

# Challenges in combining work and care: Evidence from investigating women's work in Leeds

Local Economy

0(0) 1–15

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permissions:

[sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav](http://sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav)

DOI: 10.1177/0269094212455292

[lec.sagepub.com](http://lec.sagepub.com)**Sue Yeandle**

University of Leeds, UK

**Viktorija Joynes**

University of Leeds, UK

## Abstract

Using official data and other evidence about the people and economy of the city of Leeds, England, and focusing on one decade, the 2000s, this article considers employment trends and policy developments relevant to parents' and carers' capacity to combine work and care. Highlighting the dynamic nature of labour supply and demand in the Leeds local labour market, the article examines the impact of developments in the local infrastructure of support for caring and parenting and the availability and level of social security and welfare. The discussion explores the extent to which a decade of unprecedented policy attention to childcare and caring affected the challenges facing parents and carers who wish to combine work and care, and asks whether the progress achieved is likely to be sustainable in a following decade of economic austerity.

## Keywords

carers, employment, labour market, parents, welfare

## Introduction

This article draws on an ongoing study of women's employment in Leeds, England, part of a wider internationally comparative investigation of women's labour force participation and the welfare state in 11 European cities ([www.flows-eu.eu](http://www.flows-eu.eu)). That study's principal problematic centres on how far local delivery of welfare and social policy is important for gender

equality and women's fair access to the labour market. In this article we explore evidence on how women's experiences of paid work in Leeds have been shaped by the shifting context and conditions affecting their labour force participation: changes in

---

### Corresponding author:

Sue Yeandle, CIRCLE, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT, UK.

Email: [s.m.yeandle@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:s.m.yeandle@leeds.ac.uk)

the structure of local employment opportunities and demand for labour; emerging patterns of parental and carer employment; and a redesigned local/national infrastructure and its impact on people with care responsibilities and/or who combine work and care.

Recent decades have seen unprecedented efforts to understand and respond to the way work and family life fit together, yet pressures on parents (especially mothers) and carers (many of them older female workers) remain challenging and disadvantageous to their well-being in terms of income and employment progression (Scott et al., 2008; Women and Work Commission, 2006; Yeandle et al., 2007a). Efforts to reconcile work and family life have included investment in childcare infrastructure, policies to support people of working age who care for older, sick or disabled relatives, and changes in employment rights and practices. These mitigated the employment challenges faced by parents and carers in the decade before the global financial crisis of 2007–2008, but were implemented amid generally positive employment indicators: job growth, increased opportunities for part-time work, rising levels of qualification, especially among younger workers and ethnic minority women; and solid demand for the skills and attributes many female workers possess. Conditions for addressing gender inequalities in the labour market, at least at national level, seemed favourable (Kingsmill, 2001).

In the 2000s national policies on neighbourhood renewal and regeneration in England emphasised the importance of addressing structural weaknesses in regional and local economies and of creating quality jobs (Cabinet Office, 2005; ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister), 2003). Studies of women's labour force participation meanwhile stressed the need for local level analysis if women's lifetime experiences of work, family and economic well-being were to be understood and seemingly

endemic problems addressed (Yeandle et al., 2009). A decade later, however, the fallout from the global economic crisis has become starkly evident and analysis of its uneven impact has begun (Browne, 2012; Women's Budget Group, 2012).

This article considers how some of the key aspects of the context for women's employment in one northern city, viewed as a previously thriving local economy, have changed. The analysis underscores the normative nature of combining work and care for women and highlights some of the challenges parents and carers face in Leeds as austerity measures, employment change and shifting arrangements regarding labour market activation test the sustainability of policies favourable to work-care reconciliation. The article is organised in three main sections, outlining: (1) the shifting structure of the Leeds labour market, highlighting the buoyancy of demand for labour and of female labour force participation (LFP) in the city before 2008; (2) patterns of maternal and carer employment; and (3) policy change affecting mothers' and carers' engagement with paid work and the formal labour market. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of the evidence presented for mothers and carers, as Leeds enters a new period of economic and policy uncertainty.

### **Changes in the structure of local employment opportunities**

Leeds had a growing and buoyant economy in the 1990s and for much of the 2000s; by 2008 it contained over 27,500 VAT registered business units and was home to 36 major businesses (PLCs) (Leeds Economy Handbook, 2011). It had become, after London, the UK's second largest city for finance and business services, the sector which drove the local economy throughout the period considered here. GDP per Leeds inhabitant almost doubled from 1995 to

2007 and was consistently above that for both the wider region (Yorkshire and the Humber) and the UK (Eurostat, 2011).

In the five years running up to the 2007–2008 financial crisis, the city recorded positive employment change in three sectors: distribution, hotels and restaurants (+3%); construction (+8%); and financial and business services (+22%). Employment in all other major sectors fell in 2003–2008, but in those years 22,000 additional finance sector jobs were enough to keep the overall employment picture in Leeds positive (+3%). By 2008, the finance sector provided more jobs than any other (122,210; up from 99,900 in 2003), displacing ‘public administration, education and health’ (107,100 jobs in 2003; 104,750 jobs in 2008) as the major sector for employment (Leeds Economy Handbook, 2011). As the financial crisis took effect in 2008–2010, however, jobs in Leeds fell by 7% (a net loss of 29,300 jobs). The decline was much sharper than seen in West Yorkshire, the City Region and Yorkshire and the Humber (all down between 3.5% and 3.8%) or in Great Britain (down 3.4%); jobs lost in Leeds in this period accounted for 37% of the 79,900 net jobs lost in the whole of the Yorkshire and the Humber region (Leeds Economy Handbook, 2011).

