

2022 SMART WORKS FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT

INDEX

“Yes, I’m a mum.
Yes, I’m a wife.
But I love my work.”
Melissa

**Experiencing
Unemployment**
+
**Interview
Confidence**
+
**The Meaning of
Having a Job**



SMART
WORKS

Foreword

“By giving a voice to our clients, we will help to unlock the female workforce.”

Anyone who has received a wage packet in their lifetime understands the power of employment: the freedoms it provides, the opportunities it opens, and above all, the person it enables you to be.

At Smart Works, it is our privilege to see and hear directly from thousands of women each year from across the UK, all of different ages, abilities and ethnic backgrounds, all united by the same ambition – to get a job.

This unique insight has long inspired one of our central beliefs; put simply, female workers are one of the greatest assets we have in our economy. But too often, our clients come to us after months or years of trying and failing to secure employment, lacking confidence, and frustrated by an increasingly challenging recruitment landscape.

The inspiration behind the first Female Unemployment Index is the desire to address this inconsistency. We want to ensure that our clients' voices are heard and understood by those who have the power and means to create a better route to employment for women in the UK.

As we face the most challenging economic circumstances in modern history, this work could not be more timely or important.

Our service at Smart Works is specifically designed to address the barriers women face when securing employment. We provide each client with interview training and a high-quality outfit, delivered in a safe, respectful, and welcoming environment. Together, this allows a woman to believe in her own potential. The service works because we have listened to our clients, and built a programme that addresses those issues, on a practical and emotional level.

In launching the Female Unemployment Index, we are applying the same approach to create an annual benchmark against which progress, impact and change can be tracked and measured.



During our exploration of these experiences, there has been one recurring theme; that despite the barriers faced, our clients remain determined to secure employment. They are committed, passionate and skilled, bringing diversity of thought and value to the workforce.

We know that the process of securing a job is increasingly complex, but we believe that by researching and publishing the issues facing unemployed women, we will pave the way for progress in female recruitment. By giving a voice to our clients, we will help to unlock the female workforce.

Kate Stephens
CEO



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Counters

Executive Summary

Above all, employment means a sense of purpose

The first Smart Works Female Unemployment Index is a robust study examining unemployment issues affecting women across the UK. It covers three areas: experiencing unemployment, experiences of the interview process, and the meaning of having a job.

We will continue to listen to the thousands of women that come to us each year and report back on what they tell us. Our aim is that over time, we will see improvement in the scores that are reported indicating a more favourable and successful recruitment experience for women, and a much needed injection of talent for UK businesses.

Experiencing Unemployment

Despite trying to secure work, women spent long periods of time unemployed and felt that unemployment had impacted their confidence.

- 25% of clients were unemployed for over three years, with 45% unemployed for over a year.
- Clients spent an average of 23 hours a week applying for jobs.
- More than 1 in 10 had applied to over 50 jobs.
- On average, women only attended 2 job interviews despite submitting 28 applications.
- Over 50% felt that the job application process had made their confidence worse.

Experiences of the Interview Process

We have calculated an Interview Confidence Score, our new and distinctive measure, which provides a baseline to make year-on-year comparisons about the experiences of unemployed women at interview.

- **Our clients had an Overall Interview Confidence Score of 68** (with 100 being positive about succeeding in interviews, 50 being neutral and 0 being negative).
- The confidence score for having work experience instead of formal qualifications was 71, and 76 for having developed skills outside of the workplace.
- Clients felt less positively about employers' perceptions of them being a woman, with a confidence score of 61, and being a parent, with a confidence score of 55.

The Meaning of Having a Job

Our clients applied to work in a diverse range of industries, and to jobs different in nature. Above all, finding work was about more than becoming financially stable but was seen as a means of finding identity and purpose.

- More than 50% were applying for jobs in health and social care, customer services or administration.
- 62% were applying for roles that were routine or manual in nature rather than professional or intermediate.
- Their primary drivers for seeking employment were non-financial, with 23% of clients referencing a sense of identity and purpose, making this the most common response.

Methodology



August 2022

In collaboration with research agency Opinium, we led focus groups with women who had previously been supported by Smart Works (referred to throughout as 'our clients').

The clients invited to participate were from a range of backgrounds and experiences, and from regions across the UK. In conversation with the research lead, clients were encouraged to draw on their experiences with unemployment. Findings from these discussions will be referenced throughout the Smart Works Female Unemployment Index.

Confidence, womanhood and employers' perceptions were key themes that emerged from these focused discussions.

