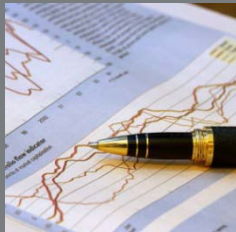


Final Report

**THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF
ESRC RESEARCH ON
PATHWAYS TO WORK**
Economic and Social
Research Council

January 2010



WM
enterprise



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	3
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 Methodology	3
2. Pathways to Work: policy development and evaluation	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Benefit reform prior to 1997	6
2.3 New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)	6
2.4 The Run-up to Pathways: ONE	7
2.5 The 2002 Green Paper <i>Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment</i>	8
2.6 Key elements of Pathways to Work	8
2.7 Key decisions in the development of Pathways to Work	9
2.8 Evaluation findings	10
3. Role of research in policy development and implementation: policy and researcher perspectives	15
3.1 Introduction	15
3.2 The role of research in early policy decisions	16
3.3 Research influences on the 2002 Green Paper	17
3.4 Influence of research on policy development following the Green Paper	18
3.5 The influence of the national evaluation of Pathways to Work	19
3.6 Influence of ESRC-funded research	20
3.7 Other research influences on the implementation of Pathways to Work	21
3.8 Other influences on the development of Pathways to Work	22
3.9 Key research influences on Pathways to Work: synthesis	23
4. Research influences on Pathways: detailed analysis	26
4.1 Introduction	26
4.2 Research prior to 1997	26
4.3 Research input to the 2002 Green Paper, 1997-2002	26
4.4 DWP commissioned research and evaluation, 2003 onwards	26
4.5 Researchers, research centres and institutes	26

4.6	The role of ESRC	26
5.	Quantifying the ESRC contribution	34
5.1	Issues	34
5.2	Scale of ESRC influence on Pathways: initial estimates	35
5.3	Economic value of ESRC impact on Pathways: initial estimates	37
6.	The ‘tracking back’ method: comments and conclusions	40
6.1	General observations on the ‘tracking back’ approach	40
6.2	Specific observations on Pathways to Work	40
6.3	Critical appraisal of the model used to measure ESRC impact	41

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings from a study which explored the feasibility of employing a ‘tracking back’ approach to the assessment and measurement of the impact on policy of research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Previous studies of ESRC research impact utilised versions of a ‘tracking forward’ approach, which started with specific ESRC investments in research initiatives or programmes, and traced through their impact on policy decisions. These studies yielded valuable insights into the ways in which ESRC-supported research influences policy decisions; however it was felt that it would be valuable to explore an alternative (or indeed potentially complementary) approach that starts from a specified policy initiative and ‘tracks back’ to identify whether and how ESRC funding has influenced policy decisions.

Given the desirability of measuring quantitatively – where feasible - the policy impact of ESRC research, it was decided to focus on policies that had been the subject of formal economic evaluations that had produced estimates of their overall economic contribution. One such national policy initiative is *Pathways to Work*. ‘Pathways’ was instigated in 2002, and is in effect a suite of policies designed to assist people claiming Incapacity Benefit (IB) to find and retain appropriate employment. Pathways was presented as a response to widespread concerns about the large and increasing numbers of IB claimants at a time when employment was increasing rapidly and registered unemployment declining.

The Department for Work and Pensions invested significant resources in research and development activities in relation to Pathways, including an extensive programme of evaluation. The initiative was piloted in a small number of areas initially and subsequently rolled out to other areas, with some adjustments taking place in the details of the initiative and its delivery. A cost-benefit evaluation led by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and published in 2008, estimated that Pathways benefited individual participants and the exchequer to the value of between £3.06 and £5.95 for every pound spent. **The primary focus of this study was to investigate – and where feasible measure – the contribution of ESRC-funded research to the positive economic contribution of Pathways, as estimated by evaluation studies.**

