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EQUALITY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

THE CASE FOR A COMMON SENIORITY LIST

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LONDON :

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THE CASE FOR A COMMON SENIORITY LIST

THE claim for equality between the sexes in the Civil Service is a claim that has now received almost universal assent, but there is, both inside and outside the Service, a variety of opinion as to whether it is possible to secure equality without aggregation at any rate in the higher posts, and, if not, as to the means by which segregation should be abolished.

Theoretically, the ideal to be aimed at is competitive entrance without distinction of sex and a common seniority list from which promotion to the Higher Grades should be made solely on the grounds of efficiency. In the Treasury Classes, viz., Clerical, Executive and Administrative, this ideal should not be difficult of attainment. The Treasury Classes are classes proper to the whole Service occupied on general work which requires no special technical or professional training. There are, however, a few posts in the Treasury Classes, such as Prison Clerks, where sex differentiation would be universally conceded, but the Resolution of the House of August 5th, 1921, which admitted women to the Civil Service on the same terms as men, gave the Civil Service Commissioners discretion in the allocation of successful candidates, and we assume that only a very extreme feminist would take exception to sex discrimination in such a type of case. The position is more complicated in the specialized Departments where Departmental Classes have been created to deal with types of work performed by one Department only.

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So far, we have little experience of mixed examination, as there have been no open examinations for Treasury Classes since August 5th, 1921. The one mixed examination which has been held is that for a Departmental Class, viz., Assistant Inspector of Taxes, where out of twenty-five successful candidates one was a woman, but, beyond the relative proportion of men and women who qualified, this experiment is too recent to afford any useful guidance.

The absorption of ex-Service men, the retention of temporary Clerks, and the need for the provision of promotion facilities for the increasing number of women Writing Assistants and Shorthand Typists, are all factors which are at the moment effectually barring outside recruitment to the Service. When normal methods of entry are again in force and examinations open to both sexes are introduced, it will be necessary to keep a careful watch on the allocation of successful candidates and to guard against any sex discrimination based on prejudice or convention and not justified by the actual needs of the post to be filled. Unless segregation is abandoned, however, and the women already in the Service placed on an equal footing, it is difficult to see how equal entry will ensure equal opportunity.

The position as regards the existing men and women in the Service is much more acute, and it is surrounded with problems which will take every effort and much goodwill to settle.

The number of women above the Manipulative Grades is at the moment roughly as follows :

Writing Assistants	...	...	4,951
Lower Clerical	...	...	5,244
Higher Clerical	...	...	413
Executive	...	...	26
Higher Executive	...	...	85
Assistant Principals	...	...	3
Principals	...	...	5

In addition there is a large number of women in the Departmental Grades of the following Ministries :

Board of Education.
 Customs and Excise.
 Home Office.
 Ministry of Health.
 Ministry of Labour.

mainly employed as Inspectors.

Dealing first with the women in the Treasury Classes, we find that practically all of the Clerical and Executive women were

recruited through the pre-Reorganization Women and Girl Clerks' examinations. They were appointed to a Woman's Branch with a separate seniority or establishment list confined to their own sex, and the majority were segregated. On the Reorganization of the Service, the women were assimilated to two of the three new Grades, but their segregation remained practically undisturbed and they retained their own seniority lists with their own ear-marked higher appointments. In the Departments employing women for the first time during and after the war the segregation is less absolute, but, with the exception of a couple of minor Departments, women have their own seniority lists and can be considered for promotion only to the few higher posts ear-marked for them.

The question of the common seniority or single establishment list should be viewed from two aspects: firstly as regards Civil Servants themselves, secondly as regards the services rendered to the public. It is really one of equality *versus* sex discrimination, and it has reactions far beyond its effect on the Civil Service. Not only does it affect women's wages throughout the country because it is impossible to substantiate "Equal Work" where no comparison is possible, but, doing this, it affects also the economic conditions of men. If men and women are not interchangeable on work that has no apparent suitability for either sex, the women who can do the work, but who are barred through prejudice, will always remain a menace to any improvement in the conditions of men; while from the women's point of view if Equal Pay were granted to-morrow the reservation of certain Grades to women only will prevent real comparison and make "Equal Pay" a mockery.