September 2022

Informed by these discussions with former clients, we worked with Opinium to develop a survey to ask clients on a larger scale about their experiences whilst unemployed. Over a three-month period, we distributed our survey to clients that were visiting Smart Works centres across the UK to form this pilot study of the Female Unemployment Index.

December 2022

At the end of the data collection period, findings were drawn from a sample of 894 unemployed women. This report has been built from the insights that our clients provided and lays crucial foundations for an annual review of female unemployment in the UK.

Our Clients

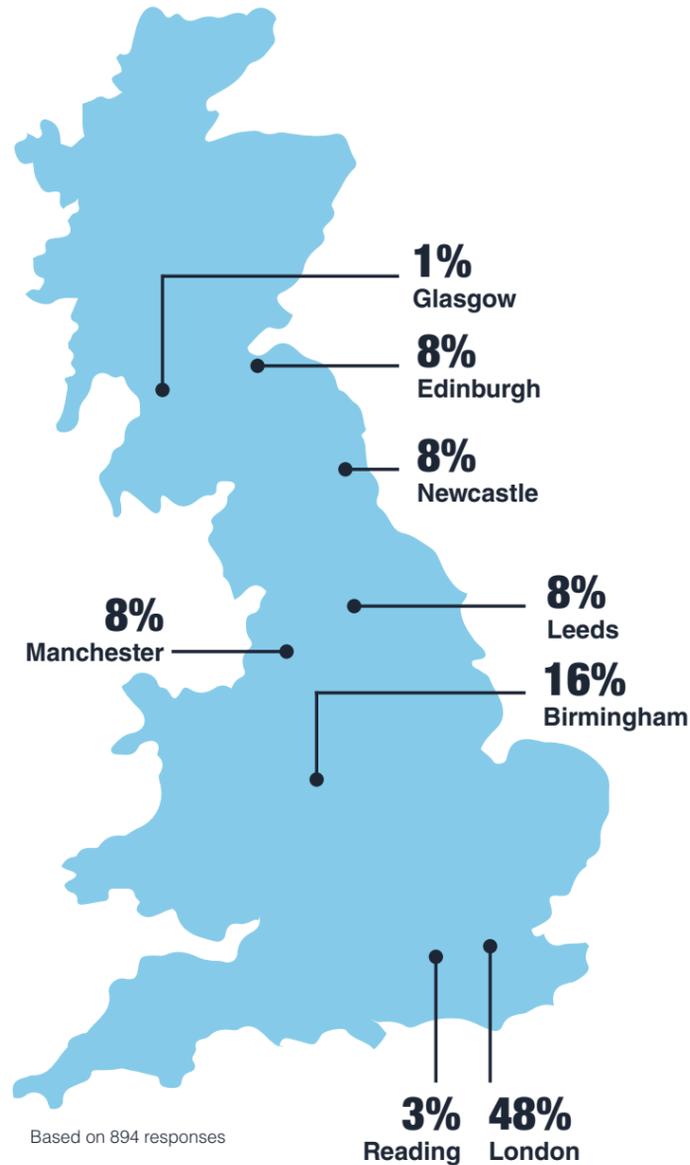
Smart Works is available to help any unemployed woman across the UK. Our clients are referred by an organisation or charity supporting them to find work. This could include Job Centres, refugee support organisations, mental health charities and the prison service. The findings of the Index are derived from a sample of 894 women who were referred to Smart Works, ahead of an upcoming job interview between September 14 and December 14 2022.

Sample size

894

Regional diversity

We have nine Smart Works centres in the UK which support women in their surrounding local areas. Our clients were seen in the following regions:



Age

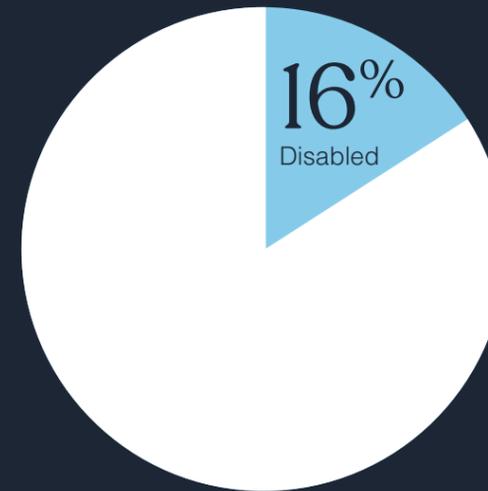
The average age of this client group was 37 with the ages of those sampled ranging from 16 to 65.

