousands of people to replace them, but if there's only 5 or 10 of you it can have a really big impact. But surely that's an argument for making an effort to improve conditions and be flexible in what you can offer them in time etc, so that you at least keep part of their skills and knowledge rather than losing them completely?

The other thing I think sometimes has an impact for women is that many social enterprises are so small that they don't have much in the way of training budgets. So that limits your capacity to learn new skills and grow as a person. If, as is often the case in social enterprises, you're some random humanities graduate with little training in technology or crafts, it sometimes feels hard to get out of that and learning 'on the job' can sometimes be hard if you don't have the confidence to ask for training off colleagues. It often seems like men have more of a sense of entitlement and confidence to ask for stuff, or they're mater in the office and better at asking colleagues to teach them things, without feeling like they're impinging on their time. There seems to be loads of funded short courses aimed at
the social enterprise sector, but they're all on really abstract things about social enterprise aims or company structures. I'm already in a company, and I've already got what the aims of social enterprise are – that's why I'm in one. I'd rather those funded or subsidised courses were on something useful!"

Helen, early thirties, has worked in several workers’ co-operatives in Manchester as well as in the public sector, no children
Reflecting on her time in a social enterprise which took on a large number of New Deal workers doing manual jobs
“New Deal in Manchester/nationally expanded to 24 years and over (having previously only taken young people). I think there are very likely more long-term unemployed men than women, so 24+ New Deal was mainly them, but 18-24 was probably nearer to a 50% 50% split?
In terms of whether women don't get opportunities to learn ‘men's’ jobs, ie manual roles, you can earn decent money doing driving jobs, particularly if you drive weird industrial machinery. If you're happy with that then fine. I think there are lots of women who think that is limited, and get office work instead which can lead in to many other things, right to the top of organisations. The waste sector has the worst health and safety record (worse than construction), so it's sensible to avoid it operationally at least!"
Reflecting on experiences in both industrial and office-based social enterprises:
“Smaller third sector organisations generally have less resources to easily put into maternity/flexible working arrangements ([current office-based co-operative] is exceptional with its flexible working and I would argue does sometimes suffer for it. It was more or less impossible to offer flexible working to, at least, manual workers when I worked at [the social enterprise described above]).
I can see why people think it's unfair to not compensate small 3rd sector organisations that employ predominantly woman who nearly all end up having 1,2, or 3 periods of maternity leave.
Do I feel that people who want to have a family are unfairly treated (intentionally or unintentionally) by the social enterprise sector? This is an issue for people that choose to have families, as long as being of childbearing age doesn't stop you getting employed. People who want/have families are, generally unintentionally, not given a realistic deal by a lot of small social enterprises, I think. to clarify about this point, I'd find it easier working in small social enterprises if I was a woman who didn't want a family, rather than a man who did. It's the biggest problem I've come across and it's not just to do with gender.

Ruth
Late 20s, works in a small workers' co-operative, one young child
“[Current small workers' co-operative] has been far more flexible and mum-friendly than any ‘regular’ job that I’ve done - hiring me for a fairly responsible position when I was 5 months pregnant so was going to need maternity leave just a few months after starting. Then encouraging me to take my full maternity leave even when I was offering to come back very early to help out. Then fully flexible hours and working from home as much as possible. I think the flexibility and accommodation has come very much from one person who is a working mum herself and has really stood up for me.
Everyone has been very sweet and lovely, I can't complain about anyone, but to be honest I think I didn't realise what working motherhood would mean until I tried it, and the people in the coop who are not mums are very lovely but they just don't have the insight that
another mum has - without her I think my experience would have been very different, and I would have had to defend myself a lot more.

It can be a bit of a nightmare organising meetings at a time when 4 part time people are free to all meet together, including 2 mums and 3 people who study and/or work other jobs. One of the ways we work around this is having the kids at the meetings - in some ways a blessing to have a company open and friendly towards the kids - in some ways a curse in that doing a meeting and looking after kids at the same time is double the work and can be a bit stressful.

As for the martyr mentality - it is definitely part of the culture, and I think to an extent these types of jobs tend to attract people who want to or tend to work in that sort of way - so it is not just a product of workplace culture, it comes from the people before they join too - that was certainly the case for me anyway! So I think I have had to balance a sense of guilt that others are working every weekend, or working late into the night, and I am not, with the guilt that I want to be with my son on weekends and evenings and not leave him with childminder and babysitters so often - maybe I'm just doomed to be guilt prone! I think in 'regular' jobs the hours and expectations are often more clearly defined, so there can be less guilt combined with less flexibility. On balance I prefer it this way."