### *Job change for women in Leeds*

The general changes in the 1990s and 2000s just described played out somewhat differently for women in those years (Table 1). In 1991, the two largest sources of employment for women in Leeds were the ‘health and social work’ and ‘wholesale and retail’ sectors, which together provided well over one-third of female employment. By 2008, however, health and social work had been displaced as the largest sector by ‘real estate, renting and business activities’ and the share of female employment in education had also increased, to almost 14%.

Meanwhile the manufacturing sector, employing nearly 11% of women in the city in 1991, had fallen well below most other sectors and by 2008 provided barely 4% of all female employment. These changes reflected broader trends, including declining industrial employment (Froud et al., 2011) and new national priorities in public spending (Chote et al., 2010). The city’s buoyant financial sector, mentioned earlier, benefited women in Leeds rather less than men. Between 1998 and 2008, male jobs in the ‘financial intermediation’ and ‘real estate, renting and business’ sectors increased by 55%, compared with a still notable, but much more modest, 28% for female jobs (ONS (Office for National Statistics), 2011).

These developments left women strongly concentrated in public sector employment, highly exposed to changes in the financial and business sectors of the local economy, and already largely outside manufacturing when the employment consequences of the 2007–2008 financial crisis began to take effect. In 2008, 43% of the employed women in Leeds were working in ‘public administration, education and health’ (compared with 16% of men), dwarfing their concentration in other sectors and leaving them especially vulnerable to the impact of consequent change in labour demand (ONS, 2010a). In the public sector in Leeds this change would include the closure of the headquarters of the Regional Development Agency (450 jobs), job losses in schools, hospitals and other public services and a planned reduction of 2500 full-time equivalent local authority posts in 2011–2015 (LCC (Leeds City Council), 2012).

The first job losses in Leeds relating to the financial crisis occurred in the ‘banking, finance and insurance’ sector itself, which lost 3800 jobs between 2007 and 2008 alone. Providing a substantial proportion of both women’s and men’s employment (21% for women and 15% for men in

**Table 1.** Female employment by broad industrial sector: Leeds (%).

Industrial sector	1991	1997	1998	2005	2006	2008
Health and social work	18.3	18.5	15.5	18.5	17.7	16.9
Wholesale and retail <sup>a</sup>	18.2	16.8	19.2	15.6	14.5	14.7
Real estate, renting and business activities	12.7	17.7	18.7	18.9	18.2	18.6
Manufacturing	10.6	8.1	7.2	4.4	4.4	4.3
Education	10.5	10.3	10.7	14.2	14.9	13.9
Financial intermediation	7.5	7.3	7.0	7.1	9.1	9.1
Hotels and restaurants	7.1	6.8	6.9	5.6	5.9	7.5
Public administration and defence <sup>b</sup>	4.8	4.6	4.9	5.3	4.9	5.0
Other community, social & personal service activities	4.5	4.8	5.2	5.9	5.2	5.0
Transport, storage and communications	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.7	2.8	3.0
Other not included above	2.6	2.3	1.9	1.7	2.3	2.1

Notes:

<sup>a</sup>Includes repair of motor vehicles, motorcycles and personal and household goods.

<sup>b</sup>Includes compulsory social security.

The ABI is based on a sample survey, and subject to sampling errors. Classifications changed in 1998 giving rise to possible discontinuities. Estimates up to and including 2005 are on a slightly different basis to later figures. Vertical lines indicate these changes, showing the first and last dates for the three periods in which direct comparison is possible.

Source: ONS (2011a) *Annual Business Inquiry Employee Analysis*.

2007), this sector saw the number of women employed within it fall from 38,200 in 2007 to 32,700 in 2011 (whereas male employment in the sector increased from 31,400 to 41,100 in the same period). Women also had considerable exposure in 'distribution, hotels and restaurants' (where 12,900 fewer women held jobs in 2011 than in 2006). By contrast, men's jobs in the region in the 2000s were distributed much more evenly across a range of industrial sectors (ONS, 2010a; Wilson and Homenidou, 2011).

All these changes, whether driven by shifts in the industrial distribution of demand for labour or emerging economic pressures, took place against a background of important changes in labour supply, to which we now turn.

### *Women's economic activity in Leeds*

Between 1981 and 2001 Leeds saw significant convergence in male and female labour force participation (LFP)<sup>1</sup> rates, evidenced in census data for 1981, 1991 and 2001. Between 1981 and 2001, women's LFP

rates rose from a little above 60% to just over 67%, while men's fell from almost 90% to just over 79%. The Annual Population Survey (APS) subsequently showed that women's and men's LFP rates in the city grew closer still in the mid-2000s (Table 2), with LFP reaching almost 73% in 2007 for women and almost 83% for men. This reflected a more general change in participation patterns, also recorded elsewhere (Yeandle et al., 2009). By 2011, however, female LFP in Leeds had fallen back to less than 70%, and the gender gap in LFP was widening.