Based on 862 responses



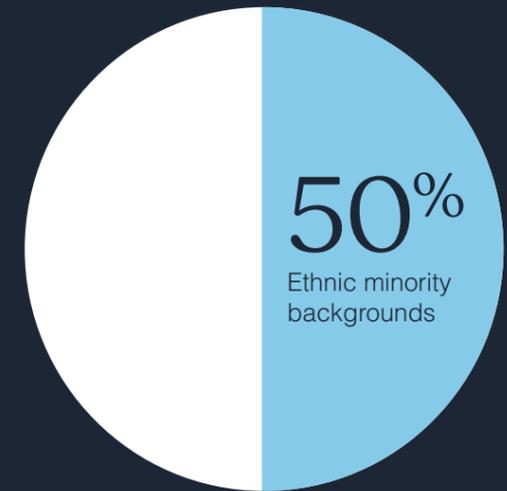
Disability

Based on 830 responses



Ethnicity

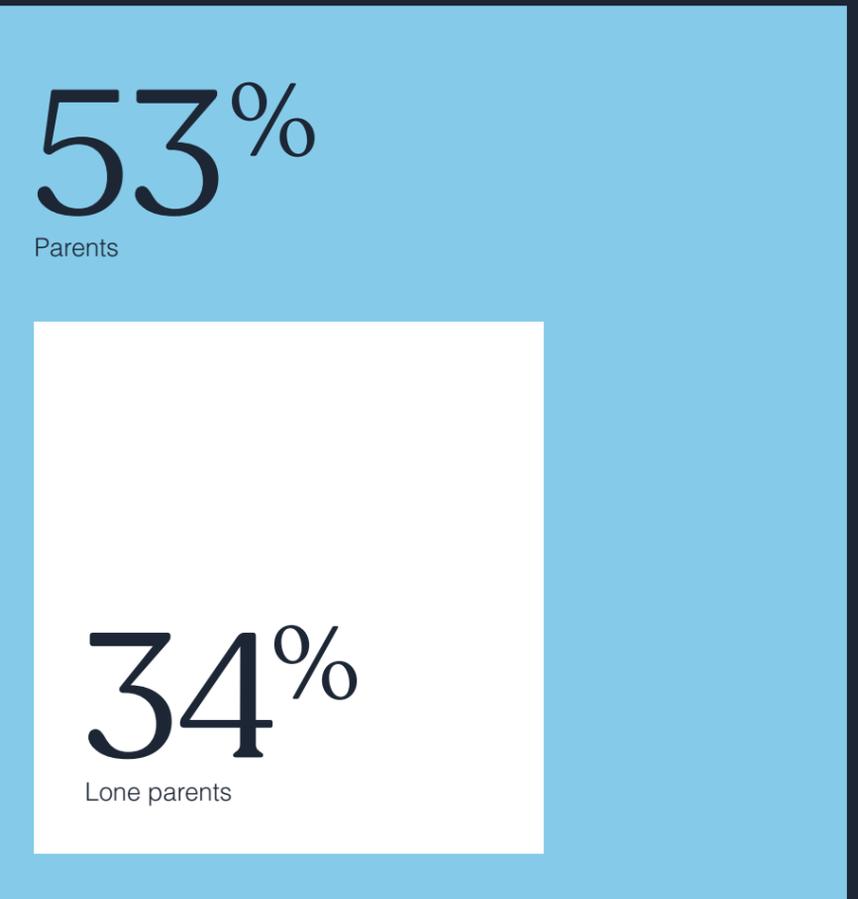
Based on 862 responses



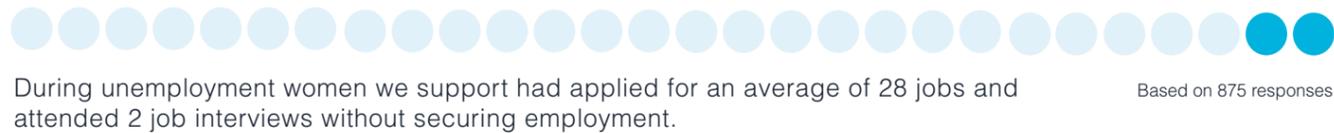
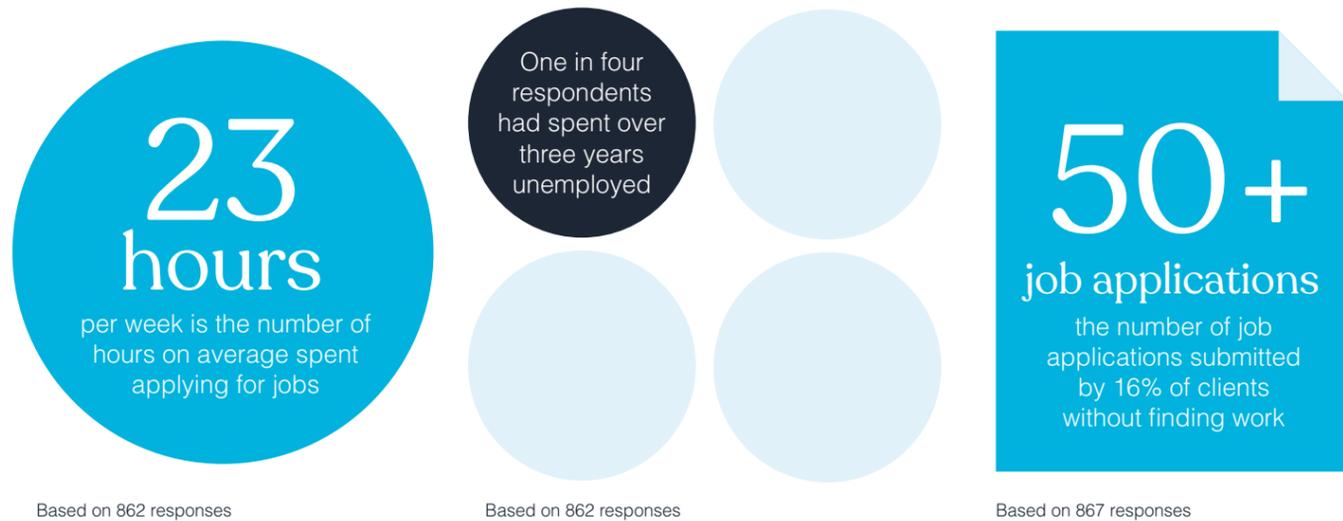
Parenthood

34% were lone parents, with 53% being parents.

Based on 813 responses



Experiencing Unemployment



Findings from both focus groups and questionnaires revealed our clients' experiences of unemployment were lengthy and exhaustive. Those in the survey sample had spent an average of 23 hours per week applying for jobs whilst unemployed. One in four respondents had spent over three years unemployed, with 45% unemployed for over a year. Over this period, 16% of clients had applied for over 50 jobs (with the average number of jobs applied for at 28) whilst they had attended only 2 job interviews; all without finding work.

“I was looking for a remote role at first but couldn't find any. You'd think a lot of office jobs would look for this [but no]. The cost of childcare is so high, just for someone else to look after my child. As a lone parent, I can't just work wherever I want.”



Amongst the women sampled, 34% of mothers had been unemployed for longer than three years and 36% of lone mothers. This compares to just 16% of women without children being unemployed for more than three years, implying non-mothers were able to find work more quickly. Motherhood was a strong theme that also emerged in focus group discussions with suggestions that the job application process is tougher for many women with children.

Furthermore, 21% of women supported in London had been unemployed for more than three years relative to 29% of those outside of London, suggesting the