The other, and to some the more vital, reason for interchangeability of the sexes within the Service is the need for the "complete" point of view on matters affecting public welfare. Men and women instinctively view a subject from different angles and the light of their understanding illuminates a different facet of the whole. The more light we can get on any matter the better, and therefore the more men and women work together the better. But many, who will not concede so much, will agree that, apart from the ethical aspect of the question, from the material point of view certain types of work are more suitable for men and certain types more suitable for women. Granted that in this year of 1924 the majority will consider the War Office essentially a man's job, would not Housing, Infectious Diseases and Poor Law Administration be at least equally a job for both sexes?

The aim of an efficient Service is to administer the laws so that they shall ensure justice and order to the citizens of the nation.

The good Civil Servant prides himself on his impartiality; he tries to see every point of view and to base his decisions on an unbiassed survey of the position, ignoring his own personal views of the matter. And yet, so far as more than one-half the citizens of this country are concerned, we never get a really comprehensive consideration, because questions concerning them are nearly always considered and dealt with by persons of one sex. I am not suggesting that there is any conscious bias in the matter or that one point of view is not as good as the other, but simply that an efficient administration should be based on *both* points of view.

But let us examine the position :

The Civil Service has just completed its reorganization in accordance with the Reorganization Report of the Civil Service National Whitley Council, which lays down "that it should be the duty of Departments, under the general guidance of the Establishments Department of the Treasury, to see to it that women are regarded as available for employment on the same work as men within the several classes, and that women are given the widest opportunities of proving their administrative capacity. Whether the interests of efficiency will be best served by segregation, or by the employment of women and men side by side, is a matter on which experience varies; and we suggest that the requirements of Departments in this respect might appropriately be discussed at the Departmental Councils. It may fairly be argued that, in order to obtain full value of the experiment, every opportunity should be given for men and women to work side by side." The Treasury has had a definite lead from Parliament that men and women Civil Servants shall be on an equality as regards the Home Civil Service, and there is an Act on the Statute Book which lays down that "A person shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from holding any Civil or judicial office or *post*."

One of the first results of Reorganization was the creation of two Grades (one Departmental and one proper to the whole Service) consisting of women only. Needless to say, both these Grades are very badly paid, even for women's work. This exclusion of men from these badly-paid Grades has been counterbalanced by the exclusion of women from many Ministries altogether and from many Branches, and consequently "posts" in Ministries employing both sexes. It will be argued that it was not possible to expect that women, even though they have been employed in the Service for fifty years, should at once penetrate into every Department, but let us see exactly what has occurred.

The CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION, responsible for the recruitment of all men and women Civil Servants, employed no

permanent women above the Clerical Grade before Reorganization, and it has made no change.

There is only one woman, a clerical officer, on the total staffs of the MUSEUMS.

In the BOARD OF EDUCATION the only change since Reorganization is that men have been introduced to the Superannuation Branch, an Executive Branch staffed by women only for fifteen years. A woman Assistant Principal has been appointed, but a vacancy caused by the death of one of the very few women Assistant Secretaries in the Service has not been filled.

In the HOME OFFICE the position remains unchanged, with only one woman outside the Inspectorate, except that the post of Woman Inspector of Prisons has been abolished.

In the MINISTRY OF PENSIONS, formerly staffed almost entirely by women, many Branches have been handed over to men, and certain men and women doing the same work are graded differently. A Woman Assistant Principal has been appointed to the Establishment Branch.

In the FOREIGN OFFICE clerical women with their own higher posts have been appointed for the first time, and one Assistant Principal has been appointed.

In the TREASURY two Administrative women have been appointed.

In the ADMIRALTY twenty-two lower Clerical Women have been appointed, but only one higher post has been allocated.

In the CUSTOMS AND EXCISE some Lower Clerical Women have been appointed, but no higher posts have been earmarked, while the whole of the Old Age Pension work has been handed over to women with no provision for any higher posts at all.

The OFFICE OF WORKS, which deals with office accommodation and equipment, has no women at all except Writing Assistants, although this Department is entirely responsible for the arrangement of dressing rooms, etc., for the 73,000 women in the Service.

The MINISTRY OF LABOUR always took first place as regards the employment of women in higher posts, and the position remains much as before.