As already indicated, economic conditions in Leeds in the period before 2007–2008 were relatively buoyant and this meant employment rates for both sexes were also high (Table 2).<sup>2</sup> Women's (and men's) employment rates for all people of working age in Leeds peaked in the mid-2000s, recording almost certainly the highest rate of female employment ever seen in the city outside wartime. Detailed data (not shown) indicate that employment rates reached 81% for women (84% for men)

**Table 2.** Selected labour force indicators, people aged 16–64, by gender: Leeds 2005–2011.

Year	People in employment				Labour force participants				All of working age	
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	Men
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	
2011	178,100	65.1	197,300	71.6	191,100	69.8	223,000	80.9	273,700	275,600
2009	179,200	66.9	195,000	72.3	192,300	71.7	218,900	81.2	268,100	269,600
2007	178,300	68.5	203,700	77.5	189,900	72.6	215,900	82.1	260,400	262,900
2005	168,500	66.4	192,500	77.4	180,400	71.1	206,200	82.9	253,600	248,700

Note: 2011 data are for Oct 2010 – Sep 2011. Data for other years are for calendar years.

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey 2004–2011 (NOMIS).

aged 35–49, the prime child-rearing years, although among people over 50, the age group most affected by caring for sick, disabled or older people, female employment rates fell more sharply than male (see ONS, 2010a; Yeandle et al., 2007a).

### Women outside the labour market

As the financial crisis took effect after 2007, unemployment rates in Leeds rose rapidly, reaching a peak of 9% for women in 2010 and 11.5% for men in 2011. Growing numbers of women and men were clearly struggling to retain their jobs or to (re)enter paid work (Table 3). Women's greater investment of their time in unpaid caring work (rather than work in the formal economy) has long been accepted as one explanation of both their higher rates of economic inactivity<sup>3</sup> (compared with those for men) and their greater tendency to work part time in the 'prime' years of working life (Grant et al., 2005; Schuller, 2012). However, the 2000s saw significant convergence in men's and women's economic inactivity rates, the gap gradually narrowing as women's rates fell between 2004 and 2006; as explained later, in this period new policies were targeted towards parents and carers. The later rise in female economic inactivity, which reached over 30% in 2011, coincided with new pressures in both

available jobs and available support for mothers and carers.

### Emerging patterns of maternal and carer employment

By the 1990s and 2000s it was usual in Leeds for women with dependent children or other caring responsibilities to be in paid work, a situation seen across the country, with national data indicating this was a rising trend (Dex et al., 2008; Yeandle et al., 2007a, 2007b).

#### Maternal employment: Combining paid work with childcare

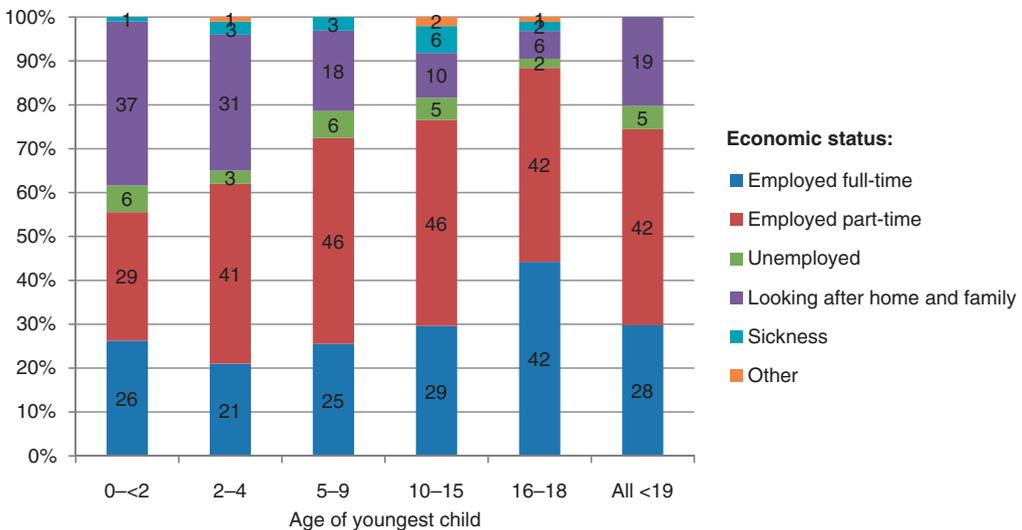
As the gap between the employment rates of mothers and women without dependent children narrowed (and almost closed) between 1996 and 2011, almost all the increase in maternal employment in England was driven by full-time working (ONS, 2011b). Among women with dependent children, employment rates reflected the age of the youngest child in the household, and by the late 2000s mothers 'staying-at-home' were comparatively rare (Figure 1). The detailed data shown in Figure 1 are not available at local authority level, but in Leeds are likely to be broadly comparable with this picture, in which having paid work is the normative situation for mothers.

**Table 3.** Unemployment and economic inactivity, people aged 16–64, by gender: Leeds, 2005–2011.

Year	Unemployed				Economically inactive				All of working age	
	Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	Men
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	
2011	13,000	6.8	25,700	11.5	82,600	30.2	52,600	19.1	273,700	275,600
2009	13,100	6.8	23,900	10.9	75,700	28.3	50,700	18.8	268,100	269,600
2007	10,700	5.7	12,200	5.7	71,400	27.4	47,000	17.9	260,400	262,900
2005	11,900	6.6	13,700	6.7	73,300	28.9	42,500	17.1	253,600	248,700

Note: 2011 data are for Oct 2010 – Sep 2011. Data for other years are for calendar years.

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey 2004–2011 (NOMIS).