challenges of unemployment are not regionally consistent. The differences in the experiences faced amongst women are important to discuss and, as such, we intend to put this into further focus in future iterations of the Index.

The women interviewed in focus groups revealed that their time spent unemployed ultimately knocked their confidence. They were not only suffering the consequences of financial instability, but also anxiety and low self-esteem from facing rejections. In total, 52% of respondents said that they felt less confident after going through the process of applying for jobs with 20% saying they felt much less confident.

“I think slowly in those two years I'd lost an awful lot of confidence in myself.”

Confident



No one knows more about the hardship of unemployment than our client Kelly, who was out of work for 10 years.

“The time when I was unemployed, I actually fell into a deep depression thinking that I was never going to get a job. It got me very down... I didn't even want to leave the house.”

With time spent continuously applying for work, Kelly's mental health worsened as she struggled to secure a job.

“I wasn't getting a response from 99% [of the applications]. I got a couple of interviews, but I just didn't come across as myself because I didn't feel confident. They didn't see my bubbly, smiley self, and then I wouldn't hear back from them.

It was just the same thing over and over again. Going around in circles just made me feel even worse. I would trek around for hours a day just handing in CVs but to no avail.”

Early on during her period of unemployment, Kelly also found that her role as a mother made the job application process tougher as she struggled to find a job that would be flexible enough for her to still carry out her commitments as a lone parent. The data revealed this to be a recurring theme as 36% of lone mothers had been unemployed for over three years.