Several scholars have investigated the links between research and policy and the main thrust of their conclusions are that the relationship is highly complex, contingent, non-linear and very difficult to measure. In particular, research can have an impact at a number of levels and in different ways, ranging from the ‘conceptual’ through to the ‘instrumental’. It is in this context that we undertook this study, which took place between May and December 2009 and comprised:

- Detailed documentary review
- Media and internet review
- Interviews with key policy informants
- Interviews with researchers involved in Pathways research and evaluation
- Analysis of publication authorship and citation
- Estimation of the value of ESRC’s impact on Pathways

The main findings arising from our study are as follows:

- **‘Tracking backwards’ approaches to measuring the policy impact of ESRC funded research have considerable value and potential for further development and use.**
- Deriving quantitative measures of ESRC policy impact is challenging and dependent on (a) the quality of the evaluation evidence on the overall economic impact of the policy under investigation, (b) the robustness of the underpinning model of research impact on policy and (c) the quality and accessibility of data on ESRC research activities and outputs.
- In particular, it is very important for any quantitative estimates to be rooted firmly in a qualitative understanding of the research impact process, derived from detailed document reviews and in-depth consultations with policy-makers and researchers.
- Notwithstanding the conceptual and practical difficulties, we were able to produce defensible estimates of the ESRC contribution to the estimated economic impact of Pathways to Work, based primarily on detailed analysis of research documents that were felt by respondents to have influenced the development and implementation of Pathways.
- An evaluation conducted by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimated a net economic benefit to society of £3.06 for every £1 invested in Pathways. Our analysis of publications and citations suggests that ESRC funding is associated with approximately 24 per cent of the overall impact of Pathways to Work; using this measure, it can be estimated that ESRC contributed £0.74 to the net economic benefit to society of £3.06 for every £1 invested in Pathways.
- Alternatively, our estimates suggest that ESRC contributed around £170 of the £701 benefit to society per person making a benefit enquiry, also presented in the IFS evaluation report.
- In summary, the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis suggest that – in the case of Pathways – the policy influence of social research in general, and ESRC research in particular, increased as the policy development process moved from conception to inception to planning and through to detailed implementation.
- This suggests that – in this case at least – the policy impact of ESRC has been largely on the ‘instrumental’ rather than the ‘conceptual’ end of the spectrum. This reflects the nature of the policy initiative, which is high profile and was originally driven by the then Prime Minister. The instrumental focus may also stem from the ‘tracking backwards’ approach, which tends to place emphasis on the operation and evaluation of the policy rather than the broad concepts that informed its initial development. Future ESRC research should explore this further.
- This suggests that some combination of ‘tracking back’ and ‘tracking forward’ approaches would be required in order to present a rounded picture of the policy impact of ESRC research.
- While the study has highlighted the challenges involved with attempting to produce accurate quantitative estimates of the policy impact of ESRC, it does suggest that there is scope to make further use of bibliometric methods, for example through more systematic analysis of sources cited in policy documents, research papers and evaluations published by government departments and agencies. This might then be compared with the ESRC Social Science Research Repository, to provide an indication of ESRC’s contribution, along the lines presented in this report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) commissioned WM Enterprise (WME) to undertake a study to explore and test a ‘tracking back’ methodology to assess the economic impact of ESRC research on the Pathways to Work initiative. ‘Pathways’ is aimed at encouraging employment among people claiming Incapacity Benefits (IB). It was introduced as a pilot in 2003, and by April 2008 all new IB claimants in Britain were eligible for Pathways. The initiative provides financial and non-financial support to encourage a move into paid employment.