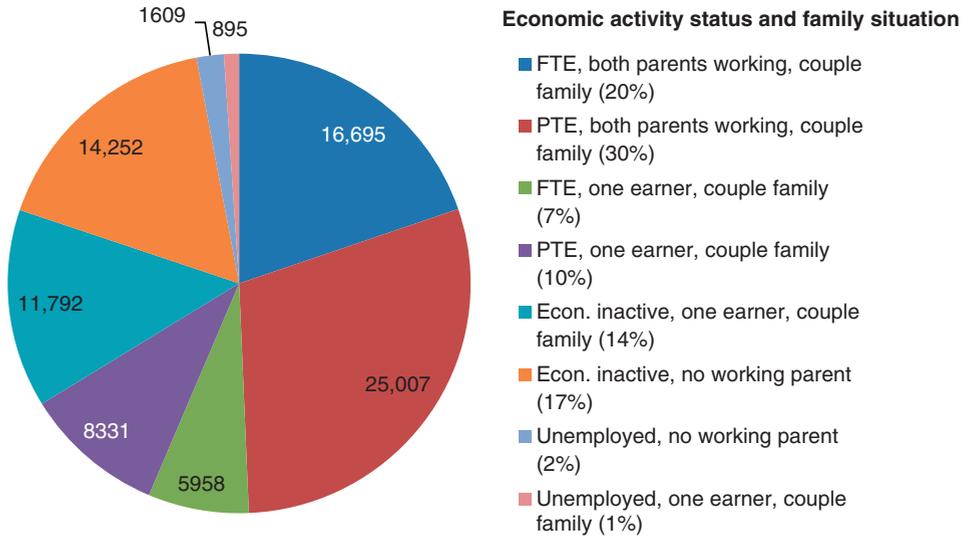
**Figure 1.** Women's economic activity status by age of youngest child: England, 2009–2010.

Source: ONS (2010b).

After 2007, however, data for Leeds show an increase in the percentage of working age women who were economically inactive due to 'looking after home and family' (from 7% in 2008 to almost 10% in 2010), as demand for labour began to fall following the financial crisis (ONS, 2010a).

Figures on female economic activity by both household composition and maternal status (available at local authority level only

through the Census of Population) showed that in 2001<sup>4</sup> half of all mothers in Leeds then lived in a couple household where both parents were working, while a further 17% lived in a couple household where the mother was the only earner (Figure 2); from this it can be inferred that in the 2000s mothers' earned income was of considerable importance to them and their families and for their local economies. Already in 2001 less than one-third of



**Figure 2.** Mothers of dependent children by economic activity status and family situation: Leeds.

Source: 2001 Census, Crown copyright.

Note: FTE: full-time employment; PTE: part-time employment.

Leeds mothers (31%) were 'economically inactive' and only 3% were unemployed. Families in Leeds in 2001 included almost 25,000 lone parent households; among these over half were headed by a lone parent in paid work (23% working full-time and 28% part time), 43% by an economically inactive lone parent and 6% by one who was unemployed.

Against this background, later data (for mothers with and without dependent children and by household type) are shown in Table 4. These show a very stable picture at national level between 2006 and 2011, but a sharp rise in unemployment among lone parent mothers. Unemployment rates rose sharply both for lone parent mothers living with dependent children (from 7% to 11%) and for those living with older, non-dependent children (from 5% to 7%). At the same time, the share of lone parents 'looking after home and family' fell (especially for those living with dependent children), almost certainly a response, as discussed in the next section, to altered policy on labour market activation for this group.

### *Employment of carers*

While mothers of dependent children are typically aged 25–39, carers of older, sick and disabled people are usually older; this type of care peaks at age 45–64 and is particularly high for women. Where 20 or more weekly hours of care for a sick, disabled or older person are involved, such care responsibilities have a marked negative impact on full-time employment for women (Yeandle et al., 2007b); there is also an association between caring and occupational level. In Leeds, employees with care responsibilities of 20+ hours per week (especially women) were disproportionately concentrated in lower level occupations in 2001 (Buckner and Yeandle, 2006) and caring was more frequently seen among people in routine, semi-routine, lower supervisory and technical jobs, the very jobs where demand in recent decades has fallen and pay is low compared to many other jobs in the economy (Wilson and Homenidou, 2011).

Despite this, most men and women with regular caring responsibility for a sick, frail

**Table 4.** Mothers' economic activity, by household composition: England (%).

	Households with dependent children				Households with non-dependent children			
	Lone parents		Couples		Lone parents		Couples	
	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011	2006	2011
In employment	54	55	70	70	68	68	75	73
Looking after home/family	27	23	20	20	4	3	5	5
Unemployed	7	11	3	4	5	7	3	4
Permanently sick/disabled	5	5	3	2	11	11	5	5
Student	3	4	2	2	4	4	4	4
Retired	0	0	0	0	4	4	3	5
Other	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	3
All above	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Dependent children are under 16 or 16–18 and in full-time education; non-dependent children are 19+ or 16–18 and not in full-time education; excludes any co-resident 16–19 year olds with a spouse, partner or child.

Source: ONS (2011c).

or disabled person combine the care they give with paid work (Yeandle and Buckner, 2007). Among women in Leeds, 74% of people caring 1–19 hours weekly, 53% of those caring 20–49 hours weekly, and 35% of those caring 50+ hours weekly had paid jobs (according to 2001 census data) (Yeandle et al., 2007a); national survey data suggest this picture has subsequently been reinforced (NHSIC, 2010). Even among those caring for 50 or more hours weekly, less than half (45%) gave 'looking after home and family' as their activity status, a figure which fell to 28% for women caring 20–49 hours weekly, and to 11% for those caring 1–19 hours.

In sum, employment was high and rising among parents for most of the 2000s, a decade in which new evidence showed most carers of working age were in employment too (Yeandle et al., 2007b). Policy makers nevertheless accepted that balancing parental, caring and employment roles remained challenging. In the next section, aspects of the support available in Leeds to those with such multiple demands upon their time are outlined, focusing on changes

in childcare and carer infrastructure and the adequacy and sustainability of the care support arrangements in place.