The MINISTRY OF HEALTH has excluded on Reorganization women above the Lower Clerical from the following Divisions :

Approved Societies Branch
(dealing with the benefits of all insured women).
Housing.
Infectious Diseases.
Poor Law Administration.
Town Planning.

One Administrative woman has been appointed in charge of the Maternity and Child Welfare Branch.

In the POST OFFICE, which has employed women for fifty years, one Administrative woman in charge of Women's Establishment has been appointed on Reorganization.

The most disquieting fact about this Reorganization of the Service is the small number of Training Grade posts allocated to women. Women have not had the experience of men in Administrative work, and it was not expected that the number of new Administrative posts allocated to them would be large, though a sum total of only three additional ones was somewhat of a disappointment. But that only three women should have been appointed to the Administrative Cadet Grade, which contains 272 men, and 26 women to the Training Grade of the Executive as against 3,550 men, throws an instructive light on the real intentions of the Treasury in "guiding" departments to give women "the widest opportunities of proving their administrative capacity." It is from these Grades that we look for the controlling Civil Servants of ten years hence, and we cannot believe that the women electors will be satisfied with the prospects as they stand.

In only two Ministries are men and women even nominally interchangeable. In all other Departments certain Branches, usually the Accounting Branches, are definitely reserved to women and certain Branches are definitely reserved to men. At first sight this might seem defensible, but let us examine its practical effect.

It will hardly be necessary to state that the Accounting and Ledger Branches are not handed over to women because women are better accountants than men, nor is Poor Law Administration dealt with by men because they can deal with it more successfully. Accounting work involves more routine work, and therefore the bulk of the work in Accounting Branches is performed by Writing Assistants and Clerical Officers, and most of the Higher Posts are supervisory, whereas there is little routine work in the Secretariats or Correspondence Branches, which are chiefly staffed by male Administrative and Executive Officers.

This reservation of purely routine work to women leads to another striking fact, which is that their proportion of higher to lower posts is quite different. The 12,000 Clerical men in the Service have nearly 5,000 higher posts above them, or a proportion of one to every 2.4 clerks; whereas the 5,000 Clerical women in the Service have only 430 higher posts, or one to every 11 clerks; and this in spite of the fact that it is part of the duties of women Clerical Officers to supervise Writing Assistants, whereas the man Clerical Officer has no one working under him.

Another result, and one which is keenly resented by the women, is the opportunity the separate establishment provides for downgrading the women's work. There is a majority of men on the Official Side of every Whitley Council, and when economy is being enforced it is easy to label every Women's Branch Clerical. The women are convinced that much simpler work in other Branches is called Executive, but in many cases they have to accept the grading imposed upon them as they have no practical experience in other Branches and their male colleagues have never worked in theirs, so no actual comparison is possible. In one large Department where certain Branches have been staffed alternately by men or women the same work has always required more higher posts while being performed by men.

Under the separate establishment system, therefore, we find that the woman Civil Servant has not only to wait longer for her promotion owing to the much smaller proportion of higher posts, but that she is frequently doing the work of the grade above her, not at the lesser rate appropriate to the women of that grade, but at the lesser rate appropriate to the women of the grade below.

Had there been any attempt during reorganization to discuss the desirability of segregation or aggregation or the possibility of introducing a common seniority list, had the National Whitley Council made any attempt to ensure that the Treasury was really giving that "general guidance" which it had itself agreed was desirable, had any Department started its reorganization discussions by a survey of its work with a view to its suitable division between the sexes, even the women would have felt that it was only a matter of time before the merging of the sexes was complete. But in only one Department was the question discussed at all, and on several Whitley Councils it was ruled out of order. Finally, owing to the women's agitation, a Treasury Committee was set up in June, 1922, before any of the Reorganization schemes were actually operative, "to examine and report on the application of the principle of common seniority lists for men and women to the classes included in the Report of the Reorganization Com-

mittee of the National Whitley Council," but unfortunately this Committee has only just reported, and it was decided that the general desirability or otherwise of a common seniority list was not within the terms of reference, though the report does suggest that this matter should be explored departmentally at an early date.