Specifically, the research is designed to:

- Identify and describe the ways in which social science and specifically ESRC research has contributed to the development/implementation of the Pathways to Work initiative, through research, dissemination, networking and related activities;
- Apply appropriate techniques to derive a quantitative estimate of the ESRC’s impact on Pathways to Work;
- Present the results of the economic assessment within a broader qualitative analysis of the impact of ESRC-funded research on Pathways to Work;
- Reflect on the results and identify lessons for economic evaluations of other major ESRC investments;

1.2 Methodology

To date, the Council’s Research and Evaluation Committee (REC) has used a ‘tracking forward’ approach to impact assessment, taking particular research investments as starting points and identifying the impacts that have arisen from the activities supported by these investments by tracing usage by policy-makers and practitioners. The REC, through this research, is seeking to explore a new approach of ‘tracking backwards’ from policy or practice initiatives, both to identify ESRC research contributions to Pathways to Work, and to provide quantitative assessments of the impact of those contributions.

Pathways to Work was selected by REC as a case study (together with a parallel study of the Education Maintenance Allowance) specifically because it is a relatively large-scale policy initiative that we might reasonably expect to have been influenced by social science research and – crucially – has been the subject of robust evaluation that has estimated the impact of the initiative in economic terms¹. This provides a benchmark on the basis of which it may, in principle at least, be possible to derive a quantitative estimate of the relative contribution of social science research in general and ESRC-supported research in particular.

¹ The methods used and results of this evaluation are described and assessed in detail in section 2.8

It is intended that this ‘tracking backwards’ approach will represent a major step forward in two key respects:

- It puts the policy community as the centre of the investigation, as users (or ‘customers’) of research. Previous studies have consulted policy documents and in most cases undertaken surveys of selected research users; however, the findings have been based largely on documentary evidence and/or feedback from researchers.
- By using policy evaluations² as the starting point, the ‘tracking back’ approach provides some basis upon which quantitative estimates of research impacts may be based. Put simply, the process involves investigating what proportion of the value added of Pathways to Work (expressed in economic terms if feasible) can be attributed to research funded by ESRC. This is still not a straightforward question to answer, but it is a promising avenue to explore, conceptually and empirically, in contrast to an approach that, in effect, asks ‘what value has been added to a range of possible policy outcomes over an indeterminate period of time, through £x spent on ESRC research into a broad portfolio of social science topics?’

1.2.1 Approach

The study has been divided into two main stages:

- Stage One: Qualitative review of how, and to what extent social science research in general, and ESRC research in particular, has contributed to the Pathways to Work Initiative. The outcome of this phase is a qualitative assessment of the ESRC’s impact on Pathways to Work;
- Stage Two: An analysis of the qualitative evidence alongside other contributory factors to establish a broad quantitative estimate of the ESRC’s economic impact. The outcome of this phase of the evaluation study is a quantitative estimate of the ESRC’s impact on the Pathways to Work initiative.

Specific activities include:

- A desk-based review of the key policy decisions prior to the introduction of the Pathways to Work initiative;
- An assessment/review of general research, and ESRC research more specifically, into the Pathways to Work initiative, and the welfare to work agenda more generally;
- Consultations with policy-makers in order to obtain their perspectives on how research more generally, and ESRC-research in particular, has impacted upon the Pathways to Work initiative. In depth interviews were conducted with a number of senior policy advisers and researchers who were involved in the development, implementation and/or evaluation of Pathways to Work

² By implication, of course, this approach can only be applied to policies that have been the subject of evaluation that provides robust quantitative estimates of the impact of a particular initiative. This is the primary rationale for the selection of Pathways to Work as a case study to test out the ‘tracking back’ approach.

- Consultations with researchers and other key informants, in order to understand their perspectives on how research has influenced the development and roll-out of Pathways to Work. Responses (written and/or verbal) were received from senior representatives of the following organisations:
 - National Institute for Economic and Social Research;
 - Institute for Fiscal Studies;
 - National Centre for Social Research;
 - Policy Studies Institute
 - Policy Research Institute, Leeds Metropolitan University.
 - Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Essex
 - Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion
 - Institute for Public Policy Research

- In addition, informal consultations were undertaken with leading researchers, evaluators, academics, practitioners and consultants attending events organised by the UK Evaluation Society and the Institute for Employment Studies.
- A detailed analysis of the research publications and other outputs that were used to inform the development and implementation of Pathways to Work, focusing on the identification of links with ESRC-funded research and other activities;
- Analysis of the evidence to provide an estimate of the contribution made by ESRC research to the economic impact generated by the Pathways to Work initiative.