## Redesigned arrangements for combining work and care

### Welfare state support

The UK social security system provides financial support for eligible people of working age who are outside the labour market because they are unable to find paid work, are low paid and living with dependent children, or cannot participate fully in the formal economy because of caring roles, sickness or disability. These arrangements are governed by national rules and eligibility criteria, but play out in different ways for women and men in different localities according to local population characteristics, local labour market opportunities and the geography of socio-economic deprivation. Patterns of claiming available benefits also respond to changes in policy, which in the 2000s included changes in activation policy, new rules

affecting lone parents and people claiming disability benefits and other policies affecting the rights and obligations of labour force participants (DWP, 2008).

In the 2000s the comparatively buoyant economic situation in Leeds already described and changes to benefit rules and eligibility reduced the numbers of people claiming some state benefits (ONS, 2012). In the 1990s, the number of women in Leeds claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) peaked (in July 1993) at 8200 (3.6% of the female labour force), falling thereafter to a low of 1.1% (2704 women) in July 2004 and remaining below 1.5% until autumn 2008. From 2009, the number of Leeds women claiming JSA rose again, reaching 2.7% in autumn 2011, the level at which it still stood in April 2012 when there were 7538 women claiming this benefit.<sup>5</sup>

The number of lone parents (predominantly women) claiming benefits also fell fairly steadily over the same period, in part reflecting central government's New Deal for Lone Parents programme (introduced nationally in 1998 as a voluntary programme of support in returning to work) and associated measures (Barnes et al., 2008). From 2006, changes to benefit rules meant lone parents claiming Income Support were required to seek work (and, if unemployed, were transferred to JSA) when their youngest child reached age 12. This regulation changed again in 2011 when this rule became applicable once the youngest child was seven, and was subsequently fixed at age five in 2012. By 2011 only 8060 lone parents in Leeds were claiming benefits, 36% fewer than in 1998 (12,610), almost certainly a decrease affected by the policy changes just described.

By contrast the numbers of people in Leeds claiming Carers' Allowance (a well-established benefit available to those earning less than £100pw and caring for 35+ hours weekly for a person receiving disability benefits) increased by 49% between 1999 and 2011, from 3340 to 4990 (Fry et al., 2011;

ONS, 2012). Here too most claimants (73% nationally) are female. The increase here probably reflected both greater demand for care and carers' heightened awareness of the benefit (arising from voluntary sector activities, the Government's first National Carers' Strategy in 1999 and linked policy developments).

The introduction of Working Families Tax Credit in 1999 and of Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit in 2003 brought other substantial changes in welfare support. These measures proved effective in supporting some families in part-time or low-paid work to escape income poverty (Barnes et al., 2008). By the end of the 2000s, tax credits of some type were being claimed by 18% of all 'benefit units' in the Yorkshire and the Humber region and (across the UK) by 54% of couples with children and 81% of lone parents (DWP, 2011), although later changes (see Discussion section) subsequently reduced these numbers.

### *Employment law and 'care-friendly' employment options*

The law and employment policy in relation to parents and carers also changed between 1997 and 2010. For parents the main developments stemmed from the National Childcare Strategy (NCS) 1998 (see below) and enhanced protection and flexibility at work. They included improvements affecting maternity and paternity leave, adoption leave, the right to request flexible working hours, and unpaid parental leave for parents of children under five (18 for a disabled child). For those caring for a sick or disabled adult, changes included the right to request flexible working (for established employees); a duty on local authorities to consider (when assessing their needs for support) carers' wishes to participate in paid work; and, from 2010, protection from being discriminated against in the workplace because of

the care they provide to a disabled person (*Equality Act 2010*). The Labour administrations 1997–2010 were distinctive, compared with earlier governments, in placing considerable emphasis on gender equality, ‘family-friendly’ employment and ‘work-life balance’ (Pascall, 2006). Some of the practical impact of these changes in Leeds is described below.

### *Support for parents to work*

Public policy on childcare in Leeds is framed by changes introduced through the NCS 1998 and the 2004 policy document *Every Child Matters* (HM Government, 2004). The NCS introduced a national focus on providing access to affordable childcare, developing early years services, supporting child development and removing barriers to parental employment for the first time. In addition, national arrangements for financial support to lower/middle-income parents include tax credits (mentioned earlier) and tax-exempt childcare vouchers provided by employers in lieu of salary (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2004). National policy aims in the 1990s/2000s were to remove barriers to parental (especially maternal) employment; tackle child poverty (by reducing the number of children raised in workless households); improve access to affordable childcare; develop early years services; and increase support for child development.

Within this context, Leeds City Council’s (LCC) approach to childcare policy, despite changes in its political leadership, remained broadly consistent throughout the 2000s; its aim was to ensure the ‘integration of health, family support, education and child care for families, with targeted support for those in particular need’ (LCC, 2011a: 3). Thus, in line with statutory obligations, LCC funds a Family Information Service providing advice and information on local childcare options and how to access relevant financial support; in addition it employs childcare advisors who help any parents who need

extra support to find childcare as they seek to enter/re-enter the labour market.

