

Final Report to Economic and Social  
Research Council

---

**CONCEPTUAL IMPACT OF ESRC  
RESEARCH: CASE STUDY OF UK  
CHILD POVERTY POLICY**

**Mark Morrin, Steve Johnson,  
Laura Heron & Emma Roberts**

---

September 2011



CONSULTING  
**INPLACE**

Final Report to Economic and Social  
Research Council

---

**CONCEPTUAL IMPACT OF  
ESRC RESEARCH: CASE STUDY  
OF CHILD POVERTY POLICY**

**Mark Morrin, Steve Johnson,  
Laura Heron & Emma  
Roberts**

---

September 2011

CONSULTING  
**INPLACE**

---

**LONDON OFFICE**

Gilmoora House  
57-61 Mortimer Street  
London  
W1W 8HS

T: 020 3008 5539

E: [mail@consultinginplace.com](mailto:mail@consultinginplace.com)

---

[www.consultinginplace.com](http://www.consultinginplace.com)

**BIRMINGHAM**

---

Wellington House  
31-34 Waterloo Street  
Birmingham  
B2 5TJ  
T: 0121 262 5111

**BRADFORD**

---

Bradford Design Exchange  
34 Peckover Street  
Little Germany  
Bradford BD1 5BD  
T: 01274 743600

---

**CONSULTING INPLACE**

# Contents

---

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>2. Introduction and background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Evaluation methodology</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>4. Child poverty policy and its conceptual underpinnings</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Key developments in social science research on child poverty</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>6. Development of child poverty discourse</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>7. Routes of impact of research on child poverty policy</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>8. Conclusions</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>9. Recommendations</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Academics in receipt of ESRC funding</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Media content analysis 2007/8</b> .....	<b>51</b>

## 1. Executive Summary

---

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned Consulting Inplace to undertake a study to explore in depth the impact of social research in general, and ESRC supported research in particular, on the development of UK policies in relation to child poverty over the past 10-15 years or so. The aim of this evaluation is to map conceptual developments, including significant changes in thinking, debate, culture and direction, underpinning the development of UK Child Poverty Policy.

Our research has highlighted clear evidence that social research has indeed contributed to thought and debate on child poverty issues within the policy making sphere over a long period of time, preceding the last Government's announcement of its commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Key findings can be summarised as follows:

- Conceptual impacts of research on child policy development are extremely difficult to isolate, measure and assess; however there is strong evidence from this study (corroborated by extensive desk research and consultations) that such effects have had an important influence on child poverty policy in the UK
- To the extent that it has been possible to trace conceptual developments in relation to child poverty research and policy, it is clear that major shifts in thinking have occurred over a long period of time, dating back to the early 1960s at least
- The main conceptual breakthroughs appear to have occurred mainly through a small number of seminal research studies (e.g. Townsend et al) although there has been, particularly since the 1990s, an increasing number of important contributions that have influenced policy thinking, culminating in a period of intense research and policy development between 1999 and 2010.
- Interaction between researchers and lobby groups has been an important feature of child poverty policy development, and is a relationship that has helped to create a mechanism through which research findings influence the thinking of policy-makers, including opposition political parties, their advisers and supporters
- Similarly, think tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Centre for Social Justice provide an important conduit for 'translating' research findings into viable policy proposals. Such interactions often take place through informal relationships but can also take the form of formal seminars, presentations and/or papers by leading academics
- While policy documents cite a relatively small number of key research papers and/or authors, this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of research impact. Our consultations suggest that formal, semi-formal and informal interactions (including secondments) between academics and government researchers are key mechanisms through which research findings are taken into account in policy development
- Conceptual developments have been important in formulating the ideas of leading researchers and thinkers. The commitment made by the Labour Government in 1999 definitely stimulated further interest among some of the UK's leading economic and social researchers and also provided a source of funding to support further, mainly applied or 'instrumental' research, including evaluations
- While it is difficult to distinguish conceptual development from other forms of knowledge advancement, it is very clear from our review that many of the earlier

theoretical developments in relation to child poverty laid the basis for further research of a more empirical nature that helped to highlight some of the main issues relating to child poverty in a way that attracted attention from the media and policy-makers

- This process was also stimulated by ongoing financial support and dissemination activity by key organisations, notably the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, supporting many of the leading researchers in a set of primarily applied research projects that received high profile attention in policy circles
- The role of ESRC in all of this is important, but difficult to disentangle from the above factors. It is clear from our study that policy impact results both from support for individuals and through the outputs produced by these individuals. We have identified a number of leading researchers who have been funded by ESRC. In addition the development of the ESRC research centre network, support for methodological research (such as cohort analysis) and funding for the creation of and access to large-scale datasets has contributed in various ways to child poverty policy development.

Our recommendations are as follows:

- This study has demonstrated the value of undertaking primarily qualitative research to trace the impact of social research on a broad policy area. It would certainly be worthwhile for ESRC to undertake a similar study of a contrasting policy area, for example one with a stronger economic or business focus
- Alternatively, further exploration of the conceptual impact of social research on child poverty policy could be refined to isolate specific policy strands or initiatives. This could enable a deeper, more forensic, investigation of the research-policy interaction
- Devoting resources to reviewing media coverage in detail has been less fruitful. We recommend that future studies should exclude this element, or undertake only 'light touch' media reviews
- On the other hand, speaking in depth to researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders has resulted in a great deal of insight into the policy development process that could be usefully repeated in future impact evaluation studies
- The 'academic panel' provided very helpful support to the study team and is a model that might be usefully replicated for other studies
- In principle it should be possible to gather some of the necessary information by asking researchers to record more systematically activities such as attending government-sponsored seminars, sitting on advisory groups, providing informal advice etc. It is recognised that this has its challenges, but it would be helpful to explore what might usefully be done to capture activities beyond formal publication.
- ESRC should publicise the findings of this and other studies to highlight the contribution of social research in general and ESRC in particular to wider society. It would be very useful to be able to use case studies such as the Welsh Government example, and engage researchers, policy-makers, lobby groups, think tanks and other stakeholders in the process
- Finally, this study and others have illustrated the conceptual and practical difficulties of undertaking evaluation exercises such as this. ESRC may wish to consider making

modest investments in research into conceptual and methodological developments in relation to assessing research impact. It would also be helpful, resources permitting, to undertake at least one policy case study each year; our suggestion is that each case study should attempt to bring together conceptual, instrumental and capacity-building impacts rather than treating them separately

## 2. Introduction and background

---

**The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned Consulting Inplace to undertake a study to explore in depth the conceptual impact of social research in general, and ESRC-supported research in particular, on the development of UK policies in relation to child poverty over the past 10-15 years or so.**

The emphasis in this study is upon the role of social research in influencing the broad direction of policy thinking and the discourse of policy discussion and debate underpinning the development of UK Child Poverty Policy over the past 10-15 years (conceptual impact). The evaluation has several strands:

- The first strand of work is to create a map of key policy changes and their conceptual underpinnings (including an analysis of how this area has changed over time).
- A second related strand is to analyse the changing nature of political discourse in this area as recorded in parliamentary documentation and in the media.
- The third strand of work is to chart the key developments (conceptual, theoretical and methodological) in social science research in this area, identifying that funded by the ESRC in the years before and during the timeframe outlined.

This project builds on recent ‘tracking back’ studies, commissioned by ESRC, introducing two important and related new aspects: firstly a focus on a broad policy area (child poverty) rather than a specific policy initiative, secondly an explicit attempt to capture ‘conceptual’ impacts through appropriate primarily qualitative research techniques, focusing on the discourse of policy debate and development and the role of social research within that process.

The research has been commissioned by the ESRC’s Evaluation Committee and the findings will be used to further inform their work on identifying, measuring and communicating the impact of social research. It will be important, therefore, to learn and share lessons about the methodologies used, and to put forward suggestions as to the most fruitful future avenues for ESRC to pursue in terms of refining techniques for assessing research impact.

The report provides:

- A map of the key policy changes and their conceptual underpinnings, in the timeframe outlined, by analysing key government documents on child poverty and meeting with those responsible for policy-making in this field. References to influential research, data sets and individual researchers are noted.
- A chart of the key conceptual, theoretical and methodological developments in social science research and resources in this area, identifying that funded by the ESRC, before and during the timeframe outlined.
- An assessment of how the different threads of discourse in this area have developed over time identifying key/seminal research studies that have informed its development.

- Identification of the routes through which social science research and resources, and in particular that funded by the ESRC, has impacted conceptually on the development and framing of the Government's child poverty policies.
- Results in the broader context of the ESRC's work on impact evaluation.
- A critical review of the approach, methodology and results of the evaluation.

### 3. Evaluation methodology

---

**We adopted a multi-method approach to this evaluation, comprising a review of key research and policy documents, interviews with a range of key stakeholders and analysis of media reporting of child poverty issues. A panel of academic experts provided advice and guidance throughout.**

#### 3.1 Documentary review and data searches

The first substantive phase of the study involved building a comprehensive and detailed picture of the development of UK policy in relation to child poverty over the past 15 years. This was achieved through an intensive and extensive analysis of the relevant policy documentation including Green Papers, White Papers, research undertaken by government departments (including cross Governmental agents such as the Child Poverty Unit). This process involved three key elements:

- Analysis of issues raised in the policy documentation, including:
  - Specific policies that have been introduced, their justification in terms of underpinning research evidence
  - Evidence of any changes in policy over time - differences in the language and terminology used to discuss child poverty – its causes and proposed policy interventions
  - Stated and, where appropriate, implicit drivers of policy change
- Identification of social research through cited references. These references have been systematically captured for analysis
- Cross referencing of research sources cited in the key policy documents with the ESRC's Society Today database to identify which research has been directly funded by ESRC
- Other works not referenced in the policy documentation (but suggested by stakeholders, interviewed as part of this study, and the academic panel) have also been cross referenced with the ESRC's database.
- A list of all academics in receipt of ESRC funding and identified during the review as contributors to child poverty research (Appendix 1).

#### 3.2 Stakeholder interviews

In order to add further qualitative background to the story emerging from the documentary review, we interviewed a cross-section of:

- Government officials involved in child poverty policy development
- Representatives from lobby groups and third sector organisations concerned with child poverty
- Representatives from Think Tanks and related policy organisations
- Prominent academics and independent researchers in the field of child poverty.

### 3.3 Media content and parliamentary discourse analysis

The scope of media content, which we have been able to analyse, is limited to the printed media, since it is not possible to search other sources of media (television, radio and internet) in a systematic way. We have therefore searched for newspaper articles using the Lexis Nexus media database. The analysis is also informed by interviews with a number of other stakeholders with an interest in and knowledge of the development of child poverty policies and the relationship between research, the media and policy.

We conducted a search for all references to UK child poverty policy in the printed media (national newspapers and websites) and captured details of:

- News items, comments, articles or other outputs
- Names of individual author or organisation producing the output
- Dates and broad context within which the items appeared in the public domain
- Topic covered and points of view expressed
- Evidence of research influence, explicit or implicit, including mention of ESRC or ESRC-supported researchers, institutes, projects, programmes etc.
- Key words and language used and how this narrative has evolved (e.g. ‘absolute’ versus ‘relative’ poverty; ‘income distribution’ versus ‘equality; ‘materialism’ versus ‘well-being’).<sup>1</sup>

Our approach to discourse analysis is based on three steps. Firstly, *counting* the number of times particular language (e.g. child poverty) is used. Secondly, *assessing* the way in which the language is used (e.g. context, media choice) and finally *describing* the ways in which language in one sphere (such as research) evolves and impacts upon another (such as policy).

We have also attempted a review of parliamentary questions and select committee reports. The former has proven too difficult to search, since online Hansard does not offer an advanced search criteria.

### 3.4 Research review and analysis

This stage ran in parallel with previous stages and entailed developing a comprehensive log of:

- All research outputs referred to in the documentary sources and mentioned by interviewees or noted in media reports and broader policy discourse
- Research that informs and feeds into the above, primarily through analysis of citations in the above research outputs.

We have mapped these research outputs according to:

- Conceptual and/or instrumental focus

---

<sup>1</sup> We used the media database Lexis Nexis to search media coverage in British national newspapers.

- Timing in relation to key policy developments or changes in broad policy direction
- Direct or indirect links with ESRC, via the author(s), institutions and/or research project/programme referred to in the output
- Discourse used, including context and media choice.

### 3.5 Academic panel

In order to paint a broad picture of how social science has developed in this area, we were able to draw on the expertise of an academic panel, including:

- Prof Paul Gregg, University of Bristol
- Prof Jonathan Bradshaw, University of York
- Prof Jane Waldfogel, London School of Economics and Columbia University
- Dr. Tess Ridge, University of Bath.

The panel provided guidance on the conduct of our research and expert advice about the key academic and policy dimensions to this work<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.6 Linking the work streams

This stage involved bringing together the evidence gathered through the above research exercises in order to undertake an overarching assessment of the conceptual impact of social research, and ESRC research in particular, on the development of policy towards child poverty in the UK.

We sought to identify impact pathways between the findings reported in social research outputs, policy thinking as revealed in official documents, reporting and comment in different media and the wider discourse of policy debates, informed by our extensive programme of stakeholder consultations. We found that associated time lags were common.

Within this we sought to identify the specific role played by ESRC and its part in enabling the conceptual impact of social science research and the mechanisms which enable and support this.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Consulting Inplace research team is grateful for the advice provided by members of the academic panel, but note that sole responsibility for the content of this report and for all opinions expressed lies with the authors

## 4. Child poverty policy and its conceptual underpinnings

### 4.1 Introduction

The terms of reference for this element of the study were to:

*Map key policy changes and their conceptual underpinnings, in the timeframe outlined, by analysing key government documents on child poverty and meeting with those responsible for policy-making in this field. In doing so, references to influential research, data sets and individual researchers should be noted.*

### 4.2 1971 to 1997

A system of support for working families with dependent children has existed in the UK for almost 30 years. This includes:

- **Family Income Supplement** (1971-1988), which was the first means tested benefit to be aimed explicitly at low-income families with children with at least one parent in work.
- **Family Credit** (1988 -1999) which replaced the FIS and was introduced in 1988 by the Conservative government in response to the 1985 Green Paper, 'Reform of Social Security'.
- **Child Benefit** (1977-present) which was introduced by a Labour government and was designed to benefit both in-work families and workless families. It followed on from the Family Allowance and was renamed Child Benefit. It was a non-means tested (universal), tax-free payment that was simple to claim.

