



**Next Steps: Where do we go from here?**

**Gender Patterns in Career Choice: positive influences, best practice and pilot actions.**

The findings and recommendations of the research project will inform the development of an integrated package of resources and actions designed to combat gender stereotyping in career choice amongst 12-16 year olds. An application for ESF funding has now been made to support the development and piloting of such a package in selected schools in Edinburgh and West Lothian.

There is evidence that the materials which are currently used to combat gender stereotyping are not used in a coherent and integrated fashion and consequently they have minimal impact. There is a need to identify best practice in careers education as this relates to supporting non-gender traditional career choice. Therefore the first step will be to assess the effectiveness of existing resources, materials and actions and this will involve mapping the resources and materials produced by a range of local and national organisations.

**The subsequent development of an integrated package will:**

- provide relevant, current, tailored careers education materials to be used in schools
- facilitate opportunities for parents and carers to access information, materials and activities at an appropriate stage
- meet the needs of 'low achievers'
- facilitate links with local employers and training providers in support of 'non gender traditional' post school placements

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**Gender  
Stereotyping of  
Career Choice**



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## GENDER STEREOTYPING OF CAREER CHOICE

*After 30 years of equal opportunities education and training, school leaver destination statistics shows that young people are still following traditional gender stereotyped career choices. This project sought to examine factors influencing gender stereotyping of the careers preferences of school students in their middle secondary school years. The research involved an extensive survey of S2 and S3 pupils in state schools across West Lothian and Edinburgh and follow on face-to-face interviews with pupils in four of these schools. The research was carried by the Employment Research Institute at Napier University as part of a wider European Social Fund (Objective 3) funded project led by Careers Scotland and other agencies.*

### The research found that:

- Many pupils held gender stereotyped attitudes towards a range of occupations, although some occupations and jobs were much less stereotyped (e.g. teacher, shop worker, police officer). Girls were significantly less stereotyping of jobs and occupations than boys.
- Pupils working at lower levels of achievement in Maths and English were more likely to stereotype than those working at higher levels.
- Many pupils perceived themselves to be suited to occupations based on traditionally gendered lines, although this was not the case for some professional jobs. Preferences were also influenced by ethnic background, year in school, levels of achievement in Maths and English, general attitudes, and differences in job characteristics perceived to be important by pupils.
- Most pupils knew someone who did their preferred careers. These included other family members and family friends, although only relatively small numbers mentioned their parents.
- Pupils used a wide range of information sources for advice about careers although parents, particularly mothers, were the main source.
- In order to help break down gender stereotyping, it may be helpful to describe jobs to pupils in terms of groups of job characteristics (e.g.

jobs that involve ‘working with technology’ may include, for example, intensive care nursing). An awareness of differences between groups of pupils (e.g. boys and girls, those with higher and lower levels of achievement) would be helpful. The influence of role models on career choice and parents as a source of careers information should be given greater importance when disseminating advice.

### Project Summary

#### Background

This project sought to explain factors influencing the persistent gender patterns of career preferences between S2 and S3 school pupils. A self-completion survey of 2148 S2/S3 pupils was carried out in 15 state schools across West Lothian and Edinburgh in June 2003. In-depth follow-up interviews were carried out by careers advisors with 82 Pupils in 4 case-study schools (2 each in West Lothian and Edinburgh) during September 2003<sup>1</sup>.

#### Pupil’s Gender Stereotyping of Jobs

Pupils were asked to indicate whether they thought ‘Men’, ‘Women’, or ‘Both’ genders were suited to do a number of jobs. This showed that over 80% of pupils felt ‘Both’ men and women were suitable to do the work of: Waiter/Waitress; Teacher; Shop Worker; Police Officer; Manager; Lawyer/Solicitor; and, GP/Doctor. However, other jobs remained persistently gender stereotyped,

including perceived ‘male’ jobs of Lorry Driver, Engineer, Plumber/Electrician, Labourer, Armed Forces; and ‘female’ jobs of Nurse and Care Assistant.

Girls are significantly less likely to stereotype jobs and occupations than boys. Girls also displayed less gender stereotyped attitudes towards wider gender roles in society. Gender stereotyping did not appear to be significantly related to ethnic background, family background or family-work situation.

Interviews with pupils in the four case study schools indicate that the main reason pupils think men or women are better suited for particular jobs is that they associate certain characteristics with a particular gender. For example:

*“Women are more caring, better at talking to people” (Girl, S3)*

*“Men are stronger” (Boy, S3)*

However, some pupils stereotyped the jobs because they perceived more men or women to be doing these (which may reflect the current situation for those occupations). On the whole, women are perceived to have better communication skills, to be more caring, understanding and good at helping people. Men are perceived to be stronger, fitter, more technical and practical.