A workshop was also held to discuss the emerging findings, together with the team that is undertaking a parallel study of the impact of ESRC research on the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) policy initiative. Insights from this workshop have been incorporated into this report.

2. Pathways to Work: policy development and evaluation

2.1 Introduction

This Section provides a brief overview of the key policy developments and decisions that were made prior to the introduction of Pathways to Work and concludes with an overview of the findings to date of the extensive programme of evaluation that has been undertaken to assess the impact of Pathways to Work³.

2.2 Benefit reform prior to 1997

The Conservative Government's underlying philosophy towards welfare-to-work issues focused on the disincentive effects that were believed to be built into the benefit system. As part of a reform of this system, Disability Living Allowance was introduced in 1991. In conjunction with Disability Working Allowance (DWA) this was intended to incentivise disabled people into jobs by:

- supplementing low incomes; and
- reducing the risk of people losing their benefits forever if they try unsuccessfully to get paid employment.

In 1995, Incapacity Benefit (IB) replaced Invalidity Benefit (IVB) and Sickness Benefit (SB). A new medical examination, the All Work Test (AWT) was introduced to go along with the new benefit. A 1997 evaluation of the medical test suggested that difficulties were found in particular when attempting to categorise the expected impacts of mental health problems on a claimant's ability to work.

2.3 New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)

The New Labour Government, elected in 1997, signalled a major shift in the focus of welfare-to-work policy towards a more pro-active model based around providing intensive support for people who have been out of work for a long time, or who suffer from recognised disadvantages in the labour market. At the centre of this new approach was the New Deal programme, with a specific element designed to assist people with disabilities, the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP).

NDDP was the major government employment programme available to people claiming Incapacity Benefits. It was delivered locally by 'Job Brokers', which may be voluntary, public or private sector organisations. Job Brokers helped claimants to undertake job search and aim to increase their confidence in their ability to work.

New Deal in general and NDDP in particular have been the subject of large-scale evaluation programmes, and the results of these evaluations (see section 3.2 for further details) were influential in determining the future direction of policies to encourage IB claimants into work.

³ A useful summary of the evaluation of Pathways to Work is contained in Chapter 1 of Bewley, H., Dorsett, R. and Halle, G. (2007) *The impact of Pathways to Work*, DWP Research Report no. 435.

2.4 The Run-up to Pathways: ONE

In parallel with NDDP, a new initiative – ONE – was introduced. ONE was a new approach – integrating the whole benefits chain for claimants of working age (16 to 59) to provide a ‘one stop shop’ for entry to the system across several different benefits.

The underlying rationale for ONE was that IB claimants, and other people claiming ‘inactive’ benefits, were not sufficiently linked in to services designed to help them into work, despite research evidence suggesting that a large percentage were both able and willing to undertake some form of employment. Given the co-existence of relatively high levels of labour demand with continuing relatively high rates of labour market inactivity among some groups, ONE was seen as an important pilot initiative.

ONE was introduced in twelve pilot areas in 1999, and the ultimate aims were to increase economic activity, encourage return/entry to work and streamline the offer. It also aimed to transform the culture of the benefit system towards independence and work where appropriate, rather than payments and dependence.

Each claimant entering ONE was assigned a Personal Adviser to guide them through the services available. The Personal Adviser sought to identify the extent to which claimants were ready to return to or enter work and to help them accordingly. When they were not job-ready further help and support was offered, including referral to specialist services or training.