The impetus for these 'family' policies, particularly Child Benefit, has been attributed to the pioneering work of Peter Townsend, who is largely credited with 'transforming how we think about poverty in post war Britain'.<sup>3</sup> Townsend's analysis further influenced the UK government's data series Low Income Statistics and after 1980 the Households Below Average Income series.

The period from 1979 to 1997 saw a relatively modest number of policy developments, specifically designed to ameliorate poverty or assist low income families, including the various regeneration initiatives (City Challenge in 1991 and the Single Regeneration Budget in 1994) designed to tackle the effects of market failure and area based deprivation, particularly in the inner cities. The Church of England's Faith in the City report (1985) played an important role in influencing these areas of urban policy and adopted a 'relative' definition of poverty that included notions of social exclusion, equity and justice.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bradshaw, J (2010) Fighting poverty, inequality and injustice: A manifesto inspired by Peter Townsend, University of York

The Labour Party developed much of its policy platform during opposition. In 1992 John Smith, then leader of the Labour Party, launched the Social Justice Commission. Its aim was to reassess the understanding of social justice, and to update thinking on widening inequalities in British society. Commissioners included a number of academics: David Marquand, Tony Atkinson, John Gennard; Ruth Lister; Penelope Leach; Eithne McLaughlin and Bernard Williams. It published a report in 1994, *Social Justice: Strategies for National Renewal* and many of the policies recommended in this document were later enacted by the Labour Government.

These policies were formulated within an emerging discourse about social exclusion. The modern use of the term emerged in France to describe those who were excluded from the social insurance system (Lenoir, 1974). During the 1980s, interest in social exclusion spread throughout Europe as it was increasingly adopted in the policy frameworks of the European Community. Social exclusion attracted attention in the United Kingdom (UK) during the 1980s and early 1990s and became prominent following the election of the New Labour Government in 1997 and its establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU).

Ruth Lister argues that these policy developments during opposition represented something of a paradigm shift in New Labour's thinking 'from a concern with equality to a focus on social inclusion and equality of opportunity, together with an emphasis on social obligations rather than social rights'.<sup>4</sup>

*"Labour knew they couldn't talk to just poverty and income distribution. The broader concept of social exclusion was about deprivation, disadvantage, integration and equality, which on the continent was more about the experience of identified excluded groups not poverty". (Think tank policy analyst)*

### 4.3 New Labour Government, 1997 - 2010

#### 4.3.1 Early reform, 1997 to 1999

There had been no explicit pledge to eradicate child poverty in Labour's 1997 manifesto. The New Labour Government's specific poverty measures were founded on its Welfare to Work policies, which had been strongly influenced by Clinton's administration in the United States and formulated during the early to mid-90s. Welfare to Work focused on the two key themes of reducing welfare dependency by getting benefit claimants into work (the 'New Deal' programmes); and, raising the standards of living for those in low paid work (tax credits, minimum wage).

However, these early reforms, based on the paradigm shift noted above, emphasising the notion that work is the best route out of poverty and that people should be better off in work, were to underpin emerging child poverty policies. Associated with this paradigm shift - but less directly related to child poverty policy - was a stream of work that focused on the health benefits of working. This research, exemplified by the work of Gordon Waddell and Kim Burton, underpinned the

---

<sup>4</sup> Lister, R. From equality to social inclusion: New Labour and the welfare state *Critical Social Policy* May 1998 18: 215-225

*Pathways to Work* initiative, reviewed in a previous ESRC report on the policy impact of social research.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.3.2 New Deal

The main vehicle for helping people into jobs was the ‘the New Deal’ programmes. The research of Professor Richard Layard (founder-director at the Centre for Economic Performance, LSE) is widely recognized as being highly influential in the formulation of this policy area although Walker and Wiseman’s (2003)<sup>6</sup> analysis of UK activation policies under New Labour, place the building blocks of ‘New Deal’ in John Major’s Conservative government (1992-1997).<sup>7</sup>

Layard was an early advocate of a welfare system based on the philosophy of welfare-to-work. In this respect, he actively participated in the policy debate and worked as an economic advisor for the Labour Government from 1997 to 2001 on policies to combat youth and long-term unemployment. He pursued welfare reform based on a system of conditionality whereby benefit payments to unemployed people are provided in return for their active participation, for example, in training activities or voluntary sector work.

Of particular relevance to the development of child poverty policies was the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) which was rolled out nationally in 1998. The international research evidence identified that lone parents were at an increasingly higher risk of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> Increasing the employment rate of parents, through the New Deal, became a key element in combating child poverty in the UK. Lone parents were actively encouraged to seek employment and offered advice and support to do so through tailored support provided through Work Focused Interviews and help with childcare costs was included<sup>9</sup>. Importantly, benefits were not affected by non take up of support.

*“Lone parent policy was of central importance with regards to child poverty for DWP. Providing support for lone parents was seen as the main ‘lever’ for reducing child poverty”. (Government official)*

---

<sup>5</sup> WM Enterprise, *The Economic Impact of ESRC Research on Pathways to Work*, ESRC, 2010; Waddell, G. and A. Kim Burton, *Is Work Good for your Health and Well-Being?* Department for Work and Pensions, 2006; Waddell, G., Aylward, M and Sawney, P. *Back pain, incapacity for work and social security benefits: an international literature review and analysis*, Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Walker, R & Wiseman, M (2003) Making welfare work: UK activation policies under New Labour, *in* *International Social Security Review*, vol.56 (1)

<sup>7</sup> For those out of work the Jobseeker’s Allowance was introduced in 1996 and continues to the present. It was introduced by the Conservative government under John Major (1992-1997) and marks a policy shift to ‘conditionality’. It was introduced to encourage benefit claimants to look for work. Part of this was the change in definition from claimants to job-seekers (Passive to Active).

<sup>8</sup> Tina Haux’s paper ‘Lone parents not in work: a critical review of the research’ reviews the evidence base on lone parents not in work that has been accumulated over the past 20 years (ISER, University of Essex).

<sup>9</sup> Another building block to the New Deal was the Project Work and Lone Parent Caseworker Project (later to become Parent plus): 1994-1997. Project Work, piloted in 1996 consisted of 13 weeks of intensive job search followed by 13 weeks of mandatory work experience for people who had been unemployed for at least two years.

### 4.3.3 Supporting the in-work poor

Welfare to Work was intended to reduce the financial and social burdens of unemployment. It aimed to 'Make work pay through a national minimum wage and a tax and benefit system that promotes work incentives'<sup>10</sup>.

An early policy initiative of the Labour government was the introduction of a minimum wage in 1998. This was not just targeted at child poverty, but at raising the level of earnings for those on low income. Sutherland (2001) looked at the effects of the introduction of the Minimum Wage on in-work poverty and concluded that its main impact was its role in underpinning the operation of in-work top-up benefits<sup>11</sup>. Measures such as the Working Families Tax Credit focused on child poverty in the context of the in-work poor.

In October 1999, the labour government enacted the Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC)<sup>12</sup>. This was more generous than the Family Credit and reinforced the distinction between the rewards of work and remaining on welfare as it was paid through the pay packet. It also offered more generous help with childcare costs, an important consideration relating to parents' decision to go into work.

The net result of these changes and others was that benefits available to lone parents considerably increased over the first two terms of the Labour government between 1997 and 2004.

### 4.3.4 1999 – 2009: from the pledge to the Child Poverty Act

In 1999, then Prime Minister Tony Blair announced a commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

*"Our historic aim will be for ours to be the first generation to end child poverty. It will take a generation. It is a 20-year mission but I believe it can be done"*  
(Tony Blair, Beveridge Lecture, Toynbee Hall, 18 March 1999)

Since then, there has been a raft of major policy developments in the area of child poverty culminating in the Child Poverty Act (2010).

*"Some policies pre-dated the Blair announcement, for example tax credits and the minimum wage... however the pledge shifted the emphasis on redistribution of cash to families with children, cementing the focus on work for lone parents and a range of other policies like Sure Start... Prior to the announcement, this had not been woven together into a 'narrative'". (Lobbyist)*

---

<sup>10</sup> HM Treasury., (1997) The modernisation of Britain's tax and benefit system: Employment opportunity in a changing labour market (Pre-Budget Publications, No. 1)

<sup>11</sup> Sutherland, H (2001), The National Minimum Wage and In-work Poverty Microsimulation Unit Discussion Paper MU0102

<sup>12</sup> Labour party, New Labour because Britain deserves better, 1997

### **Defining and measuring child poverty**

*“A key challenge during this time was trying to pin down the measure of child poverty. Getting the measure right and the data took about 5-6 years – it was about the baseline”. (Independent researcher)*

Following the announcement Carey Oppenheim of the Institute for Public Policy Research (ippr) was asked to convene a research group to look into aspects of defining and measuring child poverty. In 2001 she led a joint ippr/Treasury event which brought together academics such as Cathy Silver, John Hills and Jane Waldfogel with the Treasury to discuss child poverty. This group produced *‘Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation Document* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2003)’, which set out options for measuring child poverty.

*Measuring Child Poverty* set out the three indicators that the Labour government used to monitor its progress against the target of eradicating child poverty:

- Absolute low income, or the number of families living under a particular threshold
- Relative low income, i.e. families living below 60% of the contemporary median household income
- Material deprivation and low income combined, incorporating indicators of living standards<sup>13</sup>.

This focus on the metrics of defining and measuring child poverty in terms of an income distribution measure can be tracked back through the academic research to the seminal work of Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith in the 1960s and their analysis of the Ministry of Labour’s Family Expenditure Survey data.<sup>14</sup> Tony Atkinson was writing as early as 1987 on the needs to have targets on poverty that agreed ways of measuring them<sup>15</sup>. While prior to the announcement to eradicate to child poverty Paul Gregg with Steven Machin and others wrote a series of articles (1998-99) relating to the measurement of child poverty based on an econometric study of large-scale micro-economic data sources<sup>16</sup>.

*“There was a push to widen the definition of poverty so that it was not based solely on income levels. (Think Tank Director)*

---

<sup>13</sup> Poverty: The Outcomes for Children (Bradshaw, 2000) examined the concept of indicators for child poverty in-depth and recommended that the existing indicators used by the Department for Work and Pensions in Opportunity for All Child Poverty Indicators be expanded to include multi-dimensional indicators of well-being: physical, cognitive, behavioural and emotional. Some of these, such as child mortality rates were later included. Although in 2003 child poverty targets were linked with income levels only, the three tier approach, described in ‘Measuring Child Poverty’, included the material deprivation measure.

<sup>14</sup> Abel-Smith, B. & Townsend, P. “The Poor and the Poorest: a new analysis of the Ministry of Labour’s Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953–4 and 1960”. Occasional Papers on Social Administration No.17, Bell, 1965

<sup>15</sup> Atkinson, T (1987) On the Measurement of Poverty, in *Econometrica*, Vol. 55, No. 4 , pp. 749-764

<sup>16</sup> Gregg, P., Harkness, S and Machin, S (1999) Child development and family income: JRF; an, Gregg, P, Harkness, S & Machin, S (1998) Poor Kids: Trends in Child Poverty in Britain, 1968–96 in *Fiscal Studies* (1998) vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 163–187

The academic research continued to explore the definition and measurement of poverty as the income based approach passed into law with the Child Poverty Act. Research to establish a minimum income standard for each type of family was developed for the Joseph Rowntree Fund by Bradshaw et al (2008). This was based on self-definitions of poverty and what members of the public think is necessary to reach a socially acceptable standard of living.

The consensual or 'self-defined' approach to measuring poverty was pioneered in the 1983 Breadline Britain survey (repeated in 1990), and also supported by JRF.<sup>17</sup> The minimum incomes standard differs to the methods of 'perceived deprivation' in moving beyond associations between income and deprivation by seeking to establish the level of income people which need to avoid poverty. The standard did not intend to replace existing poverty measures but acts as a benchmark to interpret them by contributing to debates and discussions about poverty in Britain and, hence, informing the development of policy designed to combat it.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Early years and children's well being***

*Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality: The Evidence* (HM Treasury 1998) identified that growing up in poverty was a "key factor in determining what adult experience, especially in the labour market will be" and implied that early years intervention would help improve children's life chances and break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. This was another strand of policy development, which relates to the wider child poverty agenda and was influenced by the work of Jonathan Bradshaw and Tess Ridge.

Following the Treasury's review there was a large increase in resources for a range of provision including childcare, maternity care and family nursing. Sure Start was a flagship policy initiative which was imported and uniquely evidenced by the research from the Head Start programme in the United States. Originating with HM Treasury, Sure Start aimed to give children of "the best possible start in life" through improvement of childcare, early education, health and family support, with an emphasis on outreach and community development. The programme was originally intended to support families in deprived areas, from pregnancy until children were four years old. The initiative was later extended to cover a wider group including children and young people up to age fourteen, or sixteen for those with disabilities.

Other key policies followed. The Child Trust Fund, a savings and investment account for children, was introduced in 2004. This policy formed part of a broader engagement with 'asset-based welfare', the view that the stock of assets that an individual owns is an important element of their individual welfare and well-being (Sherraden 1991; Bynner and Paxton 2001). In the view of one stakeholder, *'the Child Trust fund was driven by John Bynner at the Institute of Education'*. The

---

<sup>17</sup> The Breadline Britain survey follows the deprivation approach to measuring poverty by looking at direct measures of living standards rather than indirect income measures. But in this approach, deprivation is seen in terms of an enforced lack of 'necessities' as determined by public opinion. The survey has since been developed and refined, in particular through the Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE) survey in 1999. It forms the basis of the current Poverty and Social Exclusion survey to be carried out in 2011.

<sup>18</sup> A minimum income standard for Britain: what people think, Jonathan Bradshaw, Sue Middleton, Abigail Davis, et al. 1 July 2008

publication 'Effect of Assets on Life Chances' in John Bynner and Will Paxton, eds, *The Asset-Effect* (London, IPPR, 2001) and the work of IPPR more generally is recognised as important in developing the evidence base for this policy. "It would be impossible to overstate the leadership and contributions of the Institute for Public Policy Research in informing and shaping this new policy direction in the United Kingdom"<sup>19</sup>

In 2003 the Green Paper, *Every Child Matters*, linked the relief of child poverty to benefits for society as a whole, including reduced public spending and maximising the contribution of all citizens, including those who grew up in poverty<sup>20</sup>. This led to the Children's Act 2004, which ensures that all policy initiatives aimed at children must fulfil one or more of five outcomes: that all children should be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being.