Under the *Childcare Act 2006* local authorities have a duty to ensure sufficient childcare places exist, but are themselves ‘providers of last resort’ (LCC, 2011b: 3). In 2011 the city had approximately 1400 childcare providers offering 21,200 places, including places provided by childminders, private and public nurseries, sessional nursery places and ‘out of school’ clubs and services. Across the sector, Leeds had some ‘spare’ nursery places before 2009, but a ‘28% increase in the birth rate between 2001 and 2009’ led to sharp growth in demand (LCC, 2011c: 6). By 2011, 40% of childcare providers reported being unable to meet demand for children under two (LCC, 2011b: 12) and in parts of the city insufficient places were available for children under 12 (LCC, 2011b). The Council’s ‘sufficiency assessment’ in 2011 found that only 15 of 42 areas had enough childcare places for both 3–4 year olds and 4–11 year olds. Most areas where provision was insufficient for both age groups were inner city localities characterised by high levels of deprivation and worklessness (LCC, 2011b: 7). As austerity measures took effect after 2010, spending on early years services in Leeds rose within the overall budget (in 2012), but fell in real terms as central government funding to the City Council reduced in line with the decisions first announced in the (national) Comprehensive Spending Review of 2010.

The difficulty mothers of young children face in accessing employment is well established; recent research (based on the Family Resources Survey) found the typical annual cost of a nursery place was greater than average household expenditure on either food or housing (Viitanen, 2005). The affordability of childcare remains a problem; nationally, the average cost of a nursery place for a child under two rose by almost 6% in 2011–2012 and for a

child over two by almost 4% (Day Care Trust, 2012). LCC's childcare sufficiency report notes affordability as a specific local concern. Although general living costs in Leeds are below those for London, childcare costs are above the national average and less affordable because salary levels in Leeds are lower than those in the capital (LCC, 2011a). The report estimated childcare costs in Leeds to be 53% of average salary, with high levels of 'childcare debt' (families whose childcare costs have pushed them into debt), particularly in inner city and more deprived areas (LCC, 2011a). This picture is confirmed in other surveys, which show childcare costs rising faster than either inflation or wages, including in Yorkshire and the Humber (Daycare Trust, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2012). Facing an 11% decrease in its revenue budget in 2011–2013, with further reductions to come, in 2012 LCC had limited resources available to support childcare providers in the coming years (LCC, 2012: para.6), although options for developing loan products and improving uptake of Child Tax Credit and related support were being explored (LCC, 2011b: 8).

### *Support for carers to work*

LCC first put its local carers' strategy in place in 1995, implementing this in the year the *Carers (Recognition and Services) Act* was passed and providing financial support (through LCC and Leeds Health Authority) to establish a voluntary sector-led carers' centre (Buckner et al., 2009; Yeandle et al., 2007a). Since 1999, English local authorities have received annual 'carers' grant' allocations from the Department of Health, using these to engage carers in service developments and to support carers' well-being (Fry et al., 2009). Additional statutory responsibilities to carers were subsequently established through the *Carers (Equal Opportunities)*

*Act 2004*, which requires local authorities, when assessing carers' needs, to consider their desire to participate in education, training or employment. In 2001, Leeds had over 35,000 carers combining a paid job with caring responsibilities (2001 census). Over a third (34%) of female carers of working age held full-time jobs and a further 31% had part-time employment; for those caring for 20 or more hours weekly, the figures were 19% in full-time and 23% in part-time work (Yeandle et al., 2007a). Despite growth in local authority support for carers in the 2000s (from a very low base), in 2010–2011 very few were assessed (2565), 'known to the council' (3952) or allocated a 'one-off payment' (625), and just 125 of those aged 18–64 received a carer's Direct Payment (LCC, 2011d). Local authority services to the people carers support (mainly frail older people, sick or disabled spouses and disabled children) were developed (and allocated additional funding) in the 2000s, enabling LCC to provide more intensive home care packages and to resource its residential and community-based services (CSCI (Commission for Social Care Inspection), 2009). Support at home for older people with moderate needs became more difficult to obtain however, and by 2010–2011 LCC funded home care for just 2% of residents over 65 and community services for just under 6% (NHSIC, 2011). Interview data collected in 2012 confirmed that local support to help carers of working age combine work and care also remained very limited (research communication).

### **Discussion**

This article had brought together evidence about some of the key pressures, opportunities and risks for parents and carers in Leeds and their implications for gender equality in work and care under changing labour market conditions. Prior to the

financial and economic difficulties which have affected employment in the city since 2007–2008, women's participation in paid work in Leeds was rising, not only because demand for labour was comparatively buoyant in the sectors seeking to recruit them as employees, but also as a result of steps taken to lower some of the barriers to employment which particularly affect women with child-care or other caring responsibilities. While investment in support for families with children was considerably greater than that for those caring for older and disabled people, there was increased awareness among policy makers and employers of the need for flexibility, services and support for employees with a varied range of care responsibilities, and modest changes in parents' and carers' entitlements and improvements in services for both groups were made. These developments created an initial, basic infrastructure of local support for combining work and care, on a scale which had not previously existed in Leeds (or elsewhere in the UK).

As national austerity measures began to bite in the late 2000s, local policy makers in the city faced great difficulty in developing (or sustaining) this support infrastructure, on which many parents and carers who wish to work necessarily rely. Women's rising employment rates in the years before 2007–2008 suggest that developments in relevant support affected families across the social spectrum and shifted women's behaviour in the labour market, pushing employment rates up in a buoyant labour market. The changes involved included significant expansion of childcare and (modest) carer support services in local communities, greater flexibility and adaptability in workplace relations, and changing expectations in the private sphere about women's contributions to household budgets.