In general it was felt that this approach was a step in the right direction in terms of integrating the various services, but there was a lack of clarity in the definition of the role of the Personal Adviser, the central figure in ONE (and ultimately in Pathways to Work). Evaluation evidence⁴ suggests that Personal Advisers were expected to perform some of the tasks of a job broker or link to external services, and some of the duties of a caseworker, assigned to provide one-to-one help to clients throughout their claim period. Staff felt that IB claimants were among those who benefited least from the service, since even those claimants who had been ruled out of work on clear medical grounds were being called in to discuss work options that were felt to be largely impossible or irrelevant.

However, the final assessment of the labour market impact of ONE concludes: *The evidence does not suggest that ONE has changed the probability of leaving benefit for sick or disabled clients in any of the delivery models.*⁵

⁴ See Green, H. and 7 others (2003) *Final effects of ONE*, DWP Research Report no. 183, for an overview of the evaluation findings

⁵ *ibid*

2.5 The 2002 Green Paper *Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment*

With substantial reference to lessons learnt during the ONE pilots, this consultation document outlined how the government was intending to reform Incapacity Benefit with the introduction of the Pathways Pilots. It was followed by a lengthy consultation period, and ultimately by the government's response⁶. The programme has not changed substantially since its invention (see section 2.6 for an outline).

Referred to at the time as Incapacity Benefit Reform Pilots, the first tranche of Pathways to Work pilots consisted of three JCP districts: Derbyshire; Bridgend, Rhondda, Cynon and Taff; and Renfrewshire, Inverclyde, Argyll and Bute. Pathways was rolled out to a number of other areas in 2004-2006 and nationally between 2006 and 2008⁷.

2.6 Key elements of Pathways to Work

The Pathways to Work scheme is open to all people (18 to 59) who are entitled to incapacity benefits. Incapacity benefits are continually changing, and at the moment the categories of these benefits include:

- **Employment and Support Allowance** – This benefit replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support based on incapacity for work for all new claimants.
- **Incapacity Benefit** – Although new claimants are not eligible for IB, there are many thousands of people still in receipt of it.
- **Income Support** on the grounds of incapacity – again, many people are still receiving this benefit.
- **Severe Disablement Allowance** – Since April 2001, no new claimants have been eligible for SDA, but many people are still receiving it.

Although all claimants of these benefits are eligible for Pathways, new and returning claimants are automatically entered onto the scheme.

All entrants to Pathways must attend an initial **Work Focused Interview (WFI)** eight weeks after making their claim. WFIs are carried out by **Personal Advisers**. Most people remaining on incapacity benefits must attend five further WFIs at approximately monthly intervals.

Claimants who are assessed as either totally unable or extremely likely to enter employment are required to attend only the initial WFI, and any continued participation in Pathways is on a voluntary basis.

Those exempted on the basis of the severity of their medical condition are identified through the **Personal Capability Assessment (PCA)**, a questionnaire which may be followed by a full medical examination.

⁶ Pathways to Work: helping people into employment – the Government's response and action plan, Cm 5830, June 2003

⁷ See the most recent evaluation report for an outline of the development and implementation of the Pathways initiative: Bewley, H, Dorsett, R. and Salis, S. (2009) *The impact of Pathways to Work on work, earnings and self-reported health in the April 2006 expansion areas*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 601

Participation in all other provision available under Pathways is voluntary for everyone. There are several elements:

- The **Return to Work Credit (RTWC)** offers Pathways participants who find work of at least 16 hours a week a payment of £40 per week for a year if their gross annual earnings are below £15,000.
- **In-Work Support (IWS)** is a programme of support contracted out to providers including some or all of: mentoring, a job coach, occupational health support, in-depth support, financial advice/debt counselling and an after-care service.
- The **Advisers Discretionary Fund (ADF)** allows Personal Advisers to make awards of £100 per person per year, to support activities or purchases to increase the chances of finding work.
- The **'Choices'** package consists of a number of programmes that existed prior to Pathways and one new one. The two main programmes within Choices are the (pre-existing) **New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)** and the (new) **Condition Management Programme (CMP)**.