### ***Integrating child poverty policies***

At the same time a number of policy developments concentrated on the difficulties faced by both local and central government in providing an integrated approach to the wide range of public services that could contribute to better outcomes for children and help eradicate child poverty. To this end the Government established the Child Poverty Unit (2007) to work across government and provide a single point of contact on child poverty issues.

*Ending Child Poverty: Making it Happen* (Child Poverty Unit, 2008) provided the key building blocks for the Government's Child Poverty Strategy, arranged in four groups:

- Education, health and family
- Housing, neighbourhoods and communities
- Adult skills and employment
- Financial support.

*City Survivors: Bringing Up Children in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods* (Power, 2007) had recommended an integrated approach to services based on early intervention to meet families' social, educational, health and practical needs. *Health Inequalities: Progress and Next Steps* (2008), Department of Health, used schooling to intervene on health and changing the behaviour of children of low income parents. Further support for this strategy can be found in *New Opportunities, Fair Chances for the Future* (2009) which introduced increased funding for schools in order to provide extended services to disadvantaged families and the *Marmot Review* (2010) also supported integrating health care and other services for families to reduce poverty and child poverty.

---

<sup>19</sup> Finlayson A (2008), "Characterizing New Labour: the case of the Child Trust Fund", *Public Administration* 86(1): 95-110

<sup>20</sup> *Every Child Matters* Green Paper (2003), Department for Education and Skills Children's Act 2004

## Meeting the target

The Child Poverty Act obtained Royal Assent on 25 March 2010 and enshrines in law the Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty. Some stakeholders have suggested that the legislation was required to ensure delivery against the target and that this was largely in response to the recommendations put forward by Lisa Harker (2006)<sup>21</sup> and emerging research from Donald Hirsch<sup>22</sup>; the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS); and others that indicated it would not be achieved otherwise.

The Act sets four challenging UK-wide targets to be met by 2020. Together, these targets provide a clear vision and definition of what ending child poverty means. These targets are based on the proportion of children living in:

- Relative low income (whether the incomes of the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole) - target is less than 10%
- Combined low income and material deprivation (a wider measure of people's living standards) - target is less than 5%
- Absolute low income (whether the poorest families are seeing their income rise in real terms) - target is less than 5%
- Persistent poverty (length of time in poverty) - target is to be set in regulation by 2015.

### 4.4 The current policy landscape: Coalition Government, 2010-

The Coalition maintained the goal to end child poverty by 2020 in their programme for government and reiterated its support for the statutory responsibility to develop a Child Poverty Strategy, which was published in April 2011, entitled *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the Causes of Disadvantage and Transforming Families' Lives*<sup>23</sup>.

The priority for the Coalition Government is to manage the fiscal deficit and rebalance the economy. The impacts of the spending cuts announced in the Emergency Budget in June and the Corporate Spending Review in October 2010, have already been felt in this policy area. The removal of the Child Trust Fund, Educational Maintenance Allowance and the universal entitlement to child benefit were amongst the first cuts announced<sup>24</sup>.

Education is seen as one of most important areas of reform, with the introduction of the 'pupil premium' as a way of ensuring increased funding for the education of

---

<sup>21</sup> Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take? A report for the Department for Work and Pensions, Lisa Harker, 2006

<sup>22</sup> What will it take to end child poverty? A report for the JRF by Donald Hirsch, 2006, which estimated that meeting the target would require an additional £4 billion of public spending.

<sup>23</sup> Cm 8061, Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education; note that this document was published subsequent to the completion of our research and is not reviewed in detail in this report.

<sup>24</sup> Note that the Government subsequently announced the introduction of a replacement for the Educational Maintenance Allowance.

deprived pupils (indicated by eligibility for Free School Meals)<sup>25</sup>. Welfare is also an important area of reform and the Government's proposed Universal Credit will impact on workless households with children. The White Paper *Universal Credit: Welfare that Works* (Cm 7951, Department for Work and Pensions, November 2010) argues that the complexity of the existing benefit system provides inadequate work incentives for a range of welfare recipients, including parents of young children. The Universal Credit is intended to address this perceived problem by merging out-of-work benefits with in-work support, backed up by stronger conditionality requirements to ensure that benefit claimants take all reasonable steps to find and retain employment<sup>26</sup>.

The Centre for Social Justice, set up by Ian Duncan-Smith, has introduced a new approach to conceptualising poverty and which the Minister of State has outlined in terms of the five pathways to poverty: family breakdown; drug and alcohol addiction; failed education; debt and the fifth, worklessness and dependency.

*'All of these areas interact. For example we know from the evidence that the children of a broken home are 75% more likely to fail at school, 70% more likely to become drug addicted, 50% more likely to become alcoholics, 40% more likely to be in debt and 35% more likely to become unemployed.'*<sup>27</sup>

Challenges to the child poverty targets as set out in the Child Poverty Act have emerged. The Policy Exchange has questioned the validity of the relative target and the need for a new approach to child poverty.<sup>28</sup> Frank Field's poverty review has concluded that the UK needs to address the issue in a fundamentally different way. It is family background, parental education, good parenting and opportunities in the crucial early years that are more important than income distribution in determining positive outcomes for children. If the recommendations of the review are to be developed into future policies we can expect a refocused emphasis on early years provision like Sure Start and Children's Services, for the most disadvantaged.

*"The aim is to change the distribution of income by changing the position which children from poor backgrounds will be able to gain on merit in the income hierarchy".*<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Details are set out in *The school funding settlement for 2011-12: the pupil premium and the Dedicated Schools Grant*, Department for Education, 13 December 2010.

<sup>26</sup> This White Paper was published subsequent to the completion of our research and is not reviewed in detail in this report.

<sup>27</sup> Speech to the Heritage Foundation's Resource Bank in Atlanta, GA

<sup>28</sup> *Poverty of ambition: why we need a new approach to tackling child poverty*, Peter Saunders, Policy Exchange Research Note, 2009

<sup>29</sup> *The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances*. HMG, 2010.

## 5. Key developments in social science research on child poverty

---

### 5.1 Introduction

The second broad element of our terms of reference was to:

*Chart the key conceptual, theoretical and methodological developments in social science research and resources in this area, identifying that funded by the ESRC, before and during the timeframe outlined*

Most social science research entails a combination of theoretical and methodological developments; indeed these are inter-related and linked in many cases with advances in empirical understanding. It is difficult to make firm distinctions between these aspects of social science research advancement. However, the key focus of this study has been to identify the impacts of social research (whether theoretical, conceptual or methodological) on the conceptual underpinnings of child poverty policy in the UK<sup>30</sup>.

### 5.2 Conceptual developments

There has been a long history of social and economic research relating to poverty in the UK. Some of the key conceptual developments in the study of poverty relate to the definitional terms. Conventionally, poverty is defined in two ways:

- **Absolute poverty** is based on subsistence, a minimum standard needed to live. Seebohm Rowntree's research identified a 'poverty line' on the basis of minimum needs.<sup>31</sup> This absolute measure is still recognised by the World Bank and its commitment to abolish '£1 a day poverty' by 2015.
- **Relative poverty** is based on a comparison of poor people with others in society. A key development in this area occurred in the 1960s with the seminal work of Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith<sup>32</sup>.

The work of Peter Townsend has been fundamental to the discussion of poverty in the UK.<sup>33</sup> Having re-conceptualised poverty as a relative measure Townsend then went on to extend the concept of poverty to consider individuals as social beings, who have psychological needs to participate in a society and share in its customs

---

<sup>30</sup> Note that this is not intended as a comprehensive review of all research relevant to child poverty. This has been done by a number of authors, cited throughout this report. Here we are highlighting some of the key research that is widely agreed to have had a potential or actual impact on the thinking of policy-makers.

<sup>31</sup> B S Rowntree, 1901, *Poverty: a study of town life*, Longman.

<sup>32</sup> Abel-Smith, B. & Townsend, P. "The Poor and the Poorest: a new analysis of the Ministry of Labour's Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953–4 and 1960". *Occasional Papers on Social Administration* No.17, Bell, 1965

<sup>33</sup> Peter Townsend was not funded by either the ESRC or Government during his academic career. Poverty in the UK was supported by the Joseph Rowntree Trust.

and norms. For Townsend poverty was not the lack of income necessary to purchase a basket of goods but rather the lack of resources to participate fully in society. He defines poverty as "the absence or inadequacy of those diets, amenities, standards, services and activities which are common or customary in society."<sup>34</sup>

Townsend's work was thus important in explaining poverty in terms of resources beyond the lack of income. This relates to the shift in discourse from economically income based definitions (spending power) to wider social concepts of perceived necessity, social exclusion and the effects of poverty on different groups in society. The combination of income and deprivation measures has subsequently been taken forward by a number of ESRC funded academics and others, notably through the work of Jonathan Bradshaw.

Townsend's work also helped to explain poverty in terms of inequalities in the structure of society. This enabled a structural understanding of a system that constrained and impacted on individuals, rather than poverty being a product of individual pathology, or wrongful choices. Poverty experts and campaigners welcomed this definition as identifying a very real issue facing Britain. However, there remained a tension between the 'individualistic' explanations and structural concepts of poverty.

*"The main debates in the 1980s were between the 'behavioural discourse' and those who emphasised 'structural' explanations for poverty". (Lobbyist)*

The ideas associated with poverty as one of individual failing were given prominence during the early nineties by the developing debate about an emerging 'underclass'. This term made its way into the British political, academic and media lexicon via the United States and the work of Charles Murray<sup>35</sup>. Murray's first essay (1990) discusses the concept of a British 'underclass' in general terms, relating it to trends in 'illegitimacy', crime and unemployment. His second essay (1994) is primarily pre-occupied with 'illegitimacy', marriage and the state of the British family.

Ruth Lister in her introduction to 'Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate' reveals how the association between an 'underclass' and the behaviour of its members prompted much of the controversy around those who subscribe to the 'underclass' thesis. Lister suggests that it is an association with long historical antecedents and one that has surfaced in various guises over the years.

### 5.3 Theoretical developments

A number of other developments have served to underpin observations and analyses of the causes and effects of child poverty in the UK. These include the debates regarding income based approaches to defining and measuring poverty

---

<sup>34</sup> Townsend, P. (1979), *Poverty in the United Kingdom*, Harmondsworth: Allen Lane

<sup>35</sup> In 1989 Murray had been invited to the UK by The Sunday Times to search for the 'underclass'. He returned four years later to warn that the underclass was deepening. His two essays are reproduced by the IEA Health and Welfare Unit in association with The Sunday Times London, 1996. This edition 'Charles Murray and the Underclass: The Developing Debate' includes: commentaries on Murray's first paper by Frank Field, Joan C. Brown, Alan Walker and Nicholas; four commentaries on Murray's second paper by Pete Alcock, Miriam David, Melanie Phillips; a new introduction by Professor Ruth Lister and a statistical update by Alan Buckingham.

compared with wider material resources and indices of wellbeing; the various predictors of poverty including labour market dynamics, individual and area based factors; and the effects of intergenerational poverty.

### **5.3.1 Measuring child poverty**

Some of the issues with which social researchers were engaged during this period relate to the measurement of child poverty including:

- Whether to include a range of indicators that can measure different aspects of childhood poverty, for example, an Index of Child Wellbeing (Bradshaw and Richardson, 2009) or a single relative low-income measure (i.e. 60% of median income) that is internationally recognised and can be benchmarked<sup>36</sup>.
- How to define income itself. Bradshaw et al (2008) devised a minimum income standard for Britain which developed and refined the Consensual Budget Standards methodology, and shows the cost of covering basic goods and services for different household types<sup>37</sup>.
- The relationship between low income and deprivation. The two overlap, but are not identical, as median incomes rise in a boom, or lower in a recession. This will affect a formal measure of poverty; however, this will not accurately reflect how people experience poverty, or their rising / lowering living standards.<sup>38</sup>

### **5.3.2 Labour market effects**

In the 80s and early to mid 1990s there was a perceptible shift in the research literature from poverty being a problem that comes with old age, to poverty being an issue for low income families.<sup>39</sup> Explanations for this included changes in labour market dynamics, a rise in lone parent families, and changes to welfare structures.

Paul Gregg's work with Wadsworth in 1996 examined changes in labour market trends such as rising wage inequality and polarisation of working households.<sup>40</sup> Their work was important in developing a shift in the discourse from workless individuals to workless households. This focus has helped to understand the position of children in workless households, intergenerational mobility and the drivers of social disadvantage.

Research on the experience of lone parent families and the role of women's income were also developed in this time, led by researchers such as Jane Waldfogel<sup>41</sup>. This

---

<sup>36</sup> Poverty: The Outcomes for Children (Bradshaw, 2000) makes the case for measuring poverty as a multi-dimensional concept, and criticises the indicators published in Opportunity for all as being too narrow

<sup>37</sup> A minimum income standard for Britain: what people think, Jonathan Bradshaw, Sue Middleton, Abigail Davis, et al. 1 July 2008

<sup>38</sup> Professor John Hills, Director of CASE and Professor of Social Policy at the LSE comments, in 'Measuring Child Poverty: a consultation' 2002, Department for Work and Pensions

<sup>39</sup> Bradbury, B, and Jantti, M, (1999), Child Poverty across Industrialized Nations, UNICEF, (p2

<sup>40</sup> Paul Gregg, Jonathan Wadsworth, (1996), Mind the Gap

<sup>41</sup> See papers such as Waldfogel J, (1995), Women Working for Less: A Longitudinal Analysis of the Family Gap. (Version to be published in Oxford Economic Papers, vol.47 ; Waldfogel, J (1996), What do we expect Lone Mothers to do? Competing agendas for welfare reform in the United States

was important in challenging political messages about single mothers in receipt of welfare, and re-centring discussion on the rights of the children. Jane Waldfogel was involved in the policy development process, for example, writing reviews in relation to the National Childcare Strategy.

While much of the focus from policy interventions for child poverty has been on moving parents into work, one aspect that has had some attention in ESRC funded research is the issue of the in-work poor. Lucinda Platt in *Ethnicity and Child Poverty* (2009) highlights the issues of the in-work poor relating to job quality, career progression and retention and employer discrimination. Platt also highlights the greater risk that some ethnic groups have of being in-work poor.