Women's position in 2012, four years into a continuing period of financial constraint in public policy, looks vulnerable, especially for those who lose their jobs or

come on to the labour market when jobs are scarce. As shown in this article, female unemployment in Leeds is rising as some women continue to seek work; but so too is female economic 'inactivity'. This reflects both 'discouragement' among some women displaced from paid work and low and more tightly rationed out-of-work and income support benefits (Browne, 2012).

Changes to the tax credit system (implemented in April 2012) introduced a lower income limit for Child Tax Credit (CTC), for example reducing it for a family with one child from £41,300 to £26,000 (HMRC, 2012). The minimum number of hours per week parents must work to be eligible for Working Tax Credit (WTC) was also increased from 16 to 24 hours per week, a challenging shift in a period of raised unemployment. Although parents eligible for CTC or WTC can still reclaim up to 70% of their childcare costs (depending on income), these recent changes have both reduced the number of parents able to do so and mean some parents get much less support with their childcare costs. Nationally, the average claim for the childcare element of WTC is estimated to have fallen by over £10 per week, costing affected families over £500 per year, and some 44,000 fewer families are thought to be receiving help with childcare costs (Daycare Trust, 2012).

Families under growing financial pressure from stagnant wages (for many) and rising living costs (for all) need better, more affordable services and support, yet low income households increasingly find these beyond their reach, while funding for local public services is affected by unprecedented budgetary constraints (Browne, 2012). This leaves the development of the childcare and care services mothers and carers need stalled, and parents and carers facing increasing difficulty in finding and paying for the support they need to combine work and care.

Public sector employers, shown in much research to be more likely than businesses in the private sector to develop workplace support for parents and carers, also face tightening budgets, substantial job losses and consequential loss of expertise on how to offer family- or carer-friendly working arrangements (Yeandle et al., 2007b). The need to improve flexibility at work and to address work-care reconciliation was recognised by employer bodies and governments in the 2000s as both the sine qua non of population ageing and necessary for effective management of human (especially female) resources. This perspective drove some significant policy developments, as employers' attitudes and responses shifted; however in the new economic climate efforts will need to be redoubled, with attention to how adjustments to tax, benefits and care policy affect women's labour force participation, if women and others with care responsibilities are to contribute effectively to the health of local economies in the 2010s.

### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Dr Lisa Buckner for her assistance with extracting data from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey.

### Funding

The research on which this article is based was supported by the Collaborative Project 'FLOWS: Impact of Local Welfare Systems on Female Labour Force Participation and Social Cohesion', funded under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Community, SSH-2010-2 (grant agreement no. 266806.)

### Notes

1. The share of all working age people in, or actively looking for, paid work.

2. The proportion of working age people in paid work.
3. People of working age who are not employed in, or looking for, paid work.
4. Data from the 2011 Census had not been released when this article was prepared.
5. The number of men in Leeds claiming JSA peaked at 28,544 in April 1993 (12.6%), fell to 3.5% in 2004, remaining near this level until October 2007 (3.4% or 8896 men), after which it again began to rise, peaking at 6.8% (18,643 men) in January 2010.

### References

- Barnes M, Lyon N and Millar J (2008) *Employment Transitions and the Changes in Economic Circumstances of Families with Children: Evidence from the Families and Children Study (FACS)*. Report No. 506 London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Buckner L and Yeandle S (2006) *Who Cares Wins, Statistical Annex: Working Carers – Evidence from the 2001 Census*. London: Carers UK.
- Buckner L, Fry G and Yeandle S (2009) *Carers in the Region: A Profile of Yorkshire and the Humber*. Leeds: CIRCLE, University of Leeds and Department of Health.
- Browne J (2012) *The Impact of Austerity Measures on Households with Children*. London: Family and Parenting Institute.
- Cabinet Office (2005) *Improving the Prospects of People Living in Areas of Multiple Deprivation in England*. London: Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and ODPM/Cabinet Office.
- Chote R, Crawford R, Emerson C, et al. (2010) *Public Spending under Labour*. 2010 Election Briefing Note No. 5 (IFSBN 92). London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- CSCI (2009) *The State of Social Care in England, 2007–8*. London: Commission for Social Care Inspection.
- Day Care Trust (2007) *Childcare Costs Survey 2007*. London: Day Care Trust.
- Day Care Trust (2008) *Childcare Costs Survey 2008*. Day Care Trust, London. Available at: [http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Research/costs\\_surveys/cost\\_survey2008.pdf](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Research/costs_surveys/cost_survey2008.pdf).