The CMP was developed as a core part of Pathways, and is run in conjunction with the local National Health Service (NHS). The idea is to focus on how to manage health problems so that they no longer prove an obstacle to work. After an initial assessment, a range of services is provided by occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, counsellors etc. Available services include coping skills, advice, information about exercise and confidence building.

2.7 Key decisions in the development of Pathways to Work

We have identified – through interviews and analysis of documentary evidence - seven key decisions in the development of Pathways to Work

- The decision to make the work-focused interviews compulsory for those with less severe medical conditions – conditionality;
- The introduction of two tiers of incapacity claimants (those who must attend Work-Focused Interviews and those who really are incapable and for whom attendance is not required);
- Decision to provide the CMP – Condition Management Programme – focused not on cure, but on becoming well enough to work;
- The decision to manage referrals to all available kinds and sources of provision through one interface – the Pathways to Work personal advisor;
- Changes to the medical eligibility assessment process – from the All Work Test to the Personal Capabilities Assessment;
- The decision to roll out the programme nationally;
- The decision to have the programme outside the pilot areas operated by the private and voluntary sectors rather than by Jobcentre Plus.

These provided a starting point for our discussions with policy makers and other key informants.

2.8 Evaluation findings

The national evaluation of Pathways to Work is being carried out by a consortium of research organisations led by the Policy Studies Institute and including the Institute for Fiscal Studies, Mathematica Policy Research, the National Centre for Social Research, the Social Policy Research Unit and David Greenberg of the University of Maryland. The evaluation is multi-faceted and involves qualitative analysis, large-scale quantitative surveys, impact analysis, cost-benefit analysis and a literature review of relevant programmes in the USA. It also focuses on separate phases of the introduction of Pathways – the effect on new claimants in the original seven pilot areas, the effect on existing claimants in the pilot areas and the effect on new claimants in areas of the country to which it has been recently extended.

Around 40 reports have been published that present the findings from the various elements of the evaluation programme. For the purposes of the current discussion, we are particularly interested in those that have presented quantitative estimates of the impact of Pathways to Work⁸.

2.8.1 Early quantitative evidence, 2006

A report authored by Stuart Adam, Carl Emmerson, Christine Frayne and Alissa Goodman⁹ presented some early findings on the impact of Pathways in the pilot areas. Using ‘difference-in-difference’ methodologies to compare outcomes for a sample of people enquiring about IB in pilot and comparison areas, they found that:

- Pathways resulted in a 9.4 percentage point increase in the percentage of people in work 10.5 months after enquiring about benefits, compared with the estimated counterfactual (i.e. the sample in comparison areas);
- Evidence was also found of a positive impact of Pathways on the incomes of those people who entered work in the Pathways areas;
- People in Pathways areas were more likely than those in comparator areas to have moved off IB (whether into work or not) over the 10.5 month period of the study;
- There was some evidence of improvements in reported health problems among those in the Pathways pilot area sample;
- More detailed analysis of the data revealed a number of other findings of interest, for example in relation to age (greater impact on people over 45) and nature of health condition (lower impact for those reporting mental health conditions).

The authors are clear that the findings presented in this report represent only part of the picture. For example, they state that the ‘...findings so far are not informative

⁸ Note that this section is not intended as a critical review of the Pathways evaluation, nor is it intended as a detailed technical description. The primary purpose is to summarise the key evaluation findings and to highlight their implications for this study.

⁹ *Early quantitative evidence on the impact of the Pathways to Work pilots*, DWP Research Report no. 354, 2006

about the longer-term outcomes of the policy...(and)...it does not shed light on whether any particular component or components of the package are primarily responsible' (pp 3-4). Of particular interest in the current context is the observation that, in effect, the study represents only a 'partial equilibrium' picture that does not take into account 'spillover' effects, for example substitution between different types of workers and/or wider general equilibrium effects of Pathways on the operation of the labour market.