“Most jobs expect you to work a nine to five, but then you tell them you have to leave at three o'clock for a school run. They don't really want to employ people with children.

I just kept getting knocked back and knocked back all the time.

But then I came to Smart Works, and everything changed.

As soon as I came through the door, it was such a lovely, warm, friendly feeling. It was amazing. I didn't feel awkward or anything, they just made me feel so welcome.

The clothes made me feel much better, and the coach gave me insights on how to just be myself. It really gave me a boost, and I think that showed when I was in the interview.

I was determined that day, because I felt so good, I was determined to give it my best shot. And the interviewer kept saying to me 'I'm getting a lovely aura from you Kelly, I can feel that you're going to do great here.'

Having a job has changed my life a lot. I'm managing to do things now that I couldn't do before, I'm able to do things for me as well as looking after the family.

It's about having peace of mind, and being a little bit more secure. And a hell of a lot more confident.”

“I would trek around for hours a day just handing in CVs but to no avail.”

Kelly



Experience of the Interview Process

From the skills that women bring to their jobs, to showing their true personalities and styles, and simply being a woman or parent, these factors were perceived by our focus group to impact their success at interviews. Following these discussions, we asked the clients in our quantitative sample to rate how positively or negatively they felt these characteristics were perceived by employers.

Based on these responses, we derived scores where 0 indicates that clients feel a characteristic is perceived completely negatively, a score of 100 means its perception is totally positive and 50 is neutral. Taking an average of these scores, we can determine an Overall Interview Confidence Score which is a unique benchmark figure we intend to compare year on year.

Our findings from this study suggest that, overall, clients felt confident about the interview process. Women felt positively about having developed skills and experiences without qualifications or having developed them outside of the workplace, which speaks to their recognition of their own abilities to perform well in work. They were the most confident about expressing their true personalities in the face of the negative experiences with unemployment, as discussed in 'Experiencing Unemployment'.

Notably however, it was their unchangeable and more physical characteristics that the data reveals were seen to be perceived less positively. Expressing personal style in an interview, although viewed positively, was seen 7 points less favourably than showing true personality. Womanhood and parenthood saw a 10 point drop-off in confidence compared to other factors, with 12% of clients feeling that being a woman was perceived negatively and 23% feeling being a parent was perceived negatively.

“I’ve been asked a few times [in interviews] ‘Who will take care of your child when you’re working?’ And I never get these jobs. The job that I have now, I didn’t mention it until I got the job.”

Smart Works Client

Interview Confidence Scores

Overall Interview Confidence Score

68

Having work experience instead of professional qualifications

71

Discussing skills outside of the workplace

76

Showing your true personality

78

Expressing your personal style

71

Being a woman

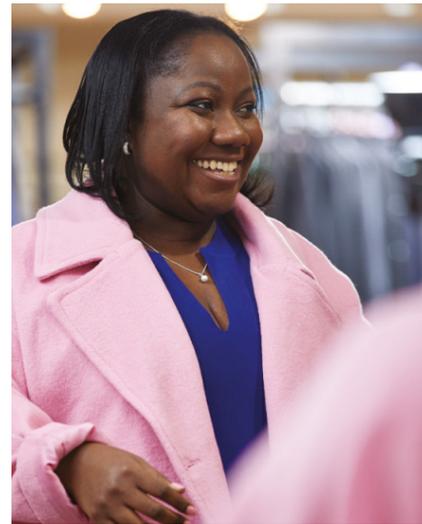
61

Being a parent

55

Based on 833 responses

Melissa's Story



“I had the confidence to sit in that interview and walk away knowing I gave it my best.”

MELISSA

For Melissa, who was made redundant by her long-term employer, confidence was key when she found herself seeking work after a decade with no interview experience.

“I already didn't feel confident, because my last external interview was over 10 years ago, and obviously a lot has changed along the way. My CV was quite full, it was attractive, but I wasn't getting past the interview stage.

One of the things I identified was that I was struggling with selling myself verbally, and I think that came down to my confidence. I was struggling with imposter syndrome, but I didn't realise it at the time.”

As a carer for her husband, and mother to their two young children, there were times in the job search where Melissa worried about the impact that her personal commitments, including being a parent, would have.

“I felt that there was a lot of baggage that I was coming with. I questioned whether there would be an employer who would be willing to take it on, when they know that they can get someone else with the same skills and experience, but without so much baggage.”

Early on in her job search, one interview experience was particularly damaging to Melissa's confidence.

