Chapter 8

The challenges facing young women in apprenticeships

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Abstract

Participation in government supported apprenticeship programs in the UK is characterized by stereotypical gender imbalances. This chapter draws on secondary data analysis of official statistics on young people's participation in vocational education and training (VET) and apprenticeship, and evidence from a study of the attitudes of 14 and 15 year olds in England and Wales to the labor market. The discussion reveals the deep-rooted nature and continuing influence of gendered stereotypes in relation to what men and women can and cannot do in the world of work. This chapter argues that whilst patterns of take up in apprenticeship mirror unequal conditions in the labor market and society more widely, initiatives in some European countries indicate that there are steps that can be taken to help young women gain access to occupations that provide better prospects in terms of pay and career progression.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the extent to which vocational education and training (VET) policies and practices, and particularly apprenticeships, perpetuate or help to alleviate the levels of gender segregation that can be found in the labor market. Whilst it draws mainly on data from the United Kingdom (UK), the chapter raises questions that will be pertinent in many other countries. This chapter argues that whilst VET mirrors conditions in the labor market and wider society, and, hence, cannot of itself solve the gender segregation problem, there are steps that can be taken to support young women to enable them to gain access to and benefit from areas of VET which provide better prospects in terms of pay and career progression. At the same time, such steps will also be helpful for young men who aspire to careers in occupations traditionally regarded as "female."

As well as looking within the labor market for the causes of gender segregation, it is also necessary to consider the extent to which young people themselves reflect gendered attitudes towards their chosen pathways in life. Despite considerable advances in the life chances of women and the breaking down of barriers across the labor market, it is salutary to note how segregated some occupational areas remain. Part of this chapter draws on data from a study (Beck, Fuller, & Unwin, 2006a, 2006b) of the attitudes of 14 and 15 year olds in England and Wales towards the labor market in order to demonstrate the deep-rooted nature and continuing influence of gendered stereotypes in relation to what men and women can and cannot do in the world of work. Much of the literature on the gendered nature of education and training and career choice focuses on the social justice dimension, but in this chapter, we also raise an economic argument. If young men

and women continue to be reluctant to cross gender lines when it comes to forging their employment trajectories, it could be argued that employers are missing out on potential talent.

There is a new urgency to the problem of gender segregation in VET in the UK as a result of: a) legislative change; and b) the current economic crisis. At the moment, young people can leave school at 16 and enter the labor market. New legislation brought in under the previous Labour government, however, means that in 2013, young people will be required to remain in some form of education or officially recognized training until the age of 17, and this will rise to 18 in 2015. Recent provisional figures for England (DfE Statistical First Release (SFR) June 2012) indicate that by the end of 2011 about a third (32.8%) of 16 year olds enter some form of VET (either work-based training or a full-time course leading to a vocational qualification at Levels 1, 2 or 3) after completing compulsory schooling and a further 0.5% enter jobs (and are not registered on government supported training programs). At 17, 34.8% are in VET and 2.5% enter jobs, whilst at 18, the proportion in VET provision falls to 23.8%, with a far higher proportion, 15.8%, going into jobs. The figure for young people (aged 16-18) classed as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) was 8.1% in 2011. In order to achieve the goal of ensuring all young people remain in some form of officially recognized education or training to the age of 18, policymakers will need to look to VET to absorb the increased participation. Without significant attempts to break down current forms of gender segregation in VET, however, the raising of the participation age could further disadvantage young women. The continued consequences of and fall-out from the recent economic crisis must also be taken into account. Since 2008, youth unemployment

among 16 to 24 year olds has risen dramatically in the UK (standing at just over one million, ONS August 2012) and may rise further as a consequence of the planned cuts to public sector expenditure. Female-dominated areas of the labor market such as health and social care and childcare will be hit hard by the reduction in public sector jobs.