<sup>1</sup>S3 and S4 pupils were chosen because these were the same cohort of pupils as those surveyed before the summer.

### Pupils’ Perceptions of Suitability for Jobs

The pupils’ own job preferences for themselves often remain along traditional lines. Significantly fewer boys than girls feel they are suited to jobs in ‘female’ occupations such as Care Assistant, Hairdressing, Nurse, Teacher and Waiter. Fewer girls feel they are suited to jobs in ‘male’ areas such as Armed Forces, Computer/Software Designer, Engineer, Labourer, Lorry Driver, and Plumber/Electrician. More girls thought they were suited to work in some previously male-dominated professions such as GP/Doctor and Lawyer/Solicitor.

Unlike for gender stereotyping of jobs (which was only linked to achievement and gender), pupils’ perceptions of their own suitability for particular jobs was influenced by a number of factors including ethnic background, year in school, levels of achievement, choice of science subjects, attitudes and differences in job characteristics perceived important by pupils. However, for the most part, socio-economic measures did not appear to affect job aspirations to any great extent.

### Job Characteristics and Sectors of Work

There were significant differences between boys and girls in some of the aspects of jobs that they rated as important. Girls rated ‘helping others’ and ‘dealing with the public’ as more important than did boys. However, ‘earn a lot of money’, ‘working with technology’, ‘means you can live locally’ (in Edinburgh and Lothians), ‘involves a lot of travel’, ‘working outdoors’, ‘being creative’ and ‘good promotion prospects’ were all rated more highly by boys than girls.

There were strong preferences by boys and, in particular, girls against working in sectors and industries that were traditionally the domain of the opposite sex. Many girls stated they would ‘not at all’ like to work in Engineering, maintenance and garage work (78%), Construction (73%) and Transport, wholesale and delivery (70%).

### Pupils’ Views on Career and Job Choices

There appeared to be differences between boys and girls in the reasons given for wanting to do their chosen jobs, as illustrated earlier under Job Characteristics. Pupils studying at Credit level in Maths or English were more likely to choose professional jobs. Pupils’ choices of future jobs appeared to be related to their father’s socio-economic classification, but not their mother’s.

Some 68% of pupils knew someone who did either their first and/or second choice of jobs. These included other family members, family friends, although only relatively small numbers mentioned their parents (and less so mothers than fathers). Of those who indicated that they knew someone who did their chosen job, 73% of boys said these were male and just over half of girls said these were female.

*“There were strong preferences by boys and, in particular, girls against working in sectors and industries that were traditionally the domain of the opposite sex.”*

### Advice About Careers

‘Informal’ networks of advice are more important than ‘formal’ ones, raising issues about the accuracy of the advice. More young people turn to their parents as their first choice for advice about future jobs and careers than to a Careers/Guidance Adviser. We also found that mothers, in particular, were important for both boys and girls, but especially girls. Fathers were important mostly for boys. However, the findings also indicate that pupils have used a wide range of information sources for this purpose.

### Recommendations

It would be helpful to be aware that gender issues may be different for different groups of pupils, e.g. those working at different levels of achievement. Since boys and girls have different patterns of gender stereotyping of jobs, it may also be worthwhile targeting each gender in a separate way for some things. Initiatives aimed at reducing gender stereotyping of career choice need to address the reasons why girls and boys continue to stereotype women and men in general, and occupations in particular.

A further way of helping pupils to think of their own career choices may be to focus on job characteristics. This would involve showing pupils a wide range of jobs where, for example, ‘helping others’ is an aspect, and this could include traditionally ‘male’ jobs where this characteristic does not immediately come to mind for many pupils, e.g. Engineer, Computer/Software Designer. Likewise, for instance, pupils could be shown that some ‘caring’ jobs do involve a lot of ‘working with technology’, e.g. Doctor, Intensive Care Nursing. Initiatives may need to address key misunderstandings that young people often have about particular jobs.

Pupils, particularly girls, appear to have strong preferences against working in some industrial sectors. Therefore, initiatives could also target gendered preferences about industries as well as occupations.

The research has illustrated the importance of role models within the pupils’ family and social circles. Initiatives may find it useful to draw upon role models within a pupil’s own family and social circles who could come and talk in the school. However, the research was unable to ascertain the impact of wider role models, such as those in the media. Given the importance of parents, particularly mothers, as sources of careers advice, involving them more fully in equal opportunities issues would be useful.