### **5.3.3 The experience and dynamics of poverty**

Robert Walker was influential in this field with books such as 'Poverty Dynamics: Issues and Examples'<sup>42</sup>. Walker's main interests are the development of welfare policies in Britain and the uses of these to alleviate poverty. His work contributed to the debates on welfare, including the measurement of poverty. Walker has championed evidence-based policy making and edited a CASE/HMT report featuring John Hills and Stephen Jenkins. This was based on a HM Treasury seminar, chaired by John Hills prior to the 'Blair announcement'.<sup>43</sup>

Tess Ridge has been particularly important in developing qualitative child focused studies that look at what poverty is like for children experiencing it, including children in lone parent households, and how they see parents' income. In shaping this agenda, Ridge has argued the importance of understanding children's experiences of poverty as vital for the success of policies aimed at alleviating this problem<sup>44</sup>.

Smith and Middleton's (2007) in their review of poverty dynamics research examined:

- Movements above and below the poverty threshold and the experience of persistent poverty (most people who enter poverty leave quickly)
- Intergenerational effects (poverty in one generation increases the chances of poverty in the next)
- The importance of unemployment as a cause of poverty<sup>45</sup>.

### **5.3.4 Poverty and place**

The connections between poverty and place and the spatial concentrations of poverty have been a focus for many researchers and policy makers. For example, Tess Ridge has written about the isolating effects of poverty in rural communities (*Living with Poverty*, 2008). The Commission for Rural Communities and the Joseph

---

<sup>42</sup> Walker, R. with Ashworth, K. (1994) *Poverty Dynamics: Issues and Examples*, Aldershot: Avebury

<sup>43</sup> *Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality: The Evidence* Proceedings from a workshop held at HM Treasury, chaired by Professor John Hills, Director of the ESRC Research Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, LSE 17th and 18th November 1998

<sup>44</sup> Ridge, T, (2002) *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a child's perspective*

<sup>45</sup> Smith, N && Middleton, S (2007) *A review of poverty dynamics research in the UK*: JRF

Rowntree Trust have both commissioned research from academics on poverty, some of which has touched on poverty relating to children, and highlighted different sets of experiences to those reported in the urban research.<sup>46</sup>

Area based poverty effects have been explored since the development of the Indices of Deprivation in the mid 1970s. The extent to which people in deprived areas suffer more from the effects of their poverty than people on low income in more affluent areas was explored in depth by Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) in their study *Disentangling Area Effects: Evidence from Deprived and Non-Deprived Neighbourhoods*. Qualitative responses to cluster poverty affects were developed in *City Survivors: Bringing Up Children in Disadvantaged Neighbourhoods* (Power, 2007) which looked at the experience of poor housing, environmental disrepair, poor services, few economic opportunities and a lack of transport connectivity to services outside the area.

## 5.4 Methodological developments

Methodological developments in social science – both quantitative and qualitative – have advanced greatly since the mid-nineties with the computational power of data analysis. In the field of statistical and econometric analysis this has enabled large and multiple datasets to be utilised in the investigation of poverty dynamics.

### 5.4.1 Longitudinal datasets and cohort analysis

The comparatively recent availability of extensive longitudinal datasets has enabled researchers to develop new methods in analysing poverty dynamics, including the analysis of the length and frequency of spells, which has added to an understanding of the complexity of poverty.<sup>47</sup> Household Panel Studies have become the leading survey type for cross-national longitudinal research and began with the Panel Study of Income Dynamics in the United States. The ESRC funded British Household Panel Survey, initiated in 1991 as part of this widening agenda, continues to provide an essential dataset for the analysis of poverty in the UK.

The longitudinal research enabled by ESRC datasets contains both dynamic studies and point in time studies. These datasets have supported research in poverty dynamics that have been funded directly by ESRC, for example Hill and Jenkins (1999)<sup>48</sup>, as well as research commissioned by government, for example, Jenkins and Rigg (2001)<sup>49</sup>.

The usefulness of longitudinal datasets in understanding income dynamics, life cycle trajectories, and inter-generational inequality was recognised in the CASE summary report of the HM Treasury workshop, *Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality: The Evidence* (1998). Several of the papers included in this volume report results drawn from ESRC funded datasets including the British Household Panel Survey, the

---

<sup>46</sup> The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2003) Rural Child Poverty Briefing Paper, End Child Poverty, NCH and Forum for Rural Children and Young People

<sup>47</sup> Walker, R. with Ashworth, K. (1994) *Poverty Dynamics: Issues and Examples*, Aldershot: Avebury.

<sup>48</sup> Hill, M & Jenkins, S. (1999) *Poverty among British children, chronic or transitory?* ISER

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, S.P. and Rigg, J. (2001), *The Dynamics of Poverty in Britain*, DWP Research Report No. 157, Department of Work and Pensions. Leeds: CDS.

National Child Development Study, the Labour Force Survey and others which are curated by and accessible from the Data Archive at Essex University.

The UK Longitudinal Studies Centre (ULSC) is the national resource centre for promoting longitudinal research and for the design, management and support of longitudinal surveys and was established by the ESRC as independent centre in 1999. This resource has been important in supporting policy makers in designing interventions to move people out of poverty, for example in *Realising Potential: Developing Personalised Conditionality and Support - A Discussion Paper on Next Steps in Implementing the Gregg Review* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2009).

Comparative studies of child poverty across the EU also served to develop understanding of child poverty in the UK. Papers by authors such as Bradshaw<sup>50</sup>, and from the UNICEF Innocenti research centre using the Luxemburg Income Study<sup>51</sup> highlighted the UK's relatively poor rating for child poverty in an industrialised country. This helped to create political pressure on the government to both make and keep the 1999 Blair announcement.

#### 5.4.2 Qualitative methods

The ESRC Children 5-16 Research Programme ran from 1997 to 2000. The Programme was based around the new sociology of childhood that focused on the qualitative experience of childhood. Designed to illuminate the middle period of childhood and the nature and quality of children's family and social lives, the research projects generated through this programme have directly impacted on, for example, the lives of mothers and children affected by domestic violence. The research informed debates that resulted in amendments to the Children Act 1989 and has also influenced policy initiatives such as Every Child Matters.

The ESRC 5-16 Programme represented a new child-focused approach, and in taking this agenda further forward, Tess Ridge in discussing some of the methodological insights to her work 'Living with Poverty' (2009) for DWP, explains how, "*Qualitative research with adults and especially children who are experiencing poverty is still a relatively new and developing field*".<sup>52</sup> Methods deployed include in-depth interviews, focus groups, action research, discourse theory and observation. Advances in computer aided qualitative analysis have also enabled a systematic interaction between theory and data. Tess Ridge is recognised as an expert in qualitative child-centred research, from a subjective perspective. Her longitudinal research with low-income children and their families (a five year study with Jane Millar) was conducted in three waves, the first two of which were funded by ESRC. DWP were so interested in the study and its implications for their lone parents welfare programme that they commissioned the third and final wave.

---

<sup>50</sup> Bradshaw, Jonathan, John Ditch, Hilary Holmes, and Peter Whiteford (1993) 'Support for Children: A Comparison of Arrangements in Fifteen Countries'. Research Report, No. 21. UK Department of Social Security.

<sup>51</sup> Bradbury, Bruce and Jäntti, Markus (1999), 'Child Poverty across Industrialized Nations'. Innocenti Occasional Papers, Economic and Social Policy Series, no. 71. Florence: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.

<sup>52</sup> Ridge, T (2009) *Living with Poverty*, Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report No. 594

### 5.4.3 The role of evaluation in evidence-based policy making

Social science researchers have played a key role in undertaking evaluations of policy interventions, particularly since 1997 and the New Labour Government's implementation of Welfare to Work policies. ESRC-funded academics, such as Paul Gregg have undertaken evaluations of Government programmes utilising data made available through the ESRC data archive. For example, Gregg and Harkness (2003) evaluated the impact of WFTC on lone parent employment rates, earnings and hours of work; this was one of the first attempts to look at the impact of the reform.<sup>53</sup>

Brewer and Gregg (2002) have identified problems associated with evaluating the impacts of financial resources on child poverty outcomes. *'In mainstream policy areas, Britain has not developed as strong an experimental and evaluation culture as the US'*.<sup>54</sup> Random assignment methods were utilised in the Government's pilot for the Employment, Retention and Advancement Demonstrator but this is a rare example.<sup>55</sup>

There is an ideal model of implementing policy change that starts with a pilot programme, which is then evaluated, and, depending on the results of evaluation, rolled out nationally. This often does not happen, due to the long timescales needed to complete this process, however, there are notable examples in the last 15 years where evaluation has driven the implementation of policy, including the early evaluation in 2000 of the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP).<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Gregg, P and Harkness, S (2003) Welfare reform and lone parent's employment in the UK, CMPO Working Paper Series No. 03/072

<sup>54</sup> Brewer, M and Gregg, P (2002) Eradicating Child Poverty in Britain: Welfare Reform and Children since 1997, Institute for Fiscal Studies, CMPO The University of Bristol

<sup>55</sup> In 2003 the DWP introduced a new pilot initiative to improve the job retention and advancement of individuals who had newly entered work from benefits. The Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Demonstration made a significant contribution to the process of evidence-based policymaking in Britain by testing the effectiveness of the intervention as a large-scale, multi-site, random assignment social experiment. The randomisation ensured that both participants in the pilot and those from the control groups shared the same baseline characteristics. The evaluation, funded by DWP, was conducted by a consortia including: the IFS; the US MDRC; the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and the Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

<sup>56</sup> Lessof, C., Miller, M., Phillips, M., Pickering, K., Purdon, S. and Hales, J., New Deal For Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the Quantitative Survey, (2003a). National Centre for Social Research, DWP Research Report

## 6. Development of child poverty discourse

---

### 6.1 Introduction

The third element of the terms of reference for this study was to:

*Make an assessment of and identify how the different threads of discourse in this area have developed over time and in doing so identify key/seminal research studies that have informed its development.*

### 6.2 Political discourse

In considering the broad time frame for tracking the changing discourse in this area it is clear that the announcement to abolish child poverty, in 1999, is a defining moment. Certainly from this point there is an immediate and identifiable shift in the language – as poverty is reintroduced into mainstream politics – but also in the pace of policy development and the use of underpinning research evidence to support this, as we have identified above.

*“There was a change from an evolution of welfare to a specific focus on poverty after the ‘99 statement, a change in both rhetoric and policy”. (Academic researcher)*

The pledge certainly seemed to surprise public commentators as well as those closest to Government, including advisors and policy makers alike. It is, however, clear that the Labour Government had already signalled their political commitment to this agenda both in opposition and during the early years of their first administration. The Labour Party had successfully campaigned with slogans of ‘Breadline Britain’ and ‘Britain Deserves Better’ during the 1997 election. By 1999 the Government was already well focused on ‘work as the best route out of poverty’ – a consistent mantra throughout three terms of government - and with policies to assist families and children through employment programmes, early years initiatives, income transfers and tax credits.

We can see how these policies had been formulated and developed by Labour during opposition in the 1990s and how the Social Justice Commission, recognised a new language that talked of social exclusion, an emerging narrative within European research and policy and particularly through the European Commission, which although not focused on child poverty was specifically interested in different excluded groups. This European influence can be found in later Labour Government legislation, and resulted in the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit in the year of their election, 1997.

The discourse of ‘exclusion’ was in stark contrast to mainstream UK policy at the time where poverty, at least in an absolute sense, was understood by the Conservative Government to have been eradicated from British society.<sup>57</sup> The politically dominant discourse focused not on the degree of poverty but the type of poverty. In this context the causes of poverty were attributed primarily to individual failings and a welfare state that had become associated with dependency and fraud.

---

<sup>57</sup> John Moore (Secretary of State for Social Services) had famously declared the ‘end of the line for poverty’ in a speech at St. Stephen’s Club, 11<sup>th</sup> May 1989

These ideas were debated during the early nineties in the context of an emerging ‘underclass’ theory (Murray, 1990 and 1994) which in its origins focused on behaviour as both the cause and defining characteristic of poverty.

From a highly polarised and problematised political discourse around poverty between the Conservative Governments of the 1980s and 1990s and the Labour opposition we can now (2011) observe a relative consensus across political parties. This debate recognises the existence of poverty in British society and the need to do something about it, although there are now clearly articulated differences in how this should be achieved. The Conservative Party signed up to the Child Poverty target in 2006 and all the main parties included the pledge in their 2010 election manifestos.

The new Coalition Government has maintained the goal to end child poverty by 2020, although the debate has now strongly focused on the political imperative to reduce the deficit and the need for welfare reform. Disagreement between political parties has concentrated on the severity of plans to reduce the deficit and whether the Coalition’s policies are ‘progressive’ or ‘fair’ in their impact upon low income families.

Ian Duncan-Smith the Minister of State has defined the five pathways to poverty as: family breakdown; drug and alcohol addiction; failed education; debt and the fifth, worklessness and dependency. This approach differs from Labour’s in the degree of emphasis placed on family breakdown and personal responsibility.

A sense of continuity and conflict between past and present UK child poverty policies are evident in the reaction to Frank Field’s poverty review.<sup>58</sup> This review has concluded that the UK needs to address the issue of child poverty in a fundamentally different way. And that it is family background, parental education, good parenting and opportunities in the crucial early years that are more important than money in determining positive outcomes for children. While consistent with the policies of Every Child Matters and early years initiatives such as Sure Start and Children’s Services, the review is critical of heavy investments in income transfers and tax credits.

### 6.3 The influence of research on political discourse

By the time of the 1999 announcement the academic community and poverty lobby groups were already well availed of the problems with widening income and equality gaps in the UK. As one academic remarked, *‘In terms of the academic discourse the debate was long over’*.

In the late 1950s it was widely believed that with the welfare state, National Health Service, and new prosperity following the war, poverty was no longer a serious social problem in Britain, a view exemplified by then Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s famous ‘never had it so good’ speech in 1957<sup>59</sup>. As we have discussed it took sociologists such as Peter Townsend and Brian Abel-Smith to ‘re-discover’

---

<sup>58</sup> The Foundation Years: preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances. HMG, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/20/newsid\\_3728000/3728225.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/20/newsid_3728000/3728225.stm)

poverty in the 1960s and focus the attention on poverty in the UK and a modern western societies as a relative term.<sup>60</sup>

This recognition of poverty as a very real problem was partly brought forward by lobby groups and collaborations of researchers and social workers. One relevant and influential group was the Child Poverty Action Group that was established in 1965. This focused on family poverty through the work of founders such as Harriet C. Wilson (author of *Delinquency and Child Neglect*, 1962; and, *Poverty in Britain Today*, 1964), Peter Townsend, Brian Abel-Smith, Tony Lynes, Frank Field and others. These researchers and practitioners championed the empirical research of poverty as a new and exciting field, and linked it to pervasive problems of poor health and economic inactivity.