Women and the labor market

As we argued at the start of this chapter, the issues we are raising are common across many countries. Occhionero and Nocenzi (2009), in their recent review of employment structures in the European Union, note, "structural factors and cultural stereotypes still contribute to a 'gender divide' in the workplace" (p. 155). Drawing on data from the most recent report from the Commission of the European Communities (2009), the following points indicate that, although women continue to perform better in general in education than men, they have a less privileged position in the labor market:

Employment

- Female employment in the EU stands at 58.3% (up from 51.1% in 1997), but varies from 36.9% to 73.2% between Member States.
- The average gap in employment rates between women and men is narrowing (from 17.1 percentage points in 2000 to 14.2 points in 2007), but this gap is doubled in the case of women with children under 12.
- The percentage of women employees working part-time was 31.2% in 2007, 4 times the male rate — more than 6 million EU women in the 25 to 49 age group

say they are obliged not to work or to work only part-time because of their family responsibilities.

- Occupational and sectoral segregation has remained almost unchanged in most Member States over the last few years, indicating that the increase in female employment has taken place in sectors (particularly service sectors) already dominated by women. There is a persistent gender pay gap across the countries of the European Union (17.4% on average).

One positive and seemingly contradictory statistic (in light of the above picture) comes from Eurostat (2008) data for 2003, which suggests that women (aged 25-64) do, however, have the edge over men in relation to continuing training once in employment — 23% compared to 19% of men. Similarly, data from the UK records that women in full-time jobs are more likely to receive training than their male colleagues, though women in part-time jobs still have fewer opportunities than men. However, the sustainability of this picture is challenged by the reduction in public sector employment. This is because the incidence of training and development is generally higher in the public than in the private sector, and female employees in the public sector have been beneficiaries of this factor (Davies, Gore, Shury, Vivian, & Winterbotham, 2012).

The growth in female employment has to be placed in the context of continued horizontal segregation (jobs concentrated in certain industries and occupations) and vertical segregation (women restricted to certain levels). Yet, despite this reality, research suggests that the career aspirations of girls have been rising. A recent study of the career plans of high school students in OECD countries shows that “girls are determined to enter

many occupations formerly thought of as strongly preferred by boys" and, hence, "the traditional perceptions of the gender-typed occupational choices have ceased being an accurate representation of what young women aspire to" (Sikora & Saha, 2009, p. 399). The authors note, however, the dangers of girls aiming too high (in contrast to boys who will opt for more vocationally oriented careers) as they will eventually confront the realities of gender differentiation in the labor market.

Research shows that the greater the level of women's education, the more likely they are to participate in the labor market, an effect that is much stronger for women than men. A significant recent paper exploring gender inequality in the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States has found that less educated women are less likely to enter paid work (Evertsson, England, Mooi-Reci, Hermesen, de Bruijn, & Cotter, 2009). The authors argue that women with more education can get better paid, more meaningful and interesting jobs and, crucially, because they have more exposure, through education, to "gender-egalitarian ideologies." This has major implications for VET as in most countries girls and young women (and their male peers) have limited exposure to debates about gender equality in relation to vocational training opportunities.

Apprenticeship and gender segregation in the UK

Apprenticeship, involving both males and females, has a long history in the UK, stretching back to medieval times when craft guilds were formed in a range of occupations to both protect their skills and knowledge and train new entrants to ensure continuity and development. In relation to this chapter, the contemporary manifestation of apprenticeship took shape in 1994 when the then Conservative government under the

Prime Minister, John Major, decided that the State should play a much bigger role in the organization and funding of apprenticeships. This followed long-standing concerns about the relatively small number of people in the UK with intermediate (technician level) skills as compared with other advanced industrial countries. To address this, Major's government introduced the "Modern Apprenticeship" (MA). This was aimed at 16 to 24 year olds and was positioned as a Level 3[2] (intermediate/technician) program (see Unwin & Wellington, 2001).