“Up until the final stage, they had been chasing me, but after the final interview I was the one that had to chase them. The only thing that had changed was that in the interview, I'd had to explain my need for flexibility in terms of childcare and caring for my husband. And the mood changed – everything had been flowing, it was natural.

But when it got to that bit, it felt different.

It took them weeks to eventually get back to me. That really hurt.”

With her confidence severely impacted, Melissa was referred to Smart Works ahead of some upcoming interviews to work on her self-esteem.

“The coach made me feel comfortable, made me realise that I do have the potential – I have it on paper, I just needed to bring it out verbally.

When I went into my interview, my whole approach changed. I was sitting up taller and the eye contact was there. I had the confidence to sit in that interview and walk away knowing I gave it my best. And I remember saying to myself that even if I didn't get the job, I knew my confidence and my presentation of me was on point, and that was enough.

Before I came to Smart Works, I'd lost count of how many interviews I had. But then it only took two [interviews] for me to get the job. I know that Smart Works played a big part in that.”

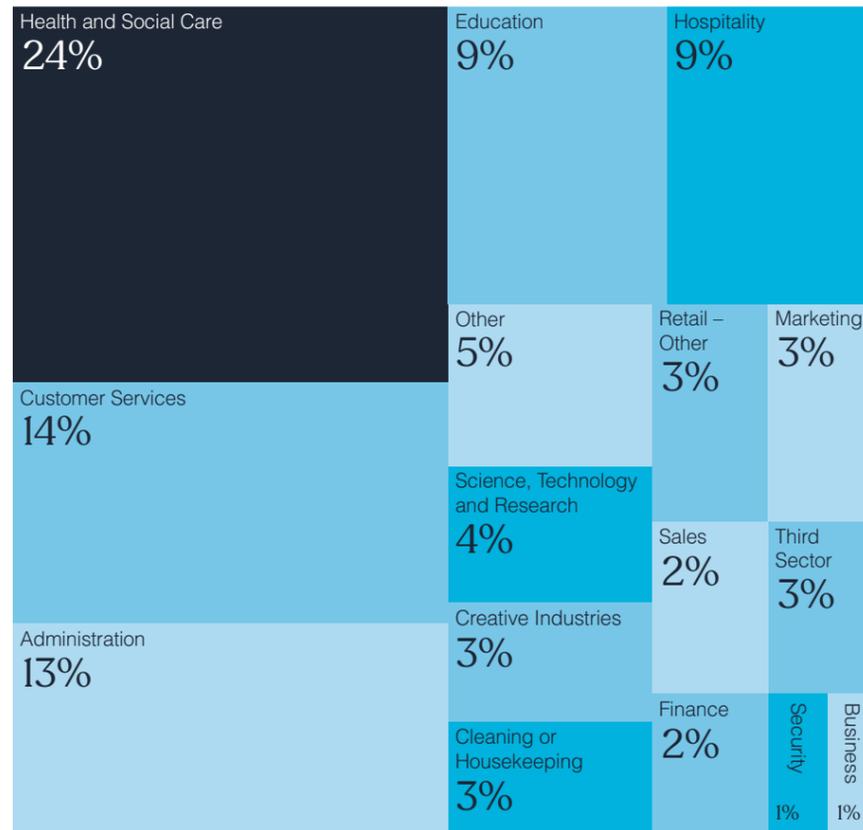
Potential

The Meaning of Having a Job

Smart Works' purpose is to inspire and empower all women who need help getting into work. For the first time, we wanted to provide an overview of the types of roles that Smart Works supports clients to apply for. This also helps to develop an understanding of their reasons behind working and why they felt work was important.

Based upon the roles the women in our sample had upcoming interviews for, the women in this study were applying to work in a diverse range of industries. The most popular sector was the Health and Social Care Industry followed by Customer Services and Administration; over 50% of clients who provided information were applying for roles in these three sectors.

The sectors our clients applied for



Based on 701 responses

This data also presents an assessment of the career types that the surveyed clients were most likely to pursue. 62% of clients were applying for roles that were routine or manual, 26% were applying for intermediate positions and 12% applying for professional positions.

When looking at career type in this way, we observed notable variations amongst the women in our sample.

67% of mothers (and 69% of lone mothers) applied for roles that were routine or manual compared to 57% of non-mothers. 74% of clients outside of our London centres applied for routine or manual roles compared to 48% of clients based in London.