Despite some success and influence upon family policies through the 1970s the impact of the prevailing academic poverty discourse on public policy was limited during the period of successive governments between 1979 and 1997. As we have discussed there was less debate within government or specific policies to ameliorate poverty during this time, than in future years. However, the research evidence was starting to have an impact on political discourse.

*“Looking back to the 90’s the research was starting to show that the rising tide wasn’t lifting all ships. By the time New Labour came in it was established that widening inequality was systematic.” (Academic researcher)*

The early and mid- nineties was notable for a number of research commissions including the Social Justice Commission, launched by John Smith, which we discuss above, and another convened by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The Inquiry Group, chaired by Sir Peter Barclay, created a series of research findings that were reported on in 1995<sup>61</sup>. This commission was important in sustaining and developing the poverty discourse and was significant in its findings, that:

- Children had a higher risk of poverty
- The gaps between rich and poor were widening in UK
- Social security slowed the growth of inequality in the early 1980s, but had not since
- The tax system had much the same impact in reducing inequality in 1992 as in 1977.
- The incomes of certain ethnic minority groups are well below the national average and a large proportion of their populations lived in areas of deprivation.
- At ward level, the already substantial differences between deprived and affluent neighbourhoods grew further over the 1980s, exacerbated by the effect of tenure concentration and council estates.

These reports provided vital evidence for subsequent discussion and policy development in tax credits, welfare reform, area-based initiatives and child poverty. The JRF Child Poverty Research Programme, launched in 2005, continued to develop

---

<sup>60</sup> Abel-Smith, B. & Townsend, P. “The Poor and the Poorest: a new analysis of the Ministry of Labour’s Family Expenditure Surveys of 1953–4 and 1960”. Occasional Papers on Social Administration No.17, Bell, 1965

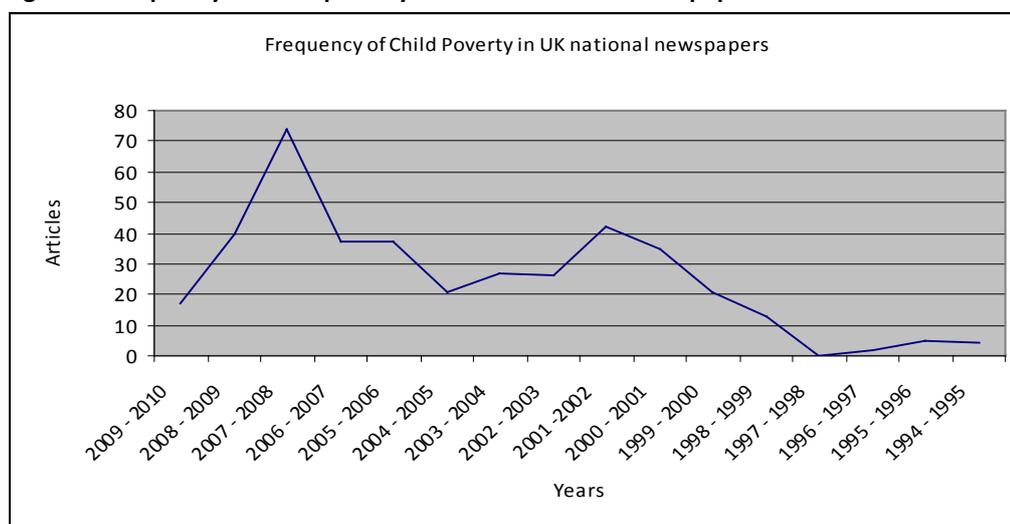
<sup>61</sup> Summary of the Income and wealth: Report of the JRF Inquiry Group, the Inquiry Group, 1995

the academic discourse in this area with a clear remit to inform policy development<sup>62</sup>. Together with important contributions from ESRC-funded researchers and institutions the body of evidence to help define, measure and achieve the Government’s child poverty target was accelerated.

#### 6.4 Media discourse<sup>63</sup>

Our analysis of the printed media (over a 16 year period from 1994 to 2010) has identified that prior to the 1999 announcement there had been relatively little coverage of child poverty. We can see from Figure 1, below, that the peaks in newspaper articles broadly correspond to public debate about child poverty stimulated by political discourse, policy development, research findings and the activities of lobby groups.

**Figure 1: Frequency of ‘child poverty’ in headlines of UK newspapers**



The high volume of coverage in 2001-2 relates to the momentum that was beginning to gather within the academic, policy and lobby group community about the need to define, measure and attend to the causes of child poverty. The highest peak in coverage, 2007-8, corresponds to an increasing awareness that the Government was unlikely to meet its target and what needed to be done to achieve it. Across the period (1997 – 2010) we can identify three significant narratives.

##### 6.4.1 Eradicate, end, equality (1997-1999)

This covers the period from the 1997 general election to the announcement in 1999.

<sup>62</sup> See Cambridge Policy Consultants (December 2010) *JRF Child Poverty Programme: evaluation report*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (<http://www.irf.org.uk/sites/files/irf/child-poverty-evaluation-report.pdf>), for an overview of the impact of the JRF programme on policy and practice.

<sup>63</sup> The scope of media content, which we have been able to analyse, is limited to the printed media, since it is not possible to search other sources of media (television, radio and internet) in a systematic way. We have therefore searched for newspaper articles using the Lexis Nexus media database. Using key search terms we have identified a range of articles and reviewed these to assess the changing nature of discourses around child poverty as recorded in the media. The analysis is also informed by interviews with stakeholders and an interview with Malcolm Dean, a journalist and academic who is currently writing a book on the relationship between the media and policy.

During the 1997 election campaign, political slogans like ‘*Breadline Britain*’ and ‘*Britain Deserves Better*’ became dominant in the media and the Labour Party was heralded as representing a shift in attitude towards social issues. Prior to the election, shadow social secretary Harriet Harman is quoted in the Guardian (22<sup>nd</sup> March 1997) saying that the then Government’s record on the family was *disastrous* with one in three children being brought up *on the breadline*. The Independent (16<sup>th</sup> October 1998) also uses this theme of *Breadline Britain* when describing the legacy of 18 years of Conservative government. There is, however, little coverage of child poverty as a mainstream issue during 1997 and 1998 in the national press.

Given the magnitude of the Prime Minister’s announcement in 1999 to ‘end child poverty’, the media reaction was subdued. None of the national papers carried the story on their front page, although this has been attributed to the fact that Alistair Campbell had ‘leaked’ the announcement to The Mirror as an exclusive so that they could run the story before the speech was given (Dean, 2008). Television did not really pick up on the story either. It made a fourth item for two minutes on ITN but nothing on the BBC (ibid).

An early report in The Times (March 19<sup>th</sup> 1999) suggested that the announcement was an attempt to *deflect attention from Labour’s failure to meet its original pledges on welfare reform* and that it could be achieved *in ten years not twenty*. Despite this, the media largely welcomed the commitment and regarded it as an *achievable* and *realisable* target (Independent, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1999). Other papers referred to the pledge as a *quiet revolution* and commented on the *egalitarian direction* of government. (The Mirror, Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999; The People, April 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 p.8; The Guardian, March 31<sup>st</sup> 1999; Independent, March 20<sup>th</sup> 1999). Discourses around this time promoted the idea that children are *everybody’s responsibility* (The Guardian, Sept 8<sup>th</sup> 1999, p. 1; The Guardian, March 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 p.6) and that *children are the future* (The Guardian, March 31<sup>st</sup> 1999 p.6).

The pledge to eradicate child poverty is covered in the press as a *battle, crusade* and *war*, ‘*While the Tories wage war on the poor, Labour is waging war on poverty*’ (The Mirror, Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999; The Sunday Mirror; The Independent, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1999; The People, April 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 p.8). Later in the year, the national media reported on the *shameful problem* and *scar on the nation* of child poverty (The Mirror, Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999; The Independent, July 14<sup>th</sup> 1999; The People, April 18<sup>th</sup> 1999 p.8).

Figure 2, below, provides a summary of the re-occurring language and frequency of key words in the media content searches which we have undertaken for this period. The larger fonts represent the greater use in media coverage.

Figure 2: Summary of discourses



#### 6.4.2 Promises, poverty, performance (2000-2009)

The nine-year period, following the announcement to eradicate child poverty, was characterised by coverage of the numerous attempts to define and measure the child poverty target.

##### ***The 'peak' in media coverage: 2007-2008***<sup>64</sup>

Seventy-four relevant articles were identified in the national press between 20<sup>th</sup> April 2007 and 19<sup>th</sup> April 2008. The dominant narrative during this period concerned the Labour Government *failing to meet its targets* and *breaking promises to eradicate child poverty*. These are evident in both the 'left' and 'right' leaning papers. These messages were coupled with an argument - in the left leaning press - of the need to invest funding if child poverty was to be addressed.

Newspapers considered to be either 'left' or 'right' of centre employed broadly similar commentary although newspapers towards the right were more likely to reinforce discourses around the *UK performing badly compared to other countries* and the *UK performing badly compared to previous points in history*.

Based on this sample of articles, we can see that the much of the evidence to support these discourses comes from charities, many of whom have a remit to campaign or lobby to support their mission. Barnardo's for example, are amongst the most commonly cited researchers in the sample of articles studied. A press release from Barnardo's (dated 22nd May 2007) *'It doesn't happen here: the reality of child poverty in the UK'* uses research to lobby the government to invest £3.8 billion to reach the 2010 target of halving child poverty. This appears to have been *picked up* by the press in June and July 2007. This demonstrates that the printed media responds to press releases from charities with a lobbying agenda. There is less evidence of direct responses to 'academic' research – this is probably because journalists simply *are not aware* of academic research unless it is bought to their attention.

Of all the articles which cite 'Child Poverty' in the headline 26% also cite the word 'research', although within these articles there are no references to the terms 'ESRC' or 'Economic and Social Research Council'. The more prominent and frequently mentioned research cited includes that supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and that carried out by the Institute of Fiscal Studies.

---

<sup>64</sup> Appendix II provides further detail on the printed media analysed during this period and the reference to specific research cited.

**Figure 3: Number of newspaper articles 2007-2008**

Name of paper	Number with Child Poverty in the Headline	Within this, number with 'research' in the article
The Guardian	32	6
Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	7	2
The Daily Telegraph	7	2
The Independent	6	3
The Mirror and The Sunday Mirror	6	1
The Times	6	4
The Express	5	0
News International Newspapers Information Services Ltd	2	0
The Observer	2	1
Independent on Sunday	1	0
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>19</b>

In March 2008 The Work and Pensions Committee, published *The best start in life?* This coincided with a peak in media coverage. The report recognised the prevailing public attitude at the time stating that '*we are aware that public sympathy for the poor in the United Kingdom is at low level and that there is an assumption that poverty is not a problem in the UK*' and explicitly thanked a number of academics (including Professor Jonathan Bradshaw and Professor Gill Scott) for their advisory contributions. A number of other academics, charity and think tank representatives were 'witnesses' for the inquiry. External research is commonly cited in the report including Save the Children's *Severe Poverty in the UK* report and IFS research for the JRF which forecasts the extra spending (an additional £4 billion of public spending) required to meet the target.

The report also draws upon feedback from the BBC Radio 4 programme 'You and Yours' on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2008 (p.12-13) which critiqued the child poverty target. This indicates the role the media, and Radio 4 in particular, has on contributing to the debate.

#### **6.4.3 Campaign, coalition, cuts (2010)**

During 2010 (from the 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2010 to 31st August 2010) there was significant coverage of poverty (and child poverty) in the media reporting of the General Election. This included discussion of the 'ideologies' of the new Coalition Government, the implications of public sector spending cuts and the Labour Leadership contest.

#### ***The 2010 Election campaign***

Pre-election, coverage focused on the success that Labour have had with regards to addressing child poverty with Jane Waldfogel's book 'Britain's War on Poverty' referenced in the Guardian (24<sup>th</sup> March 2010). The Times published an article by author J.K. Rowling, critiquing Conservative policy, stating that its rebranding as '*no longer the nasty party*', is actually guise for the party to minimise the role of the welfare state to the detriment of children in poverty (14<sup>th</sup> April 2010). The day before the General Election (5<sup>th</sup> May 2010), the Guardian published a commentary on the way in which Child Poverty has been covered during the campaigns. The article states that Conservative policy will not truly address the real challenges faced by families and advocates the role of redistribution. The article summarises the campaigns by stating that Labour offer a *commitment* to eradicate child poverty whereby the Conservatives *aspire* to address it. Conversely, The Sun (26<sup>th</sup> March 2010) reports on *Labour's failure on poor kids* due to not achieving its goal of halving child poverty by 2010.

### **The Coalition Government**

Following the election, The Guardian observes the *loss of momentum* by the Labour Government with regards to halving child poverty by 2010 but also recognises that the new coalition government have said *very little about how it intends to improve on Labour's record* (Guardian, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2010). The Sunday Times (13<sup>th</sup> June 2010) suggests that *to cut poverty, we must cut welfare* and references lessons learned from welfare reform in the USA.

Throughout this time there is recognition in the media of the challenges associated with getting the measure right. For example, an article in The Guardian (3<sup>rd</sup> July 2010) suggests that targets should be *less aspirational and more achievable*. This particular article discusses challenges associated with *target setting* and *measuring* child poverty through the prism of Frank Field's background, a Labour MP appointed by David Cameron to examine poverty causes. The Times (11<sup>th</sup> June 2010) also covers Frank Field's appointment and makes clear that income measures, such as the current child poverty target, which sets the bar at 60 per cent of median earnings across the economy, *will not be the basis of the new calculations*.

The Coalition's Programme for Government (2010) is underpinned by principles of *freedom, fairness, responsibility* and states, '*we will ensure that fairness is at the heart of those decisions so that all those most in need are protected*' (p7). The Coalition's budget was announced on the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 against this backdrop of *fairness*. The Coalition Government also describes itself as *progressive* (p8), a discourse picked up by the media around the time the budget was announced and a term previously used extensively by Labour.

An Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report published on 25th August 2010 drew on evidence published by the Department for Work and Pensions and challenges the Coalition Government claims that the Budget was progressive and argues that the poorest families will be *hardest hit*. The launch of this report, commissioned by the End Child Poverty campaign, stimulates a media debate as to whether the Coalition budget is *progressive or regressive*.