The use of the term "apprenticeship" was a deliberate attempt to set the new program apart from existing "youth training" schemes, which had struggled to shake off an image of low quality (Gospel & Fuller, 1998). Importantly for this chapter, the use of the term, "Modern," was also chosen to signal that this new form of apprenticeship would break through the gendered nature of apprenticeship up to that point. The MA would be available to young women as well as young men, and would achieve this by being available in a much greater range of occupations (e.g., retail, business and administration) than had previously been the case for apprenticeship. After the New Labour government came to power in 1997, it decided to abandon the previous government's policy and re-branded all youth training schemes as "Apprenticeships," thus encompassing existing Level 2 programs, and extending the age limit to beyond 24, as well as introducing a "Young Apprenticeship" program for 14 to 16 year olds. Since the May 2010 general election, the Coalition Government has further increased government support for post-16 Apprenticeships, although in March 2011, the Department for Education (DfE)

[2] The education system in the UK is organized in "levels," with Level 1 as entry level, Level 2 as 5 good grades (or vocational equivalent) at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) (examination taken by 16 year olds), Level 3 as two A-level passes (or vocational equivalent), Level 4 and 5 as sub-bachelor degree level, and Level 6 as bachelor degree level.

announced the withdrawal of the Young Apprenticeship program from September 2011. Apprenticeship is the responsibility of the UK's devolved administrations.

In England, the following levels of "apprenticeship" are currently available for 16 to 24 year olds and for people over the age of 24:

- Higher Apprenticeship (UK qualification Level 4/5/6)
- Advanced Apprenticeship (UK qualification Level 3)
- Intermediate Apprenticeship (UK qualification Level 2)

The vast majority of apprentices are pursing either the Level 2 or 3 program. Just under 3 out of 10 (29%) apprenticeship starters were in the 16 to 18 age group, 31% were aged 19 to 24, and the remaining 40% were in the 25 and over age group (DfE, Feb 2012). The age profile of those starting apprenticeships has changed dramatically in the past few years. In 2004/05, the first year to include apprentices aged 25 or over, less than 1% of starts were in this age group, but 6 years later (2010/11) the proportion had risen to 40%. Within that same period the number of apprentice starts rose strongly from 189,000 to 457,200.

We have published critiques and analyses of the contemporary manifestation of apprenticeship in the UK (see, *inter alia* Fuller & Unwin, 2003, 2008, 2009, 2011). In order to concentrate on the gender dimension in this chapter, we now provide a contemporary picture of the segregated nature of government supported apprenticeship. For the first time in 2010/11, the figures indicated that the majority of those starting an apprenticeship were female. After hovering at about 49% for several years, the increase

in the female share of apprenticeship starts rose strongly to 54% in 2010/11 (SFR, Feb 2012).

Apprenticeships are available in over 150 occupational sectors, but two thirds are in 12 sectors. Table 8.1 presents the 10 sectors with the highest number of apprentices starting their program in 2008/09 and 2010/11, and the proportion of starts that are female. The period covers the 3 years since around the beginning of the economic crisis.

>Table 8.1 Here<

It can be seen from Table 8.1 that whilst the traditional craft sectors (engineering and construction) are still available, the presence of the other sectors reflects the major shift in the British economy from manufacturing to services. The Table shows that the number of people starting apprenticeships in the service sectors has grown dramatically since 2008-09, whilst the number of starts in the traditional sectors has remained more constant. The growth in female apprentices is a direct result of this shift. However, whilst the majority of apprentices are now female, the distribution across the sectors remains a major area of concern. Despite some reduction in the size of the gender imbalance in several of the service sectors since 2008-09, female apprentices are still much more likely to be found in the service sectors where pay, qualification levels and career prospects tend to be lower (Fuller & Davey, 2010). Their participation in male dominated sectors remains very low. In 2003, the UK's Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) launched a General Formal Investigation (GFI) into the gender segregation in apprenticeship in

England, focusing on 5 sectors. Table 8.2 shows the percentage of female apprentices in these 5 sectors for 2002/03 and for 2010-11.