- Day Care Trust (2009) *Childcare Costs Survey 2009*. Day Care Trust, London. Available at: [http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Policy/costs\\_survey\\_2009.pdf](http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Policy/costs_survey_2009.pdf).
- Day Care Trust (2012) *Childcare Costs Survey 2012*. Day Care Trust, London. Available at: <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/childcare-costs-survey-2012.html>.
- Dex S, Ward K and Joshi H (2008) Changes in women's occupations and mobility over 25 years. In: Scott J, Dex S and Joshi H (eds) *Women and Employment: Changing Lives and New Challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 54–80.
- DfEE (1998) *Meeting the Childcare Challenge: A Framework and Consultation Document*. London: Department for Education and Employment.
- DfES (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
- DWP (2008) *No-one Written Off: Reforming Welfare to Reward Responsibility*. Cm 7363. London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- DWP (2011) *Family Resources Survey 2009–10*. London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Eurostat (2011) *Gross Domestic Product at Market Prices: Euro per Inhabitant*. Available at: <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu> (accessed 8 June 2012).
- Froud J, Johal S, Law J, et al. (2011) *Rebalancing the Economy (Or Buyer's Remorse)*. CRESC Working Paper No. 87, Centre for Research on Socio-Cultural Change. Milton Keynes: Open University.
- Fry G, Price C and Yeandle S (2009) *Local Authorities' Use of Carers' Grant*. London: Department of Health.
- Fry G, Singleton B, Yeandle S, et al. (2011) *Developing a Clearer Understanding of the Carers' Allowance Claimant Group*. RR739. London: Department for Work and Pensions.
- Grant L, Yeandle S and Buckner L (2005) *Working below Potential: Women and Part-Time Work*. Working Paper Series No. 40. Manchester: Equal Opportunities Commission.
- HM Government (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. DfES/1081/2004 London: Department for Education and Skills.
- HMRC (2012) *Tax Credits: Effect of Budget Changes from 6 April 2012*. Available at: <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/taxcreditsbudget/index.htm> (accessed 8 June 2012).
- Kingsmill D (2001) *The Kingsmill Review of Women's Pay and Employment*. London: DTI.
- LCC (2011a) *Childcare Sufficiency 2011 to 2014: Childcare in Children's Centres*. Leeds: Leeds City Council.
- LCC (2011b) *Childcare Sufficiency 2011 to 2014: Executive Summary*. Leeds: Leeds City Council.
- LCC (2011c) *Childcare Sufficiency 2011 to 2014: Demographics Section*. Leeds: Leeds City Council.
- LCC (2011d) *Freedom of Information release 6638, 13 December*.
- LCC (2012) *Revenue Budget and Council Tax 2012–13*. Available at: [http://www.leeds.gov.uk/Council\\_and\\_democracy/Council\\_budgets\\_and\\_spending.aspx](http://www.leeds.gov.uk/Council_and_democracy/Council_budgets_and_spending.aspx) (accessed 8 June 2012).
- Leeds Economy Handbook (2011) Available at: <http://www.leeds.gov.uk/Business/Pages/Economic-information.aspx> (accessed on 8 June 2012).
- NHSIC (2010) *Survey of Carers in Households 2009–10*. National Health Service Information Centre. Available at: [http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/009\\_Social\\_Care/carersurvey0910/Survey\\_of\\_Carers\\_in\\_Households\\_2009\\_10\\_-\\_England\\_NS\\_Status\\_v1\\_0a.pdf](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/009_Social_Care/carersurvey0910/Survey_of_Carers_in_Households_2009_10_-_England_NS_Status_v1_0a.pdf) (accessed 17 July 2012).
- NHSIC (2011) *Personal Social Services Expenditure and Unit Cost – England and Councils with Social Services Responsibilities Tables, 2010–2011: Activity Data*. Available at: <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/pssexp-costs1011> (accessed 17 July 2012).
- ODPM (2003) *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*. London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- ONS (2010a) *Annual Population Survey 2004–2010*. Colchester: UK Data Archive (NOMIS). Available at: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=6721> (accessed 17 July 2012).
- ONS (2010b) *Labour Force Survey*. October 2009 – December 2010. ESDS. Available at: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/lfs/> (accessed 17 July 2012).

- ONS (2011a) *Annual Business Inquiry: Employee Analysis*. London: Office for National Statistics.
- ONS (2011b) *Mothers in the Labour Market – 2011*. London: Office for National Statistics.
- ONS (2011c) *Quarterly Labour Force Survey*. April–June 2006 and April–June 2011. Available at: <http://www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/qlfs.asp> (accessed 17 July 2012).
- ONS (2012) *DWP Benefits Data*. Department for Work and Pensions. Available at: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/articles/648.aspx> (accessed 8 June 2012).
- Pascall G (2006) Gender and Citizenship under New Labour. In: Espiet-Kilty R and Whitton T (eds) *Citoyen ou Consommateur: Les Mutations Rhétoriques et Politiques au Royaume-Uni*. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, pp. 103–135.
- Schuller T (2012) *Gender and Skills in a Changing Economy*. Wath-upon-Dearne: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
- Scott J, Dex S and Joshi H (eds) (2008) *Women and Employment: Changing Lives and New Challenges*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Viitanen TJ (2005) Cost of childcare and female employment in the UK. *Labour* 19(Special Issue): 149–170.
- Wilson R and Homenidou K (2011) *Working Futures 2010–2020: Main Report*. Wath-upon-Dearne: UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
- Women and Work Commission (2006) *Shaping a Fairer Future*. London: Department for Trade and Industry.
- Women's Budget Group (2012) *Women's Budget Group Pre-Budget Briefing, March 2012*. Available at: <http://wbg.org.uk/pdfs/WBG-pre-budget-FINAL.pdf> (accessed 8 June 2012).
- Yeandle S (ed.) (2009) *Policy for a Change: Local Labour Market Analysis and Gender Equality*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Yeandle S and Buckner L (2007) *Carers, Employment and Services: Time for a New Social Contract?* CES Report Series No. 6. London: Carers UK.
- Yeandle S, Bennett C, Buckner L, et al. (2007a) *Carers, Employment and Services in Leeds*. CES Report Series No. 10. London: Carers UK.
- Yeandle S, Bennett C, Buckner L, et al. (2007b) *Managing Caring and Employment*. CES Report Series No. 2. London: Carers UK.
- Yeandle S, Bennett C, Buckner L, et al. (2009) Local labour markets in public policy context. In: Yeandle S (ed.) *Policy for a Change: Local Labour Market Analysis and Gender Equality*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 13–34.