The 'left-wing' press suggests that the *savage* austerity imposed on Britain is *unfair*. On 25<sup>th</sup> August, the IFS research was front page of the Guardian and on page 6 of

the Independent. The Guardian headline makes reference to the IFS as a *respected think tank*. The Guardian (26<sup>th</sup> August 2010 p. 30) presents the Liberal Democrat party as *unravelling the work of Liberal greats* such as Beveridge and Keynes. The left-wing media states that the coalition *brag falsely* (ibid) about the progressive nature of their policies and they have a false commitment to fairness. The coalition budget is described as *regressive* echoing the IFS research. Later in the week, The Observer (29<sup>th</sup> August 2010, p. 8) reports a letter to be sent from the heads of the Child Poverty Action Group, Barnardos, TUC, Oxfam, Save the Children and the Equality Trust which will accuse the Government of failing to put *fairness* at the heart of their agenda. The article continues to critique the coalition’s approach with particular critique of the Liberal Democrats.

The Daily Star (26<sup>th</sup> August 2010, p. 2) quotes Shadow Secretary Yvette Cooper accusing the Government of carrying out a *shocking attack on children and families* and Shadow Chancellor Alistair Darling accusing the coalition of *hitting the poorest hardest*. The Financial Times (26<sup>th</sup> August 2010) published an article authored by Nick Clegg titled *fairness should never be a numbers game*, which critiques the IFS approach and defends the coalition budget. The article reiterates the coalition commitment to fairness (*there is nothing fair about ducking decisions and burdening the next generation with debt*) and social mobility (*help people into work, which is the best and most sustainable route out of poverty*).

The ‘right-wing’ press in general supported the Government line that the budget was progressive. For example The Daily Telegraph (27<sup>th</sup> August 2010 p 29) felt that the coalition had made an excellent start and suggested that Labour’s claims of progressive policies turned out to be empty. The paper problematises the IFS research stating that the analysis is based on a comforting illusion that social outcomes can be forecast using the tax and benefits system.

### **The Labour leadership**

The contest for the Labour leadership highlights the candidates’ approaches to addressing child poverty and an article in the Guardian (12<sup>th</sup> June 2010) published David Miliband’s *challenge* to Frank Field, to commit to eradicating child poverty.

Figure 4 below provides a summary of the re-occurring language and frequency of key words in the media content searches which we have undertaken for this period. The larger fonts represent the greater use in media coverage.

**Figure 4: Summary of discourses**



## 6.5 The influencing role of the media

Stakeholders interviewed for this study expressed mixed attitudes towards the role of the media in the child poverty policy arena. The anti-poverty lobby groups and dedicated charities have used the media to promote their campaigns and research findings. However, whilst recognising the complexities of reporting on poverty issues to a mass audience some stakeholders regard media coverage as ‘crude’ and ‘simplistic’. Some described their experiences with the media, particularly during the 1980s and 90s, as being less about influencing the policy debate and more about managing and reacting to negative myths and stereotypes about poverty portrayed through the national press.

The media can play a significant role in helping to both reflect and shape public opinion in areas of social policy. In some instances the media can be more directive, for example, we have discussed how in 1989 Charles Murray first visited Britain in search of the ‘underclass’, with his observations being reported subsequently in *The Sunday Times*. For this reason, our review of media coverage has been informative in understanding the role of social science research in underpinning the developing discourse about child poverty in the UK. While specific authors, titles and funders/commissioners of research (such as ESRC) are not always named, there is evidence that research is picked up and used by the media to contribute to a wider public debate.

The media does not appear, however, to have had a significant influencing role on the development of child poverty policies. Its impact on this agenda is difficult to assess, compared to the issues of migration and asylum for example. As Malcolm Dean observed in his 2008 lecture<sup>65</sup>, *it is easier for the media to change policy if the government does not have a clear policy itself*. Despite an active and influential lobbying community in the lead up to the announcement to abolish child poverty, overall, we found no significant media pressure on this issue at this time.

Since the introduction of the child poverty target, the media have consistently reported on it, often as a proxy for the Government’s success and failure. We can see that the media reports at times when child poverty policy is uncertain, such as agreeing the measure or meeting the target during a time of public sector spending cuts.

---

<sup>65</sup> Dean, Malcom (2008) *Media Fingers in the Social Policy Pie – and the Seven Sins of the Reptiles*, The 15<sup>th</sup> Guardian Lecture

## 7. Routes of impact of research on child poverty policy

### 7.1 Introduction

Finally, our terms of reference were to:

*...identify the routes through which social science research and resources, and in particular that funded by the ESRC, has impacted conceptually on the development and framing of the Government's child poverty policies.*

The relationship between social science and policy is complex. Child poverty is itself a multifaceted policy area. There is no one policy instrument that will help to eradicate child poverty. It cuts across many government departments and policy areas - welfare, employment, education, skills, taxation - and is of central concern to a range of non-governmental bodies including charities and policy groups.

We have seen how child poverty policies have developed over a long time frame and the research which has been cited in policy documents, and by policy makers and practitioners, as having contributed to and influenced this policy agenda. This narrative highlights the non-linear, interactive and contingent relationship between research and policy making, which a number of scholars, including Sandra Nutley, Bill Solesbury, Janie Percy-Smith and Ian Sanderson have examined in some depth.<sup>66</sup>

### 7.2 Non-linear routes, attribution and time lags

Martin and Tang provide a conceptual overview of the challenges involved in assessing the economic and social benefits from publicly funded research.<sup>67</sup> They identify a number of factors which we can relate to the development of child poverty policies in the UK.

- There are limitations to a simple 'research push' understanding of the generation of policy outcomes. Some of the 'pull' factors which we have identified in relation to the development of the UK's child poverty policies include the significant lobbying role of anti-poverty charities and the influence of political parties (in government and in opposition). In this context we can see that what may be considered as knowledge can itself be politically determined in respect of underpinning ideologies and beliefs, regarding the nature and causes of poverty, and what is fair.

*"I'm sceptical about the role of research. It was a political judgement. Brown was personally committed to the target...Maybe there was a critical mass of research to give government and the civil service the confidence to enshrine the target in an Act..." (Think Tank Director)*

<sup>66</sup> See for example, Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. and Davies, H. T. O. (2007) *Using Evidence: how research can inform public services*, Policy Press, Bristol; Nutley, S., Percy-Smith, J. and Solesbury, W. (2003) *Models of research impact: a cross-sector review of literature and practice*, Learning and Skills Development Agency; Sanderson, I. (2002) 'Evaluation, policy learning and evidence-based policy making' *Public Administration*, 80(1), 1-22

<sup>67</sup> Ben, R. M, and Tang, P. *The Benefits from Publically Funded Research*, SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research, University of Sussex, 2006

- The routes of influence extend beyond the immediate outputs of specific academic research which serve to influence and shape policy developments. The stock of accumulated experience and tacit knowledge may be just as important. Individual researchers played important roles in advising government and policy makers but there is also evidence, as we discuss below, of an evolving community of researchers, policy makers, think tanks, lobby groups and practitioners within which ideas and policy were formulated.

*“There was a lot of hard work before New Labour came to power. Gordon Brown was already well appraised of the issues. People like Cary Oppenheim, with a research background for CPAG, worked in No. 10 from 1997 and would have been very influential. The announcement to eradicate child poverty was not as random as it seems.” (Lobbyist)*

- The influence of international research inputs and outputs make it difficult to attribute the impacts of national resources and investments. Many strands of the child poverty debate in the UK, and particularly welfare to work policies, have been influenced by other countries, including the United States, Europe and Australia.
- The time-lag between the completion of a piece of research and its potential impact is difficult to assess. The development of specific child poverty policies has occurred within the last 10 years but many of the underpinning concepts have been evolving over decades. Research messages can take a long time to filter through to inform new insights or understandings. This is particularly the case in considering the conceptual impact of Townsend’s research and the timescale between his early seminal works on poverty and the Child Poverty Act.

### 7.3 The role of academics in shaping the policy agenda

One of the key routes in which knowledge flows into policy development is through the explicit actions of individual academics. This can be through the direct impact of specific research outputs. We have identified a number of ESRC-funded and other researchers that have been cited in child poverty policy documents, including: John Hills, Robert Walker, Mike Brewer, Jane Waldfogel, Jonathan Bradshaw, Tess Ridge, Ruth Lister, Stephen Machin, Paul Gregg, and Lucinda Platt. However, it is difficult to demonstrate how the research cited in the policy documents has directly contributed to policy making or whether it simply correlates highly with decision-making.

We have interviewed a number of important researchers and policy makers in this field. This process has helped reveal the wider involvement of academics in the policy process. Civil servants were very conscious of ensuring that learning was shared between Government researchers and the wider research community, as well as other research programmes such as JRF. Some policy makers, particularly from DWP, sat on external research panels with academics (e.g. JRF) to help avoid duplication and to share ideas and understanding.

*“There was significant research capability in government and research teams were responsible for maintaining relationships with external researchers – organisations and individuals. They worked very closely with academics and met with prominent professors regularly”. (Government Official)*

The development of child poverty policies in the UK has involved interactive relationships between academics, political parties, think tanks, policy makers and practitioners. The wider influence of Peter Townsend's work on the formulation of child poverty policies was enabled through his life long involvement with the Child Poverty Action Group. This lobbying role was particularly important during the period when successive governments were less interested or responsive to the debate.

Many academics have contributed to the discourse through their involvement in regular summer schools (such as the LSE/DWP seminar series which ran from 1954 to 2008 and were well established) which enabled academics like Jonathan Bradshaw to present current research to departments and politicians in order to influence the policy agenda.

The role of academics in Government sponsored evaluations and reviews has also been evident, particularly during the New Labour Government. This gave academics new funding opportunities and the chance to increase their visibility in this policy arena. But we have also seen how academics had previously been involved in policy formation with the Social Justice Commission in the early 1990s.

A number of ESRC-funded academics have made significant contributions to policy. Individual academics who had good relationships with Government were called upon, formally and informally, to supply the government with evidence for their policy debates, for example:

- John Hills chaired a HM Treasury workshop which fed into the policy document *Persistent Poverty and Lifetime Inequality: The Evidence (1998)*.
- Cathy Silver, John Hills and Jane Waldfogel were invited to an ippr/HM Treasury event in 2001 to discuss child poverty. This informed the consultation document *Measuring Child Poverty, 2002*.
- Paul Gregg provided advice to Sure Start as part of its evaluation activity; to the Prime Ministers Strategy Unit on child development and poverty; and undertook an advisor role to the Treasury for Labour relating to welfare. He also undertook an independent review of conditionality and support for the Department for Work and Pensions in 2008.
- Tess Ridge advised the Treasury's Cross Cutting Spending Review (2002) and the Children and Young People's Unit on the development of the child poverty strategy (2002). She has made contributions to the Work and Pensions Select Committees into Child Poverty (2003 and 2007) and was an expert witness to the Commons Public Bill Committee scrutinising the Child Poverty Act. She has recently completed a three month secondment to the Child Poverty Unit advising on the new Child Poverty Strategy.
- Lucinda Platt is currently a member of the DWP Advisory Group on Lone Parent Obligations Evaluation
- Ruth Lister was a member of the National Equality Panel and a member of a task group on social protection as part of Sir Michael Marmot's Strategic Review. In 2000, she was appointed by the Home Office as a Trustee of the Community Development Foundation from 2000 to 2010.

Evidence from interviewees inside DWP suggested that staff from the Department regularly met with academics. In fact there had been extensive preparatory work for the Toynbee Hall lecture, where Tony Blair made the announcement to eradicate child poverty. Leading social policy specialists, including Robert Walker, David Piachaud, Tony Atkinson, and Peter Golding were invited to submit papers to Number 10. Some of which were published along with others in response to the speech *Ending Child Poverty*.<sup>68</sup>

These mechanisms were important for the Government to keep abreast of research developments as they were happening. Many academics recognise that the publication of results often comes several years after the events that are being studied with conclusions formed in collaboration with other researchers through conference papers, and conversations. The cultivation of a semi-formal relationship between academics and government officials allows policy makers to be part of this conversation and to create evidence based policy relevant to current events.

## 7.4 Other resources

### 7.4.1 Research centres

A number of research institutions were cited during our study as particularly important for developing child poverty research. These are all funded to some extent by the ESRC and include:

- **The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, (CASE)** led by John Hills, was started with funding from ESRC in 1997. It has been extremely important as a bridge between research and policy, for example, it organises regular seminars on empirical and theoretical issues connected with social exclusion, and co-organises the monthly Welfare Policy and Analysis Seminar, supported by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- **The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP)** was set up with funding from ESRC in 1990. The Centre's research in the 1990s on long-term unemployment has influenced much of New Labour's welfare policies.
- **The Centre for Macroeconomic Analysis of Public Policy**, hosted at the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) receives core funding from ESRC, and as mentioned previously, is an important advocate for evidence based policy in the areas of child poverty, and welfare.

These ESRC funded research centres have provided a base for many of the influential researchers in this field, including Paul Gregg at CfEP and Jane Waldfogel at CASE. In terms of the flows of knowledge these centres also provide a key input and driving influence through the volume of trained students who move into academic and policy roles and contribute to the evolving stock of knowledge.

### 7.4.2 Datasets

Much of the cited research relies on existing data sets and studies that can be interrogated in new or interesting ways. It is clear from the research review that the

---

<sup>68</sup> *Ending Child Poverty, Popular Welfare for the 21st Century*, ed. Robert Walker, The Policy Press, 1999.

availability of data sets such as Family Resources Survey, Luxemburg Income Study, British Household Panel Survey, and Labour Force Survey were critical in driving forward the understanding of the extent and depth of child poverty in the UK. This research gave Government a sense of urgency, and a way to measure progress which was important for a flagship policy announcement.

The ESRC is a vitally important source of funding for and access to many of these studies including BHPS, and the Millennium Cohort Study. These create the infrastructure that most researchers in the sector need to study and make new connections and analyses.