The proper way to proceed is obviously for the Treasury to call for a report from each Department as to how far it has been able to give effect to the recommendations in paragraph 9 of the Reorganization Report, and to point out that the earmarking of posts to men is contrary to the Sex Disqualification Removal Act. If consideration of the matter is left to the discretion of each Department, in most cases nothing will be done. The four years since the Reorganization Report was published have already been wasted, not only because no general steps have been taken to introduce equality into the Service, but because the Service has been reorganized during that period on the old bad lines of sex discrimination. There is one exception to this statement, where, in one of our largest Ministries, a Committee was set up which divided the work into five categories.

- (a) Necessarily women's work.
- (b) More appropriately women's work.
- (c) Work common to both sexes.
- (d) More appropriately men's work.
- (e) Necessarily men's work.

This method is particularly satisfactory for Departmental Classes where the officials are dealing directly with the public, and, though there appears to be no reason for labelling the work of any of the Treasury Classes as peculiarly appropriate to either sex, the general application of this method would hardly result in the extraordinary anomalies created during reorganization. In view, however, of the small number of women on the Departmental Whitley Councils (the Official Side rarely contains more than one woman, and many have not even that) it would be very desirable that there should be some form of appeal where there was disagreement as to the classification of the work.

The creation of a common seniority list would also go a long way towards solving one of the most pressing problems in the Service of to-day, viz. : the provision of a promotion outlet for the Writing Assistant. The numbers of this class are increasing so rapidly that the reservation of all the vacancies on the women's Clerical Grade for their promotion will soon not do more than provide an adequate outlet. The Women Clerks, however, who have been fighting for equality for twenty-five years, strongly object to the differentiation in recruitment which this would cause. The

male Clerical Class would be recruited from the secondary schools, while the women's Clerical Class would be recruited by the promotion of a Class which had entered with a lower educational standard. The number of Clerical men is more than double that of the Clerical women, and the merging of the two classes would provide a much wider avenue of promotion, even were 50 per cent. of the vacancies reserved for outside recruitment. This policy would, of course, ultimately have the effect of increasing the ratio of women to men Clerks, assuming that on the mixed examinations the numbers of successful men and women were fairly even. The problem would then have to be faced as to whether it were not advisable to recruit both boys and girls to this Grade or whether the Grade should be entirely abolished. But this problem will have to be faced sooner or later, and as far as the women are concerned the sooner the better.

What we desire to abolish in the Service is the point of view which regards as suitable for women any of the work which the men dislike. This point of view is expressed by certain members of the Lytton Committee set up to consider the appointment of ex-Service men to the Civil Service. In considering the creation of a class for men analogous to the women Writing Assistants, they say: "The work to be performed by such persons will be of a semi-clerical, semi-manipulative character, and will, moreover, be of the most routine kind." "Some of us are of the opinion that not only would the efficiency of the Department in question be lowered to a substantial extent by the employment of such men, but that, in addition, the proposal would not prove a satisfactory solution of the problem of the employment of this class of man. Those of us who hold these views are of the opinion that, although the men might be content to carry out the duties assigned to them for a short period, in due course they would become disheartened by the very routine nature of the work. Hence, not only would a further loss of efficiency result, but the Civil Service would be burdened with a class of men thoroughly (and *not unnaturally*) dissatisfied with the conditions under which they were called upon to work" (*italics mine*).

We get the same point of view in a recent article in *The Civilian* where the writer says: "In a short time it may be proposed that the coding of the import and export entries should be done by writing assistants. I should not be disposed to oppose such a proposal. From a human point of view, young women, the majority of whom will marry between the ages of 20 and 30,*

* Figures as to the marriage wastage among women Civil Servants generally are not available, but for the years 1911-14 out of an average woman staff of 20,200 in the Post Office there was an annual average wastage of 606 or exactly 3 per cent. (*Report of the Committee on Recruitment for the Civil Service after the War*).

might very well be asked to do the work. The keeping of a large number of men on such work throughout their official lives could not be contemplated. Of course, the women would not be content with supervision by men; they would demand—and rightly—a share of the supervising posts." This assumption that women do not suffer from the deadening nature of routine work has no foundation in fact. Whether monotony is injurious or not is a question of temperament, not sex, but economic pressure has taught women to be grateful for almost any employment and they suffer more silently than their male colleagues. We believe that an analysis of the Sick Leave figures for women Civil Servants would disclose an excessive amount of neurasthenia probably directly traceable to the monotonous nature of the work they are engaged upon and the small prospects it offers of change or advancement.