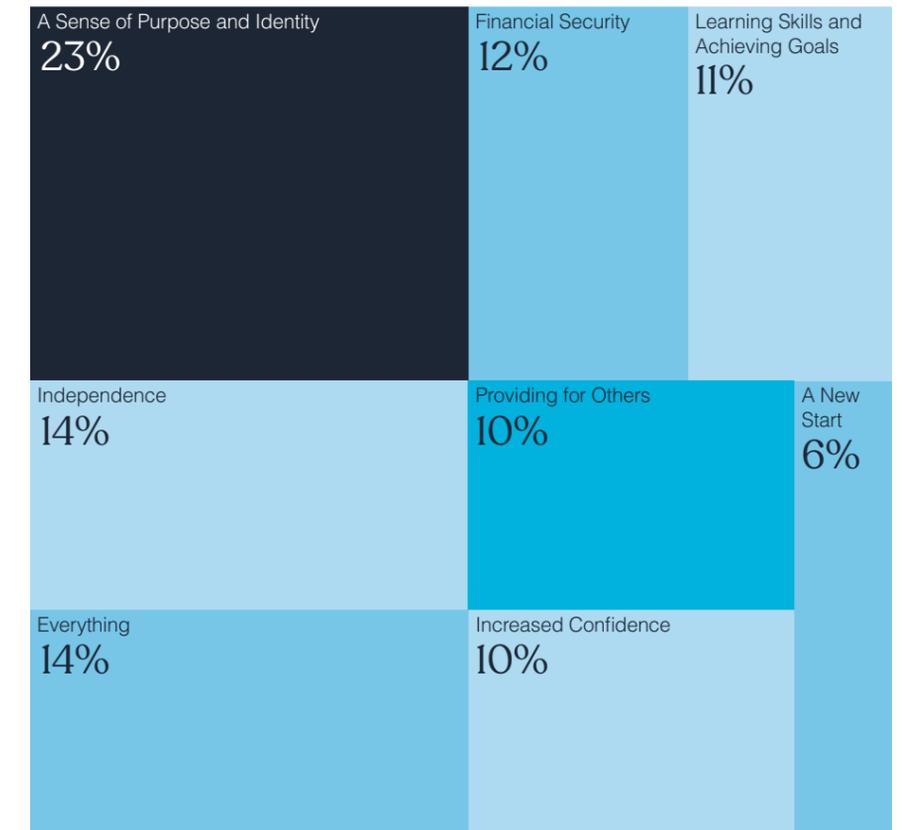
Not only was it important to analyse what our clients wanted to move into after their period of unemployment, it was also important to explore what having a job would mean to them. Focus group discussions suggested that, although financial stability was an important motivator, the meaning of having a job went beyond this.

“Having a job gave me freedom again... It has given me back the person I was before the pandemic.”

“Having a job gave me freedom again... It has given me back the person I was before the pandemic.”

Smart Works Client

What does having a job mean to our clients?



Based on 717 responses

Asking clients “what would having a job mean to you?” and coding their responses revealed similar results amongst the surveyed sample. The largest group of respondents (23%) implied having a job meant regaining a lost sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. There were some differences between respondents. For instance, 18% of mothers quoted being able to provide for others as their primary

motivator. However, despite discrepancies, having a newfound sense of meaning and purpose from having a job was consistently the most popular response. With 11% more respondents motivated primarily by finding identity and purpose than financial stability, this finding speaks to the importance women place around work not only as a means of income, but as crucial to their identities.

“I’m sure, by the time Smart Works calls me in five years time... maybe I’ll be the CEO of a company.”

Morayo

Role model



Morayo's Story

Having a wage is about more than financial stability; it allows people to feel a sense of purpose and is central to how they identify themselves.

This is especially true for Morayo, who was determined to continue building her career when she moved to the UK.

With numerous qualifications and experience as the former Head of Finance and Operations for an international entertainment company, she hoped that finding a job would be easy, but this wasn't the case.

“Throughout the period of unemployment, it was hell. It was frustration... It was a lot.

Every interview just made me feel less confident in myself... I felt like I couldn't do it, that maybe I wasn't the person they're looking for. It was as difficult as difficult can be.”

Like many women seeking employment, Morayo faced huge knocks to her confidence. Despite this, she persevered, because having a job meant so much to her.

“For me, getting a job means three things:

One, being able to be a good role model for my daughter. For her to know that hard work pays off. So when she's older, she'll say 'I want to be whatever it is I can be... whatever it is that my mum does'. I can show her that as a woman, you can achieve whatever it is you need to achieve.

Secondly, it means being able to provide for myself and for her; it means giving her the best education I can. Being a working mum means that if I want to buy a bicycle for my daughter, I don't have to save for 10 months to do it. This time last year, I couldn't afford that... but now that I have a job, I can.