## 7.5 Other routes of influence

There are a number of organisations outside the Higher Education sector, including lobby groups, charities, think tanks, and independent research institutions which have all made vital contributions to the development of child poverty policies, over many years. In some instances these organisations are generators or commissioners of research. Many academics have formal links with these groups, working collaboratively with them and in some instances represented on their non-executive boards. Some of the most important include:

- **Joseph Rowntree Foundation:** The Foundation is an endowed charity that funds a large, UK-wide research and development programme. It funds research that aims to understand the root causes of social problems, to identify ways of overcoming them, and to show how social needs can be met in practice. One long running focus has been child poverty, and JRF were instrumental in setting up the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), and in lobbying for more support for children in poverty. Their 2005-2009 Child Poverty Programme engaged around 30 researchers, including ESRC-supported academics.
- **Save the Children:** This charity has been campaigning to end child poverty for over 90 years. They have been part of the End Child Poverty Coalition (which includes over 100 other anti-poverty groups) and use both internal and commissioned researchers to provide evidence as part of their lobbying efforts.
- **Child Poverty Action Group:** This group was co-founded by social workers and researchers, including well known academics such as Peter Townsend and Harriet C. Wilson. Many influential researchers and advisers have been connected with the group, including Ruth Lister, Carey Oppenheim and Lisa Harker.
- **Institute for Fiscal Studies:** An independent research institute, part-funded by ESRC, with a focus on economics and welfare, amongst other things. It has published extensively on child poverty and related welfare issues, and aims to deliver high quality evidence that result in better outcomes for individuals and society.
- **Institute of Public Policy Research:** This has been an important and highly influential institution, particularly during the New Labour Government. A number of individuals from IPPR provided advice to Government including Carey Oppenheim who was an advisor to No. 10 during the time when the child poverty pledge was announced. Carey Oppenheim wrote several influential briefings on child poverty, some with Lisa Harker whilst with the Child Poverty Action Group<sup>69</sup>.

---

<sup>69</sup> Oppenheim C. & Harker L. (1993) *Poverty the facts: CPAG*, Oppenheim. C (1998) *An inclusive society: strategies for tackling poverty: CPAG*

These organisations and the outputs they generate provide an important interplay between academics and policy makers and illustrate the way that academics can retain their independence, while making an impact on policy and practice.

## 7.6 Case study: Wales Child Poverty Strategy 2010

In addition to the UK-wide child poverty strategy and the Child Poverty Act, the devolved administrations were required to develop their own strategies, reflecting the specific circumstances of their countries and the devolved powers at their disposal. The description below of the development of the consultation paper for the Welsh Child Poverty Strategy provides an indication of the routes through which research influences policy, through the interaction of government researchers, policy-makers, academic researchers and others. It also illustrates the importance of personal interaction as well as the production of formal papers. Finally, it shows that conceptual advances, such as those pioneered by Jonathan Bradshaw and colleagues, can take many years to find their way into policy thinking and action.

### **Policy impact case study: Welsh Government Child Poverty Expert Group**

The Welsh Government was determined to ensure that its child poverty strategy and action plan published in 2010, was underpinned by a thorough review of the research and evidence. To this end, two key groups were established:

- An internal analytical team comprising WAG social researchers, economists and statisticians
- An external advisory group (Child Poverty Expert Group) comprising academics and other experts on child poverty issues from across the UK.

A key factor in the perceived success of this approach in bringing the research evidence to the attention of policy makers was the relationship between these two groups of researchers. A formal procedure existed through which expert group members peer-reviewed the draft papers produced by the internal analytical team. Arguably more important was a strong informal relationship that built up between the two groups; Welsh Government social researchers felt that they were *'able to talk to expert group members on a similar level'*.

An example of 'conceptual' impact through this process related to advice provided by an original member of the expert group, Jonathan Bradshaw, who encouraged the Welsh Government to adopt a wider concept of poverty than the mainly income-based focus of the UK approach. Concepts such as service poverty and participation poverty, reflecting a notion of poverty that emphasises people's ability to participate effectively in society, strongly influenced the thinking of the Welsh Government.

The Welsh Government analytical team reviewed evidence in order to identify the key policy levers and determine *'where are our efforts best placed?'*, taking into account the balance of powers between the UK Government and the Welsh

Government. Research supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, notably a paper by Donald Hirsch<sup>70</sup>, was particularly influential in this regard.

The key themes set out in the Child Poverty Strategy document were strongly influenced by this evidence review, for example:

- A strong focus on early years and addressing inter-generational poverty
- The importance of work in tackling poverty: the Wales approach places particular emphasis on tackling in-work poverty and is influenced by research that emphasises the wider benefits of work on mental, family and social well-being.
- ‘Narrowing the gap’ in relation to health and education, in parallel with measures to address early years and work-related issues

An important outcome of the evidence review process was recognition of the need to focus on long-term solutions, rather than ‘quick wins’, particularly in the context of issues such as inter-generational poverty. The inter-connections between different aspects of policy (e.g. through the role of childcare) were also highlighted by the evidence review.

It is too early to conclude definitively that research has had a positive influence on policy-making in this case. Nonetheless it is clear that the establishment of the expert group as a mixture of academic and policy researchers, and the development of a strong working relationship with the Welsh Government analytical team, appears to be a key success factor.

---

<sup>70</sup> Hirsch, D. ‘What is needed to end child poverty in 2020?’, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008

## 8. Conclusions

---

This chapter presents our conclusions based on the research described in the preceding chapters.

### 8.1 Contribution to the ESRC impact evaluation programme

Work carried out for this study clearly enhances the current findings from the ESRC's impact evaluation programme, primarily by investigating the conceptual dimension to the policy impact process. This study is also different to previous work in so far as it focuses on a broad and complex policy area.

In one sense it is difficult to describe specific 'child poverty' policies, although the Child Poverty Act (2010) provides defined targets for the eradication of child poverty and most policies that have been introduced since 1997 have sought to address three key themes:

- Welfare to work, to promote active labour market policies (within which there is a focus on workless families and lone parents)
- Increased financial support (particularly for families) and
- Investment in the health, early-life development, and education of children (with an emphasis on the most disadvantaged children).

Each strand of policy has seen a proliferation of instruments (e.g. tax credits) initiatives (e.g. Sure Start) and programmes (The New Deal Options) all of which contribute to child poverty targets, but not exclusively so. Identifying the range of research that has contributed to these various policies and initiatives and further to this, isolating the impact on child poverty policy in particular has proved challenging – both conceptually and empirically. Exploration of the conceptual impact of social research on child poverty policy could be further refined in terms of specific policy strands or initiatives, although less ambitious in scope this could enable a deeper, more forensic, investigation of the research-policy interaction.

Nevertheless we believe that we have been able to identify a number of important contributions that have influenced policy thinking over a number of years, culminating in the intense research and policy development process that took place from the mid-1990s to the present day. It is not clear if the production of quantitative measures of such impact is possible. Nor is it feasible to set out a simple theoretical model that describes the conceptual impact process. The narrative form of qualitative analysis utilised in this report is, we believe, the most appropriate way of illustrating the research impact process in this context.

### 8.2 Reflections on methods used

In terms of methods adopted, this study has demonstrated the benefits of undertaking in-depth qualitative research with key stakeholders, utilising an iterative or 'snowball' approach to contacting informants. In terms of a 'tracking back' approach to the research-policy development it is clear that most of the policies and reforms originate after 1997, although the conceptual underpinnings

extend further back in time. One of the main pitfalls in this approach has therefore been the ability of key stakeholders to recall their involvement in the research-policy process over a long timeframe. This is particularly the case for civil servants who may not have been active in the relevant policy fields for many years (or indeed at all, in the case of civil servants recently appointed to their posts).

Interviews with stakeholders can help to corroborate the more significant developments, such as important research publications, policy workshops and specific advisory roles but given the breadth of policy which this study addressed it is also clear that an investigation of key over-arching themes can quickly be exhausted. Interviews will highlight and reference the same important headlines and milestones. We have not encountered problems of alternate or contradictory viewpoints which may have complicated our assessment, in terms of reconciling fundamental differences.

The desk review of policies and research was useful in providing context and pinpointing key individuals and organisations, but was less helpful in ‘modelling’ the relationship between research and policy. This is primarily because published information does not always highlight the ‘real’ chain of influence, which typically occurs through a series of informal and semi-formal interactions involving researchers, lobby groups, think tanks, political parties and government officials.

The analysis of media and parliamentary discourse has been limited to a discussion of the printed media, since this is the only source material that can be readily and systematically searched and analysed. The media is not of central interest to the study – however, it plays an important role in contributing to, creating and influencing public debates about policy making. The analysis of discourses presented in the media is a reasonable way to *make sense of*: the public debates around child poverty; who is contributing to this dialogue; and, how the language of child poverty and the political priorities have changed over time. There is, however, limited evidence to be found about the extent to which the media reflects the findings of social science research (and ESRC funded research in particular) and how social science research influences the understanding of the wider public.

One important conclusion in terms of methods is that the experiment of recruiting an ‘academic panel’ to advise and support the project team proved successful, although it proved difficult to convene as many meetings as originally envisaged. Academic panel members were very helpful and forthcoming in reviewing draft reports, providing written material not easily accessible in the public domain and sharing their experiences of the policy process.

### 8.3 Key findings

Our research has highlighted clear evidence that social research has indeed contributed to thought and debate on child poverty issues over a long period of time, preceding the last Government’s announcement of its commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020. There is an implicit model emerging of stocks of research building up through time, that produce flows of knowledge to influence policy debates (some of this funded by ESRC). There is then a stock of ongoing research being done in a complex community, with charities, think tanks and NGOs all playing a key role. Policy makers and campaign groups are influenced by a range

of factors in addition to research, and our study has picked up many examples of such influence and exchange.

Researchers, policy makers and campaigners recognise that the relationship between research and policy is not linear. Some commentators are sceptical about the defining role of research even during a period of evidence based policy making. Many point to the political motivations of the Labour Government to address child poverty, although the extent to which these politically motivated changes to public policy would have happened without the underpinning knowledge and concepts provided by social science is difficult to determine.

However, it is recognised that the announcement by Tony Blair reflected the campaigning work of long standing child poverty groups and the research of influential academics closely associated with these groups. The research and policy debate intensified following the pledge and many stakeholders involved in this agenda at this time have suggested that this critical mass of research helped give the government and civil service the confidence to enshrine the target in an Act. It is also clear from our reviews and consultations that many years of conceptual, theoretical, methodological and empirical research by a sizeable group of academics laid a strong foundation for the considerable work (formal and informal) undertaken by academics in relation to the 'Blair pledge'.

It is also clear that the ESRC played an important role in funding significant research contributions to the development of this emerging policy area. We have identified a number of key research papers associated with ESRC funding that have been cited in policy documents and in the supporting evidence for the Child Poverty Act. It is also acknowledged that ESRC funding underpins the work of several of the key research centres (Bristol, CASE at LSE, SPRU York, IFS, etc.) which have made important contributions to research and policy in their own right and have enabled the relationship between researchers, pressure groups, Think tanks and the often informal advisory role played by some ESRC funded academics (Gregg, Hills, Bradshaw, Ridge, Waldfogel etc.).

Our research suggests that the print media does not appear to play a central role in influencing child poverty policy. However, media is one of the channels in which discourses about policy are played out and it is therefore a useful area to study as it often both informs and reflects wider public attitudes. It is important to recognise that media discourse is not created in a vacuum – social research, lobbyists, campaigning and political motivations both inform and are informed by media discourses. But the extent to which the media directly influences policy is difficult to measure. Some stakeholders engaged in child poverty policy-making reveal that the media can be both a negative and positive force. In many cases it is not so much a *policy-influencing* medium but rather, something to *be managed*.

Key findings from this research study can be summarised as follows:

- Conceptual impacts of research on policy development are extremely difficult to isolate, measure and assess; however there is strong evidence from this study (corroborated by extensive desk research and consultations) that such effects have had an important influence on child poverty policy in the UK, especially between 1997 and 2010

- To the extent that it has been possible to trace conceptual developments in relation to child poverty research and policy, it is clear that major shifts in thinking have occurred over a long period of time, dating back to the early 1960s at least, and almost certainly before this
- The main conceptual breakthroughs appear to have occurred mainly through a small number of seminal research studies (Townsend et al) although there has been, particularly since the 1990s, an increasing number of important contributions that have influenced policy thinking, culminating in a period of intense research and policy development between 1999 and 2010.
- Interaction between researchers and lobby groups has been an important feature of child poverty research over a long period of time, and is a relationship that has helped to create a mechanism through which research findings influence the thinking of policy-makers, including (crucially) opposition political parties, their advisers and supporters
- Similarly, think tanks such as the Institute for Public Policy Research and the Centre for Social Justice provide an important conduit for ‘translating’ research findings into viable policy proposals. Such interactions often take place through informal relationships but can also take the form of formal seminars, presentations and/or papers by leading academics
- While policy documents cite a relatively small number of key research papers and/or authors, this is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of research impact. Our consultations suggest that formal, semi-formal and informal interactions (including secondments) between academics and government researchers are key mechanisms through which research findings are taken into account in policy development. Such interactions are often not formally recognised, but need to be taken into account in assessing research impact
- Conceptual developments have been important in formulating the ideas of leading researchers and thinkers. The commitment made by the Labour Government in 1999 definitely stimulated further activity among some of the UK’s leading economic and social researchers and also provided a source of funding to support further, mainly applied or ‘instrumental’ research, including evaluations
- While it is difficult to distinguish conceptual from other forms of knowledge advancement, it is very clear from our review that many of the earlier theoretical developments in relation to child poverty laid the basis for further research of a more empirical nature that helped to highlight some of the main issues relating to child poverty in a way that drew attention from the media and from policy-makers
- This process was also stimulated by ongoing financial support and dissemination activity by key organisations, notably the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, drawing many of the leading researchers into a set of primarily applied research projects that received high profile in policy circles
- The role of ESRC in all of this is very important, but very difficult to disentangle from all of the above factors. Many of the leading researchers, certainly since the 1990s, have received direct funding from ESRC. While the development of the research centre network, support for methodological research (such as cohort analysis) and funding for the creation of and access to large-scale datasets have all made significant contributions to many of the research outputs which have been influential in child poverty policy development.