>Table 8.2 Here<

The findings presented in Table 8.2 show that little progress has been made in changing gender stereotypical participation in the 5 occupational sectors that were included in the EOC's GFI nearly 10 years ago. Two sectors, plumbing and engineering, indicate a slightly increasing female share, although this is from a very low base. In the case of IT, it is difficult to make an accurate comparison because of changes in the relevant frameworks. Given the benefits (career prospects and financial) associated with those employed in sectors dominated by male participation, there is a strong equity case renewing efforts to reduce the gender imbalance. The lack of males participating in childcare apprenticeships continues to reflect deep-seated concerns in society about the risks (e.g., relating to potential child abuse) involved (Beck et al., 2006b), as well as wider issues relating to the status and salaries accruing to childcare workers.

Recent work by Fuller and Davey (2010) for the Equality and Human Rights Commission's Triennial Review has focused on gender participation in apprenticeship in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, government supported apprenticeship is still called the Modern Apprenticeship (MA) and at the time of Fuller and Davey's research remained as only a Level 3 program[3]. The majority of participants are males aged 16 to 19. Participation in the MA in Scotland is more male dominated than the Advanced

[3] Scotland now offers 4 levels of Modern Apprenticeship from Level 2 through to Level 5, more information is available at www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/our-services/modern-apprenticeships/ma-frameworks.aspx

Apprenticeship in England. This is because the largest apprenticeship sectors in Scotland are Construction, Electro-technical, Engineering, and Plumbing — all sectors traditionally dominated by males. The following Tables (8.3 and 8.4) present participation by sector, age group and gender.

>Table 8.3 Here<

>Table 8.4 Here<

In Wales, government supported apprenticeship is currently available to those aged 16 and over at Levels 2, 3 and 4/5, known as the Foundation Apprenticeship, Apprenticeship and Higher Apprenticeship respectively. At the time of Fuller and Davey's research the majority of apprentices (60%) in Wales were participating in the Foundation Apprenticeship. In contrast with Scotland, the majority of apprentices are female (54%) and a minority of all apprentices are aged 16 to 19. Data on apprenticeship and gender and other equality groups in Wales is only available by broad sector subject areas rather than by sector frameworks as in Scotland and England.[4] This means that the percentage share for females in Wales cannot be compared directly with the figures presented for the other 2 countries (see Table 8.5). Nonetheless, the pattern of gender imbalance across sectors in Wales is similar to Scotland and England.

>Table 8.5 Here<

Qualifications, pay and career prospects

[4] See www.statswales.wales.gov.uk

It could be argued that the sectoral/occupational gender segregation found in contemporary apprenticeships simply reflects the realities of the labor market. There are, however, 3 significant reasons why we should be concerned about this continued situation. First, there is the issue of apprenticeship wages. In the UK, apprentices aged 16 to 18 are not eligible for the Minimum Wage, but employers are required to pay them and 19 year olds in the first year of their apprenticeship a minimum of £2.65 an hour (from 1 October 2012). This rate falls below the threshold for National Insurance contributions, which means that apprentices are not eligible for statutory sick pay or statutory maternity pay. Recent data for apprenticeship pay shows that, whilst the median pay gap between men and women for the whole economy in April 2007 was 11%, for apprentices it was 21% (Fong & Phelps, 2007). The average pay for male apprentices was £186 compared to £147 for females. In the 2 highest paid sectors (electro-technical and engineering manufacture), the vast majority of apprentices were males, whereas in the 3 lowest paid sectors (hairdressing, health and social care, and early childcare and early years education), the vast majority of apprentices were female. In the electro-technical sector, the average net pay in 2007 was £210 a week, compared to £109 a week in hairdressing. Fong and Phelps (2007) also found evidence that, within some sectors, some female apprentices were paid less than their male peers, and hairdressing and childcare, both female-dominated, had the highest rates (11%) of underpayment of apprentices.

In addition to being financially disadvantaged, women are also more likely to be restricted to sectors where it is difficult to progress. The service sectors, where women dominate, tend to offer far more Level 2 than Level 3 apprenticeships. To progress beyond Level 2 can be difficult in sectors where less value is placed on qualifications and

where the vocational knowledge being deployed is less codified and the skills tend to be regarded as "soft" or "interpersonal" and, hence, equated with so-called feminine attributes (e.g. Evans, 2006; Faulkner, 2000). In the UK, Level 3 is important in that it can provide access to advanced further education and, critically, to higher education. This is a complicated picture due to the way in which vocational (and particularly competence-based qualifications) and academic (general education) qualifications are currently structured in the UK, but the point here is that apprentices in certain sectors are in danger of not acquiring the level and type of qualification that will enable them to progress both educationally and in the labor market (Fuller & Unwin, 2012).