Thirdly, it means being a great woman. I'm sure, by the time Smart Works calls me in five years time... maybe I'll be the CEO of a company. I may start little now, but I'm going to be bigger than this.”

It was for these reasons that Morayo remained determined in her job search, and was referred to Smart Works.

“When I came to Smart Works, I actually broke down in tears because I was so scared of not getting the job.

But the coach encouraged me a lot. She said 'You know what? Your CV is great. I know that you're going to go into that interview, and you're going to ace it'. And that's all that kept ringing in my mind.

I was able to build up that confidence that I'd lost from all the rejections I had gotten. I'm super grateful to the volunteers for that. That's why I'm here now.

You know what? The sky is the limit.”



The Impact of our Service

91%

Felt more confident having received their new outfit

91%

Felt clearer about their skills and experiences

94%

Felt confident to succeed in their next interview



All of the women involved in this study came to Smart Works for support while they were unemployed and awaiting an upcoming job interview. Our focus groups revealed that clients felt positively about the experiences they had at Smart Works, suggesting they had come away from their appointments with a newfound sense of empowerment.

Similarly, our research showed that after their appointments 91% of clients felt more confident having received their new outfit from Smart Works, 91% felt clearer about their own skills and experiences and 94% felt confident to succeed in their next interview.

As of January 3 2023, 66% of the women involved in this study had already successfully secured employment following their visit to Smart Works.

The Future of The Female Unemployment Index

The Smart Works Female Unemployment Index will be released annually each January to provide an overview of women's experiences of unemployment in the UK from the previous calendar year.



As referenced in the findings, this pilot study has laid the foundations for future iterations to make year-on-year comparisons using a combination of case studies and quantitative research.

As we scale up to analyse a larger sample in future reports, we intend to compare our Interview Confidence Scores each year to assess changes in women's experiences at this crucial stage of the job application process. We will also look at the discrepancies between women's experiences. For example, comparing experiences of women from different parts of the UK, women of different ethnic backgrounds, those with disabilities, and those who have children compared to those who don't.

Being driven by data and establishing a national voice on behalf of our clients is vital for Smart Works to reach more unemployed women, help them find their way to a Smart Works centre, and create a virtuous circle of positive intervention and progress towards unlocking the female workforce.

The Smart Works Manifesto

We are Smart Works, a community dedicated to supporting and empowering women in their professional pursuits.

We treat every woman as an individual and give her the safe space she needs, listening without judgement.

We are powered by volunteers, united by a mission to help all women realise their potential.

We work together to support our clients with the clothing and coaching they need to get the job and transform their lives.

We believe in fashion as a force for good. We know that when a woman looks and feels great about who she is, she can change her life.

We are proud of the joy and magic our service brings to the women we serve.

We are guided by data to deliver simple, profound and tangible results, constantly innovating to tackle the challenge of female unemployment.

We know our service is deceptively simple. It only works because of the care and thought we invest in our clients' journey with us.

Join us and help transform a woman's life.

About Smart Works

Smart Works is a dynamic and fast-growing UK charity that exists to give women the confidence they need to reach their full potential, secure employment and change the trajectory of their lives. At the heart of our charity is a dressing and coaching service for unemployed women ahead of their job interview. The tangible impact is profound. Between April 2021 and March 2022, 72% of the clients Smart Works helped ahead of a job interview got a job within one month of their appointment.

At an appointment with Smart Works, each client receives a bespoke dressing consultation with two stylists to find a beautiful and high-quality interview outfit that will fill her with confidence. This is free of charge and the clothes are hers to keep. This is followed by a one-to-one coaching session with an expert interview coach where every client receives valuable interview preparation, unlocking her potential and enabling her to succeed at interview.

All the coaching and dressing is done by trained and skilled volunteers, and all the pieces in our wardrobe are donated by individuals and retailers, making our model efficient and effective.

Since our foundation, we have supported 25,000 women across centres in Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Reading. By 2025, we want to double our reach and help 10,000 women each year, delivered by centres in every major urban hub in the UK. Our manifesto unites everyone in the Smart Works community with a shared ethos and mission to transform women's lives.

Acknowledgements

Smart Works would like to thank all the women who participated in this study, particularly Melissa, Kelly and Morayo who kindly shared their stories with us for the purpose of the Index. We would like to thank research agency, Opinium, for their advice and support throughout the data collection process and Archewell Foundation for the financial contribution that helped produce the first Smart Works Female Unemployment Index.

Designed by Day Studio.