## 9. Recommendations

---

- This study has demonstrated the value of undertaking primarily qualitative research to trace the impact of social research on a broad policy area. It would certainly be worthwhile for ESRC to undertake a similar study of a contrasting policy area, for example one with a stronger economic or business focus
- Alternatively, further exploration of the conceptual impact of social research on child poverty policy could be refined to isolate specific policy strands or initiatives. This could enable a deeper, more forensic, investigation of the research-policy interaction.
- Devoting resources to reviewing media coverage in detail has been less fruitful. We recommend that future studies should exclude this element, or undertake only 'light touch' media reviews
- On the other hand, speaking in depth to researchers, policy-makers and other stakeholders has resulted in a great deal of insight into the policy development process that could be usefully replicated in future impact evaluation studies
- The 'academic panel' provided very helpful support to the study team and is a model that might be usefully repeated for other studies
- In principle it should be possible to gather some of the necessary information by asking researchers to record more systematically activities such as attending government-sponsored seminars, sitting on advisory groups, informal advice etc. It is recognised that this has its challenges, but it would be helpful to explore what might usefully be done to capture activities that are broader than formal publication.
- ESRC should continue to publish and publicise the findings of this and other studies to highlight the contribution of social research in general and ESRC in particular to wider society. It would be very useful to be able to use case studies such as the WAG example, and engage researchers, policy-makers, lobby groups, think tanks and other stakeholders in the process.
- Finally, this study and others have illustrated the conceptual and practical difficulties of undertaking evaluation exercises such as this. ESRC may wish to consider making modest investments in research into conceptual and methodological developments in relation to assessing research impact. It would also be helpful, resources permitting, to undertake at least one policy case study each year; our suggestion is that each case study should attempt to bring together conceptual, instrumental and capacity-building impacts rather than treating them separately.

## Appendix 1: Academics in receipt of ESRC funding

---

Researcher	Summary
<b>John Hills – Director of CASE</b>	The Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) was established in October 1997 with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). John Hills chaired the Measuring Child Poverty consultation.
<b>Paul Gregg</b>	<p>As well as being the author of one of the ESRC funded outputs cited, he has recently been awarded a large grant to look at the data generated for a birth cohort of school age children.<sup>71</sup> He joined Centre for Economic Performance in 1995. As part of his ESRC funded activities he has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Provided advice to Sure Start as part of its evaluation activity</li><li>▪ Provided advice to the Prime Ministers Strategy Unit on child development and poverty</li><li>▪ Researched worklessness and its measurement</li><li>▪ Was influential in the progression to work agenda as developed by the Labour Government</li></ul> <p>Paul Gregg has been an advisor to the Treasury for Labour relating to welfare.</p>
<b>Robert Walker</b>	Robert Walker is and has been funded by the ESRC. His main interests are the development of welfare policies in Britain and the uses of these to alleviate poverty. He has contributed to the debates on welfare, including the measurement of poverty, and champions' evidence based policy making. He is also on the board of Member of the Governing Board of the ESRC UK Household Longitudinal Study.
<b>Mike Brewer</b>	<p>Mike Brewer has been the author of many influential research papers looking at the –in-work poor. These have been important in driving the recognition that it is not enough to get people back to work, work must pay in order to lift people out of poverty. He works with the Centre for Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy, which is ESRC funded.</p> <p>The policy document 'Ending child poverty: mapping the route to 2020' cites Brewer, M et al (2009) Micro-simulating child poverty in 2010 and 2020. Children's Poverty Act Impact Assessment and the Child Poverty Act - Information Pack also cites: Brewer, M et al (2009) Micro-simulating child poverty in 2010 and 2020</p>
<b>Jane Waldfogel</b>	Jane Waldfogel has written extensively on Child development and outcomes for children. Her books include: Britain's War on Poverty (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010); Steady Gains and

---

<sup>71</sup> "An examination of the impact of family socio-economic status on outcomes in late childhood and adolescence."

- Stalled Progress: Inequality and the Black-White Test Score Gap (Russell Sage Foundation, 2008); What Children Need (Harvard University Press, 2006); Securing the Future: Investing in Children from Birth to College (Russell Sage Foundation, 2000); and The Future of Child Protection: How to Break the Cycle of Abuse and Neglect (Harvard University Press, 1998). She was funded by the ESRC for her 1999 book 'Early Child Interventions' and Outcomes'. She works with John Hills at CASE.
- Jonathan Bradshaw** Jonathan Bradshaw has been researching child poverty since the 60s. He has been involved in developing the discourse of child poverty, as well as participating in summer schools, the Social Justice Commission, and further consultations with academics. He has held a number of ESRC grants. Child Poverty Review (HM Treasury, 2004) cited 'Poverty: The Outcomes for Children' which was ESRC funded
- Tess Ridge** Tess Ridge is a Member of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy (CASP) and a Policy group member of CPA. She has published extensively on poverty and social exclusion, and support for children and families. She has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Ruth Lister** Ruth Lister worked for CPAG as a Director, and went to become a Professor of social policy and is now an Emeritus Professor. Her main interests include poverty and the social security system. She has been a member of the National Equality Panel and a member of a task group on social protection as part of Sir Michael Marmot's Strategic Review. In 2000, she was appointed by the Home Office as a Trustee of the Community Development Foundation from 2000 to 2010. She has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Stephen Machin** Stephen is the director of the Centre for the Economics of Education at the LSE, Research director at the ESRC funded Centre for Economic Performance and Professor of Economics at UCL. He is also an editor of The Economic Journal. His research interests have covered labour economics, the economics of education and industrial relations. He has published extensively with Paul Gregg amongst others.
- Lucinda Platt** Lucinda Platt has been an important researcher through her papers and books examining ethnicity and poverty, as well as child poverty. She currently works for the Institute of Social and Economic Research, where she has a key role in Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). She is currently a member of the DWP Advisory Group on Lone Parent Obligations Evaluation. She has held a number of ESRC grants. Delivering on child poverty: what would it take cites Platt, L, Ethnicity and Child Poverty, 2009
- David Piachaud** Author of multiple outputs including: 'Child poverty : aims, achievements and prospects for the future', 'How effective is the British government's attempt to reduce child poverty?',

- 'Poverty and growth' and 'Child poverty, opportunities and quality of life'. He has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Peter Golding** Grant holder for multiple ESRC grants including: 'The community charge and the mass media: a case study in political communication', 'Assessment and development of new methods for the analysis of media content' and 'Community business feasibility study'.
- Tony Atkinson** Author of outputs: 'The economics of giving for overseas development', 'Welfare economics and giving for development' and 'Giving overseas and public policy'. He has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Jane Millar** Author of multiple outputs including: 'Avoiding poverty over time : low paid workers, households and welfare', 'Part-time work and social security : increasing the options', 'Foundations and contexts : social security challenges : past and future' and 'Family lives and relationships over time : using research evidence for policy'. She has held a number of ESRC grants.
- John Bynner** Grant holder for multiple ESRC grants including: 'Young movers and international developments', 'The transition to adulthood and the formation of adult identity', 'National child development study: fifth stage', 'Coordinator for the 16-19 initiative', 'SPRU birth cohort studies programme: integration development maintenance and updating programme' and 'The ESRC millennium cohort: interim contract'.
- Miriam David** Author of 'Diversity, choice and gender' and 'Parental involvement in education : choice and help in schools'. She has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Stephen Jenkins** Author of multiple outputs including: 'Distribution of income by sectors of the population', 'Child poverty dynamics in seven industrialised nations', 'Where in the world is the middle class? A cross-national comparison of the shrinking middle class using kernel density estimates' and 'Moving off income support: barriers and bridges'. He has held a number of ESRC grants.
- Sandra Nutley** ESRC grant holder for 'Increasing research utilisation in public policy and public services' and author of multiple outputs including: 'Evidence based policy and practice : cross sector lessons from the UK', 'From knowing to doing : a framework for understanding the evidence-into-practice agenda' and 'Developing organizational learning in the NHS'.
- Susan Harkness** ESRC grant holder for 'Employment, work patterns and unpaid work: an analysis of trends since the 1970s' and 'ERSC placement fellowship in the strategy unit'. Author of multiple outputs including: 'Female employment and changes in the share of women's earnings in total family income in Great Britain', 'The family gap in pay: evidence from seven industrialised countries' and 'Looking forward or harking back? :the commission and the reform of governance in the

European union'. Child Poverty Act Information Pack; Ending Child Poverty: Making it happen; Ending Child poverty: Everybody's Business cites Evans, M., Harkness, S., & Arigoni Ortiz, R.Lone Parents Cycling Between Work and Benefits

**Alan Walker**

Director of the national collaboration on ageing research (NCAR, Programme director for the growing older research programme' and Director of the New Dynamics of Ageing (NDA) Programme. Alan Walker contributed to the commentaries on Charles Murray's first paper on the 'Underclass'.

**Tess Ridge**

Author of multiple ESRC outputs including: 'Children and poverty across Europe : the challenge of developing child centred policies', 'A fine balance : managing work and family life', 'Listening to children over time : childhood poverty and the value of child-centred research with children' and 'Children's perspectives on parents' working hours'. She has held a number of ESRC grants.

---

## Appendix 2: Media content analysis 2007/8

Discourse	Premise	Dates and publications	Research cited
<p>'broken promises'</p> <p>'Labour not meeting targets'</p>	<p>Progress on addressing child poverty as an indicator of Labour's success</p> <p>Labour are failing to address child poverty</p>	<p><i>June 12, 2007 Tuesday; Polly Toynbee, Guardian Comment and Debate Pages, p. 33</i></p> <p><i>October 10, 2007 Wednesday; Marianne Barriaux, Guardian Newsprint Supplement, p.12</i></p> <p><i>October 29, 2007 Monday; Sam Coates, Chief Political Correspondent, Home News, p. 23</i></p> <p><i>December 3, 2007 Monday; Larry Elliott, Economic editor, Guardian Financial Pages, p. 26</i></p> <p><i>December 3, 2007 Monday; Ben Russell and Sean O'Grady, The Independent p. 4</i></p> <p><i>December 3, 2007 Monday; Rosemary Bennet, Social Affairs Correspondent, The Times Home News, p. 9</i></p> <p><i>December 13, 2007 Thursday, Graeme Paton Education Editor, The Daily Telegraph, p. 4</i></p> <p><i>December 13, Daily Mail 2007 Thursday; p.23</i></p> <p><i>February 28, 2008 Thursday; Patrick Wintour and Larry Elliot, Guardian Home Pages, p.12</i></p> <p><i>March 14, 2008 Friday; The Independent (London), Sean O'Grady Economics Editor, BUSINESS; Pg. 50</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Millennium Cohort Study [funded by ESRC]. Professor Heather Joshi, director for the millennium cohort study</li> <li>▪ Unicef [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Barnardos report published last month [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Rowntree report [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Institute of Fiscal Studies [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Save the Children [no report title or author stated]</li> <li>▪ Karen Buck, a London Labour MP, Still Home Alone – the report published with the Charity 4Children</li> <li>▪ New Policy Institute think-tank, author Peter Kenway</li> <li>▪ The London School of Economics study - commissioned by the Sutton Trust education think-tank [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ London Child Poverty Commission [no report or author cited]</li> </ul>
<p>'need to invest'</p>	<p>More investment is needed to truly</p>	<p><i>June 12, 2007 Tuesday; Polly Toynbee, Guardian Comment and Debate Pages, p. 33</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Millennium Cohort Study [funded by ESRC]</li> <li>▪ Professor Heather Joshi, director for the millennium</li> </ul>

	address child poverty	<p><i>December 3, 2007 Monday; Larry Elliott, Economic editor, Guardian Financial Pages, p. 26</i></p> <p><i>February 28, 2008 Thursday; Patrick Wintour and Larry Elliot, Guardian Home Pages, p.12</i></p>	<p>cohort study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unicef [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Barnardos report published last month [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Rowntree report [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Institute of Fiscal Studies [no report title or author cited]</li> <li>▪ Peter Kenway is cited and quoted in the article. [Report title is not cited in the newspaper article.]</li> <li>▪ Institute of Fiscal Studies [no report or author cited]</li> <li>▪ London Child Poverty Commission [no report or author cited]</li> </ul>
'shamed by child poverty study'	UK (or Scotland) are performing badly with regards to child poverty when compared to other countries or when compared to previous decades	<p><i>July 4, 2007 Wednesday; Daily Mail, Simon Johnson, p.17</i></p> <p><i>December 13, 2007 Thursday, Graeme Paton Education Editor, The Daily Telegraph, p. 4</i></p> <p><i>December 13, Daily Mail 2007 Thursday; p.23</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Barnardos report published July 2007 [no report title or author is cited]</i></li> <li>▪ <i>The London School of Economics study - commissioned by the Sutton Trust education think-tank [no report title or author cited]</i></li> </ul>
'child poverty costs the taxpayer'	Child poverty is expensive for the tax-payer	<i>October 28, 2007; Amellia Hill, The Observer (England), p. 14</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Barnardos [no report title or author is cited]</i></li> </ul>
'need for more recognition about child poverty'	Need for more recognition of the ways in which poverty impacts on families	<i>November 15, 2007 Thursday; Emily Dugan, The Independent, p. 12</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Living with Hardship 24/7, The diverse experiences of families in poverty in England, By Carol-Ann Hooper, Sarah Gorin, Christie Cabral and Claire Dyson (November 2007)</i></li> </ul>

	Statistics do not tell the full story	<p><i>December 5, 2007, Wednesday, letter from Professor John Veit-Wilson, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University</i></p> <p><i>December 5, 2007, Wednesday, letter The Rev Paul Nicolson, Chairman, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust</i></p>	
	The public are not aware of the problem	<p><i>December 11, 2007 Tuesday; Patrick Wintour, Political Editor, Guardian Home pages p. 14</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Research undertaken by DWP – it stated the research is unpublished at time of writing but is due to be published next year</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Neema Sharma, Principal Policy Officer Barnardos [report title not cited]</i></li> </ul>
<i>'policy has the potential to revive Labour'</i>	Plans to address child poverty could 'revive' Labour	<p><i>December 11, 2007 Tuesday; Polly Toynbee, Guardian Comment and Debate Page, p.29.</i></p> <p><i>February 28, 2008 Thursday; Patrick Wintour and Larry Elliot, Guardian Home Pages, p.12</i></p> <p><i>March 9, 2008 Sunday; VINCENT MOSS POLITICAL EDITOR, Sunday Mirror, p. 18</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ ECP have some 'figures' on child poverty although no report is cited</li> <li>▪ DWP research (no report cited)</li> <li>▪ Rowntree Foundation research (no report cited)</li> <li>▪ Opinion polls (no source cited)</li> <li>▪ Other research is cited with no author or report</li> <li>▪ Institute of Fiscal Studies [no report or author cited]</li> <li>▪ London Child Poverty Commission [no report or author cited]</li> <li>▪ ippr [no report or author cited]</li> </ul>