Young people's attitudes to apprenticeship and their career prospects

As part of the EOC's investigation of gender segregation in apprenticeship, we carried out research with 14 and 15 year olds in schools in England and Wales, with employers who were recruiting and training apprentices, and with other key informants associated with apprenticeships and the transition of young people from education to the labor market. We conducted the research using both quantitative and qualitative methods (see Fuller, Beck, & Unwin, 2005a; Beck et al., 2006a, 2006b). In England, we conducted a telephone survey of 162 employers, a questionnaire survey of 1,281 14 and 15 year olds in 8 schools, 8 focus groups — 1 per school, and 2 group "events" with a sample of employers, training providers and young people.

The research revealed the deep-rooted nature of the stereotypical attitudes still held by young people. The following quotations are indicative of the young people's responses when asked why they thought "male jobs" were better paid:

"…because they put more work in, the work is more physical. They are totally different jobs, so they should be paid better." (male student)

> …cos it's more technical stuff you need to learn…whereas more caring stuff you don't need… to learn…but it's more sort of inside you as well, it's more built in to you so they don't pay you much. (female student)

These views were reinforced by the attitudes of some of the employers we interviewed, as the following comment illustrates:

> We want someone who's got … not exactly plumbing in their blood but real enthusiasm. (plumbing employer)

The implication here is that the employer would think it more likely that a young man, perhaps with relatives in plumbing, would have plumbing "in his blood." A vocational teacher emphasized the importance of generational attitudes: "…they're very strong family traditions with fathers, sons, uncles, brothers all going into the family business."

The young people in our research were able to articulate the strength of deep-rooted gender stereotyping, but also spoke about the realities of actually crossing gender lines. The survey responses showed that the majority of girls and boys agreed with the statement that apprenticeship is "equally suited to boys and girls." Asked if they would consider entering non-traditional jobs, the majority of girls (80%) and boys (55%) said yes. In the focus groups, they also said that they would consider taking an apprenticeship

in a non-traditional sector, but were not actually doing this because they did not want to. This raises the intriguing paradox that, on the one hand, young people believe they have the freedom to make a radical choice, but they stop short of actually doing so by justifying the choice they make as being based on what they really want. This suggests that despite their seemingly confident and assertive sense of having the autonomy to choose, ultimately they retreat back into traditional gendered pathways. Part of the problem lies with the limited provision in UK schools and colleges of careers advice and guidance, and of opportunities to discuss and debate the roles of men and women in society and equal opportunities more generally.

Many pupils, but particularly boys, held gender stereotyped attitudes towards a range of occupations, although they regarded some occupations and jobs as being much less stereotyped (e.g. teacher, shop worker, police officer). In the focus groups, girls and boys spoke of their fears about crossing gender lines, but boys were much more cautious: 63% of boys (37% of girls) agreed that "as a young person you don't want to stand out from the crowd by doing a job normally done by the opposite sex." Boys were worried about being teased, especially about their sexuality, if they trained for a traditionally female occupation (see also Simpson, 2004). One girl captured the fears of her male peers:

> It's like if you had a 20 year old (boy) … being like a child minder or like looking after 2 year olds or something, all his friends would be like 'ha ha ha look at you looking after all these little people'… and you don't like talk to anyone and you don't get out enough and stuff you're like a wuss and stuff and they make you feel stupid.

Our respondents said they would be more inclined to try out non-traditional occupations if:

- They received extra money to train
- The pay rates were better
- There was an opportunity (through "tasters") to try out working and training in non-traditional sectors before making a commitment
- More of their sex made the same choice

One of the most striking findings from our research was that none of the stakeholders in the education and training system in the UK appeared to have ultimate responsibility for tackling gender segregation in VET or education more generally. In Figure 8.1, we identify the range of key stakeholders in a position to influence and guide young people's decision-making and indicate the main priority for each of these groups. The Figure shows different primary concerns for each stakeholder and that challenging gender segregation is not the priority for any of them.