The question of the actual segregation of routine workers employed in large blocks is not immediately important. It may well be argued that in the present state of public opinion, and particularly of Civil Service opinion, it would not be considered desirable for women to supervise men or *vice versa*, although in several Departments to-day women Clerical Officers are working with no higher officer of their own sex and blocks of men on clerical work have been working under women without any trouble. In the two Departments which have adopted a Common Seniority List the sex question has caused no trouble, and in two important Departmental Classes the men take their instructions from their women chiefs exactly as the women have taken them from the men.

With goodwill and a little organizing ability it is possible to arrange the work so that large blocks of workers should be supervised by their own sex without reserving any one type of work to either sex. Women staff could in one room deal with women's cases and men staff in another deal with men's cases, or women staff in one room deal with half the alphabet and men staff in another deal with the other half. This aspect of the matter, which is really quite a minor one, easy of adjustment, has been magnified into a bogey of such dimensions that it threatens to nullify the whole effect of the Resolution of the House as to equality in the Civil Service.

The Treasury contends that having admitted women to the same "Grades" as men they have carried out the intention of the House as regards equality. They do not explain how they imagine they have carried out paragraph nine of the Reorganization Report and have seen that "women are regarded as available for employment on the same work as men *within* the several

classes and that women are given the widest opportunities of proving their Administrative capacity" when they are excluded, with few exceptions, from any but routine Branches, and when the number of women *training* for Administrative and Executive posts is respectively 3 and 26 as against 272 and 3,550 men, although roughly there are only three times as many men as women in the Service.

The men's Associations frankly object to aggregation owing to the menace to the existing prospects of promotion of the men, but we find that men are employed in the Treasury Classes in fifty Government Departments, of which only sixteen employ more than ten women and in some of these the women have been so recently introduced that they would in any case go to the bottom of any seniority list. The menace is most real in one or two of the Departments which have employed women for some considerable time, but the prospects of the men affected have been created mainly since Reorganization, and they already benefited by being graded with the women who entered the Service by a much stiffer examination and by open instead of limited competition. The argument that, because the women have to wait twenty-five years before they are considered for their first promotion, they must remain segregated as their merging in any other class would reduce the prospects of that class seems curiously of the "I'll larn you to be a toad" variety.

The mixed Associations which object to Common Seniority do so also on the ground that it would worsen the prospects of the women. After exhaustive investigation we can find no grounds for this fear. In the one Department quoted as an example we find the number of posts above the Lower Clerical for women is 1 in 22, and, though it is true that the women who are very junior would have to go to the bottom of the list, the men's prospects are so much better than the women's that on a *merged* list the proportion would be 1 in 1.5. It is true that a Common Seniority List would not immediately produce in every male establishment officer a desire to introduce women to all Branches of his Department, but it would make it much more difficult for him to exclude them. If promotions had to be made from a mixed list, the frequent omission to appoint competent women on the ground of their ignorance of the work would require some explanation.

It is fairly safe to assume that for some time after common seniority is introduced women will be at a disadvantage with men. They will not be considered solely on their merits. A certain, and in many cases an unconscious, sex prejudice is bound to have its influence and women will be judged from the men's point of view for some time to come. If a promotion is to be made and there is

an efficient man in the running he will always get it before an exceptional woman, but it is hardly likely that an efficient woman will have to wait twice as long as a man for promotion, which is what is happening at present. We must not yet compare the woman's position under aggregation with the man's, but with the woman's under the present conditions.

