

Smart Works report highlights 'bleak' jobs market for women seeking work

A new report has highlighted a "bleak" job market for North East women seeking work, with 40% remaining unemployed for more than a year despite applying for scores of jobs.

The 2023 Female Unemployment Index also suggests the cost-of-living crisis has weakened the employment market for women, with many applying for an average of 33 jobs. The report has been compiled by Smart Works, the national charity with regional divisions which helps women get back into work, gain financial independence and ultimately change their lives by providing free interview clothing and coaching.

Since its launch six years ago, the Newcastle arm of the charity has helped more than 1,000 women, with around 67% going on to succeed at a job interview within a month of receiving support. In the latest index, women said they spent an average 23 hours a week applying for jobs, only to receive little to no feedback on unsuccessful attempts.

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Women in the region said they faced challenges including demanding applications, unclear job descriptions, and highly competitive recruitment markets when looking for work – obstacles which led to financial and psychological repercussions, with 24% reporting feeling less confident after applying.

The report also showed that pressures caused by the cost-of-living crisis led 68% of women to accept lower-paid and lower-

skill roles, compared to 62% in 2022. It also makes a number of recommendations to employers to create a more accessible job market, including a call for clear job descriptions with salary, location, and options for flexibility listed upfront; an offer to reimburse costs associated with applications; and that regardless of salary and the qualifications expected, all roles should be advertised where unemployed people will see them. It also highlights a need for useful and objective feedback to be given to unsuccessful job applicants.



Collay Dennis, a former client of Smart Works Newcastle
(Image: Smart Works)

Helen Boyd, centre manager of Smart Works Newcastle said: “The report shows that job seeking as a woman is challenging and we hope the Index highlights this and encourages positive change. As the Smart Works service shows, having a job is vital to financial independence, self-worth, and purpose. We will continue to support unemployed women with the confidence to succeed at interview and get the job.”

Collay Dennis, a former client of Smart Works Newcastle who features in the report, said: “I am thrilled to be a part of the Smart Works 2023 Index. Following my appointment at Smart Works Newcastle my confidence in my skillset skyrocketed, and I felt much more equipped to navigate the world of work. Now I am working, my self-worth has increased, and I feel great.”