>Figure 8.1 Here<

Tackling gender segregation

In order to help both girls and boys aspire to non-traditional areas of work (and, crucially, to select corresponding VET programs), research suggests that they need to be exposed to gender awareness activities as early as possible in their school (possibly pre-school) careers.

A review of gender-related work in UK primary schools found that a range of mixed strategies could be effective: single-sex settings help to increase the self-confidence of girls and/or encourage them to experiment with non-gender-traditional activities; or to provide a setting for boys to tackle aspects of traditional forms of masculine attitudes and behavior; whilst mixed groups encouraged cross-gender friendships (EPPI, 2002). It also found that teachers could reduce stereotypical curriculum preferences, particularly with younger children, and could confront stereotypical attitudes and behavior through discussion and awareness of the perspectives of the opposite sex.

A Danish EQUAL project[5] (Youth, Gender and Career) was deliberately aimed at intervening at an early stage when young people "dream" about their future careers. Courses were run for parents of students in years 7 to 10 (ages 12 to 16) of lower secondary school. They provided parents with information on current and future labor market trends and prospects to encourage them to adjust their stereotyped approaches to both work and educational choices. Parents and children filled in forms about their attitudes to gender stereotyping and these were used to trigger "family discussions" about each other's expectations. Similarly, in a Spanish EQUAL project in Barcelona, it was decided to introduce guidance and anti-stereotyping methods as early as kindergarten and primary school.

Young people are rational human beings and base their decisions on what Hodkinson, Sparkes and Hodkinson (1996) usefully called their "horizons for action." In

[5] The EU funded EQUAL program "focused on supporting innovative, transnational projects aimed at tackling discrimination and disadvantage in the labour market. These projects were created to generate and test new ideas with the aim of finding new ways of fighting all forms of discrimination and inequality within and beyond the labour market." This included a focus on improving gender equality. For more information including the results for participating member States go to: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal_consolidated/index.html (accessed 23 August 2012)

asking girls and boys (or even adults) to consider breaking through the deep-rooted gender stereotyping of occupations, it is presumed they will be prepared to take risks. In a review of young people's attitudes to gender equality and balance in 2000, Tinklin, Croxford, Ducklin and Frame (2005) concluded that they did understand the equal opportunities message and believed that males and females should have the same opportunities and expectations in their future work and family lives. They were, however, very conscious of continuing inequalities, which they saw in the world around them and in their personal lives.

The career choices and perceptions of young people are influenced by a range of actors, including: parents, siblings, friends, teachers, and careers officers. Friends appear to be particularly important, whilst the role of careers guidance practitioners can be over-estimated. The media and the Internet also play an important role in the formation of young people's attitudes. These attitudes are often formed, however, in the absence of robust information about the realities of contemporary occupations and workplaces. To counter this, it is important to:

- bring "role models" (adults working in non-traditional roles) into schools and colleges to show young people that, for example there are female engineers and construction workers as well as male carers and hairdressers
- develop work experience (or "taster") opportunities that allow young people to try out non-traditional jobs
- develop short programs that allow young people to sample different types of apprenticeships

- encourage schools and colleges to use their partnerships with employers to ensure teachers and careers guidance practitioners are up-to-date with their knowledge of the world of work (see Francis, Osgood, Dalgety, & Archer, 2005).

It is clear that the strategies listed above should be brought together so that a holistic package of methods can be delivered. A German EQUAL project, in an area of the country that has seen considerable economic change, has introduced a multi-level strategy aimed at girls and young women: vocational information and guidance workshops at the end of lower secondary school; a training scheme for teachers to support them in encouraging non-traditional vocational choices; coaching and mentoring for female apprentices in technical occupations; and a program to help trainers to provide optimal support to trainees. Similarly, an innovative EQUAL project in the Netherlands sought to reach out beyond educational settings and use television to target men and boys through the use of commercials.

