

Paper proposal for the **Belfast FRESH Meeting, April 23, 2010:**

The role of the company in occupational feminisation

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the hypothesis that local and company specific characteristics constitute an important and largely overlooked factor behind occupational feminisation. The case used to test the hypothesis is the Swedish commercial bank sector, which quadrupled its female labour share from approximately 8 to 32 percent in the decades from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until WW2. Through compilation of previously unexplored data from the Swedish bank matriculation registers (*Svensk Bankmatrikel*), a data set which covers all companies and employees in said sector from 1886 to 1938 has been created, in the form of panels at five year intervals. In total, this amounts to approximately 500 companies and 40000 employees.

The data shows that very large inter-company differences in the female labour share, from 0 to 80 percent in a given year, persisted throughout the entire period 1886–1938, in spite of steady feminisation on the aggregate level. To explain these differences, factors such as company size and structure, location, labour organisation, productivity and profit margin are explored through a fixed effects linear regression model, controlling for unobserved heterogeneity between companies such as differing recruitment practices or management cultures.

The results support the presence of local and company specific effects. Numerous banks consistently fail to conform to the predictions of traditional theory, and a significant effect of alternative factors, such as location, is found. A substantial part of the differences in female labour share between banks also remains unexplained, which suggests an importance of corporate culture or personal convictions of the management, not captured in the model. How company characteristics, and individual agency, impact changes in the sex composition of occupations is thus a question with large potential for future research in economic history.