The question, however, of whether it would be materially advantageous for the women at the moment is one of expediency. The present writer believes that it will, and that the abolition of all sex differentiation is essential to the claim for equality. There is, however, another aspect which cannot be overlooked. Women are demanding equality all round, and they cannot at the same time demand sex consideration. Either they must be content to be employed because their cheapness and manipulative efficiency outweigh their other disadvantages, or they must demand that on work equally suitable for either sex they are employed under precisely the same conditions as men; and when a proviso as to suitability is made it implies no inferiority in either sex. Women are better at manipulative work, typewriting, sorting and filing documents, etc., because of their smaller and more agile fingers, while a man is more suitable for much of the Registry work now performed by women, where the lifting of heavy files is involved, because of his greater physical strength; women are generally more suitable for interviewing women and men for interviewing men; while in dealing with the normal administrative problems of the Service it would be safe to suggest that one would expect to find a preponderance of women in a Ministry dealing with social questions and a preponderance of men in the Ministries of Defence. Questions as to Education and practically all Home Office questions should benefit by the advice of both sexes, and the general administration work of the service should be dealt with by any "officer," male or female, who is suitable to deal with it. This condition of affairs will never be reached if we continue to weigh up our personal chances under freedom or protection. Equality of opportunity is what we want and we must stand or fall by it.

We are advised by the First Civil Service Commissioner that, the principle (of equality) having been admitted, it is for us to make good by patience and peaceful penetration, and he adds that "In difficult circumstances the women had shown very wise and admirable self-restraint." There has been nothing revolutionary in our demands, and, provided that our penetration had been forwards, we should have been content to await its fruition with the amount of patience with which as a sex we are traditionally endowed; but so far our penetration has been backwards. In

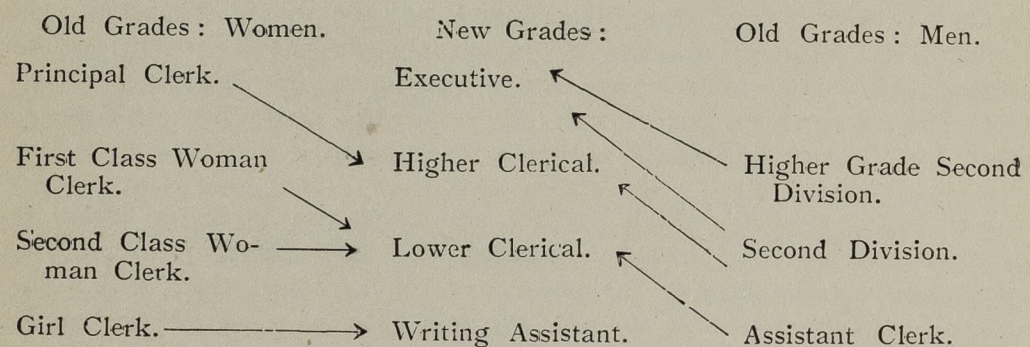
1920, when the Whitley Council recommended the Treasury to see that we had every opportunity of proving our capacity for administrative work, we were employed in a larger number of Departments than we are to-day, and for every new block of routine work handed to us on Reorganization we have been excluded from some more interesting Branch elsewhere. There is a paragraph in the Reorganization Report which provides for the training of senior Executive Officers on Administrative work. In only one Ministry has a woman been appointed to such a post, though there are 85 Higher Executive women in the Service. It is not a question of making room for the ex-Service man, as in another Ministry, where there are seven women of Higher Executive rank, fifty-three out of sixty-three higher posts for men were filled by the promotion of non-Service men.

This is a matter which vitally concerns the younger women in the Service and those outside who are being trained in our schools and colleges for a career. What does the Civil Service offer women? We do not suggest that as a career it could not be improved from the men's point of view, but surely the time has now come when we can, at any rate, begin to drop the differentiation and discuss the prospects of "Civil Servants" without that "male" and "female" of which the authorities are so fond. A Civil Servant of high rank, familiar with the position of women in the Service, said the other day: "I forget who coined the phrase, 'to travel hopefully,' but I am sure it was not a woman Civil Servant in the lower grades." Nothing could be truer. It is difficult to travel hopefully with your face set the wrong way.

D. SMYTH.

APPENDIX I.

Showing the degrading of women on Reorganization.



The above comparison of the old Grades was officially made in a Department employing men and women, and the First Civil Service Commissioner in an address to the Institute of Public Administration on July 31st, 1923, said: "Women clerks recruited on an examination similar to the Second Division."

APPENDIX II.

Grading and salary of Treasury Classes under Reorganization.

	Men.	Women.
Clerical	£80-£250	£80-£180
Higher Clerical	£300-£400	£230-£300
Executive	£100-£400	£100-£300
Higher Executive	£400-£500	£300-£400
Administrative Training Trade	£200-£500	£200-£400