Although many of the initiatives referred to above can have an impact on young people's attitudes, they can often be seen as tangential to the main areas of their school or college activity, and they will not, necessarily, extend beyond the classroom. A particularly innovative approach has been taken in an EQUAL project in Barcelona. This involved the development of a curriculum approach in primary and secondary schools to challenge traditional gender roles. Gender issues were not "taught," but introduced through household processes (e.g. cooking, baking or ironing) to explain certain phenomena in chemistry and physics. The project reports how boys realized the value of

unpaid female work and the need for men to accept more responsibilities at home. Female pupils saw science as a possible career choice.

In many countries, schools and colleges are expected to take responsibility for ensuring they promote social inclusion and cohesion agendas. A review of gender equality in Scottish schools (Condi & Kane, 2006) highlighted the way in which, ironically, consideration of gender issues can become marginalized within a broader inclusion agenda. This is where a whole-curriculum approach could be valuable so that the discussion of gender issues takes a natural place within teaching and learning more generally. The needs and concerns of teachers are, of course, central to such developments. The Scottish Review found that teachers responded much more positively to tackling gender inequality when they had a degree of ownership over the development of gender awareness strategies and were supported by practical guidance and advice.

Conclusions

Despite the considerable attention in both policy-making (at all levels) and the research literature that has and continues to address gender equality and balance, there are no systematic international, comparative reviews of how to tackle inequality in education and training. The closest we have to an international overview are the documents produced by the EQUAL (2005) projects, which form part of the EU's strategy "for more and better jobs and for ensuring that no-one is denied access to them," co-funds projects in all EU Member States. Since they began in 2001, some EQUAL projects have included a focus on young people's career decision-making (see EQUAL, 2005, for a summary of evidence). In most cases, initiatives to encourage young people to consider non-traditional occupations form part

of a broader project. Whilst European and other countries have different education and training systems preparing young people for the transition into work, they all need to address the challenge of addressing gender inequalities. It would be very valuable if EQUAL could produce a separate report that distils the evidence related to the initiatives aimed at young people in a range of European countries and reflects on their generalizability across national systems. This would enable the lessons and ideas to be made more visible for policymakers and practitioners concerned with gender equality and balance in VET.

Even within countries, there is surprisingly little publicly available evidence of what initiatives have been effective. Most studies are based on small-scale, localized initiatives. Whilst these are helpful in providing ideas for strategies, it is not possible to judge the extent to which they have a lasting influence as many are funded on a short-term basis. A further key problem is that there is hardly any evidence about strategies aimed specifically at boys and young men. Despite these problems, however, it is possible to highlight a number of strategies that appear to have some common currency across countries.

The evidence presented here indicates that overcoming gender inequalities and helping young people to change their attitudes to the choices they make in relation to both education and careers requires a multi-faceted, innovative and sophisticated approach, beginning as early as possible and extending well into adult life. It requires the commitment and involvement of everyone in society, and continuous monitoring. Above all, young people's decisions need to be treated with respect for they often reflect an understanding of the realities of the world rather than ignorance. An EU Fifth Framework project (involving research in Germany, Finland, Greece, Portugal and the UK), completed in 2004, offers important insights into these complexities (see Heidegger et al.,

2004). The research explored the part played by gender in the vocational education and training experiences of young adults (aged 16-19 years) entering specific occupations in childcare, electrical engineering, food preparation and service, and of older adults (e.g., women returners) changing occupations. It had a particular focus on studying the extent to which the development of key competences (and associated qualifications) in Europe plays a role in perpetuating gender imbalances; the concern here is that so-called interpersonal competences are also often held to be "female skills." It found that both VET institutes and workplaces need to do a great deal to improve their performance in relation to gender equality and balance (see also Evans, 2006).

As far as apprenticeship is concerned, the challenge of gender segregation has and always will be considerable due to the continued segregation in the labor market. As the consequences of the current economic crisis continue to have an impact, this challenge will be even greater as government concentrates its efforts into trying to ensure apprenticeship places are available, regardless of whether they are equally accessible to men and women.

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Table 8.1: Starts in the 10 most populated apprenticeship sectors by gender (England 2008-09–2010-11)

			2008-09			2010-11
Sector Framework	**Female**	**% female (rounded)**	**Total starts**	**Female**	**% female (rounded)**	**Total starts Position in 2010-11 top 10 in brackets**
Customer Service	15,520	69	22,500	33,380	62	53,970 (1)
Business Administration	16,810	93	18,100	29,710	76	38,900 (4)
Children's care	16,730	97	17,200	25,730	94	27,410 (7)
Construction	270	2	16,800	230	1	15,590 (10)
Hospitality	9,080	54	16,800	15,300	51	29,810 (5)
Hairdressing	14,620	90	16,200	15,030	91	16,450 (9)
Engineering	430	3	15,300	940	5	18,330 (8)
Health and Social Care	10,600	86	12,300	44,320	83	53,720 (2)
Retail	7,240	66	10,900	28,030	68	41,410 (3)
Management	6,110	62	9,900	17,740	60	29,790 (6)
Total	**97,410**	**61**	**158,700**	**210,410**	**65**	**325,380**

Source: Fuller and Davey 2010 for 2008/09 starts and from SFR Feb 2012 for 2010/11 starts

Table 8.2: Percentage of female apprentices in 5 sectors

Sector framework	2002-03 female %	2010-11 female %
Construction	1	1
Early years (childcare)	97	94
Engineering	4	5
Information Technology	15	12
Plumbing	1	2

Table 8.3: Modern Apprenticeship Scotland: 16-19, top 11 frameworks and gender—in training, 2008-09

Sector framework	Age 16-19 (number)	Female share (%)
Construction	6432	1
Engineering	3059	2
Electrotechnical	2585	1
Plumbing	1507	1
Business Administration	902	91
Early years care	784	99
Hospitality	387	46
Customer Service	371	67
Hairdressing	333	95
Health and Social Care	71	87
Management	43	35

Source: Fuller and Davey 2010

Table 8.4: Modern Apprenticeship Scotland: aged 20+, top 11 frameworks and gender—in training, 2008-09

Sector framework	Age 20+ (number)	Female share (%)
Construction	1212	3
Electrotechnical	651	1
Engineering	568	3
Management	373	47
Plumbing	268	2
Health and Social Care	251	85
Hospitality	239	46
Early years care	168	98
Business Administration	87	87
Customer Service	54	67
Hairdressing	38	95

Source: Fuller and Davey 2010

Table 8.5: Sector subject area by MA/FMA and gender in Wales (2007-08)

Sector subject area	MA	Female Share		FMA	Female Share	
		N	%		N	%
Retailing and customer service	1,230	875	71	4,910	3,240	66
Leisure, sport and travel	375	145	39	510	185	36
Hospitality	670	360	54	2,085	1,310	63
Hair and beauty	500	465	93	1,495	1,365	91
Health care and public services	4,835	4,000	83	5,700	4.950	87
Media and design	30	25	83	*	*	
Agriculture	155	30	19	305	55	18
Construction	2,205	25	1	3,215	75	2
Engineering	2,410	70	3	1,480	135	9
Manufacturing	95	35	37	2,145	485	22
Transportation	35	*		180	5	3
Management and professional	2,290	1,395	61	850	465	55
Business administration	3,185	2,475	78	3,885	2,695	69
Sector unknown/not confirmed	270	5	2	680	100	15
Total	18,275	9,885	54	27,410	15,070	55

* The data is “disclosive or not sufficiently robust for publication” (see Fuller & Davey, 2010).
Source: Fuller and Davey 2010

Figure 8.1: Key stakeholder priorities

Government	Increase participation targets
Schools	Keep majority of young people in full-time education
Training Providers	Meet quotas/fill places
Connexions (careers service)	Reduce NEET figures
Job Centre Plus (employment agency)	Place people in jobs
Employers	To recruit as needed
Parents	"do what's right for my child"