Despite these caveats, the findings presented in this report are overwhelmingly positive and, according to our investigations, played an important role in influencing the decision to roll out Pathways to a larger number of areas, and ultimately nationally. The quantitative analysis provided evidence of positive employment and economic impact, while the qualitative work suggested some improvements to the detail of Pathways that were subsequently adopted (or adapted). Interviewees found it difficult to identify specific and clear links between qualitative findings and policy implementation; the most commonly-cited example was the decision to reduce the number of Work-Focused Interviews for some groups of respondents.

2.8.2 The impact of Pathways to Work, 2007

Around one year later, the Department for Work and Pensions published a report authored by Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Getinet Haile of the Policy Studies Institute¹⁰. This presented findings – again based on difference-in-difference analysis of pilot and comparator areas – that were broadly similar to the Adam *et al* findings described above, although in most cases suggesting a slightly less strong 'Pathways effect'. In particular:

- Pathways appears to increase the probability of being in work around 18 months after enquiring about benefits, by an estimated 7.4 percentage points;
- In this case, the researchers were not able to detect a statistically significant impact of Pathways on earnings;
- Likewise Pathways was found to have a small but not statistically significant impact on off-flow from IB;
- More detailed findings included an apparently stronger impact of Pathways on women than on men; stronger effect on people aged under 50; a stronger effect on people with dependent children and little effect on the self-reported health of people with mental health conditions.

The authors conclude that '*...the results are encouraging in that they suggest Pathways continues to have a positive impact on employment and, furthermore, that this impact may be sustained'* (p. 4). Again, a number of caveats are noted in the report, including the observation that people may not be entering full-time employment, perhaps due to their health conditions. The report again makes the point that 'spillover' effects are not considered, and notes that a separate cost-

¹⁰ *The impact of Pathways to Work*, Research Report No. 435, Department for Work and Pensions, 2007

benefit exercise (see 2.8.3 below) is being conducted in order to address these wider issues.

2.8.3 Cost benefit analysis, 2008

A report published by DWP in 2008 is central to the current exercise, in that it attempts to provide an overall estimate of the additional economic value created by the public funding¹¹ invested in the Pathways to Work programme. The report's authors are Stuart Adam, Antoine Bozio, Carl Emmerson, David Greenberg and Genevieve Knight.

In brief, the report concludes that *'the financial benefits of Pathways that we estimated significantly exceed the estimated financial costs, with net measured benefits both to Pathways participants and to the Exchequer'* (p. 2). The researchers reach this conclusion on the basis of the application of the 'Tax and Benefit Microsimulation Model' developed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (with ESRC support).

Depending on assumptions made about the length of time for which participants are likely to remain in a job (or off benefits), IFS suggest a net benefit to society as a whole of between £3.06 and £5.95 for each pound invested. Using the lower estimate of £3.06 for illustrative purposes, the calculations are based on the following:

- An estimated average net cost of Pathways (for individuals making a benefit enquiry) of £340 per capita;
- Assuming that 'Pathways effects' last for 70 weeks, measured benefits are estimated at £1,041 per person of which £526 represents additional disposable income for the individual and £515 accrues to the Exchequer in the form of tax revenue and/or reduced benefit payments;
- This implies a net benefit to the Exchequer of £175 per capita (£515 less the £340 unit cost of Pathways);
- The 'net measured benefit to society' is calculated as £701 per person making a benefit enquiry (£1041 less the £340 unit cost of Pathways), or £3.06 per pound invested.

The report recognises that, although a fairly comprehensive and sophisticated model was employed, these figures do not take into account a range of 'omitted costs and benefits', for example those associated with changes in the health status of Pathways and non-Pathways participants (e.g. NHS costs) and the value of changes in the non-work time available to Pathways participants. Interestingly, the report notes that there may be (non-measured) costs and benefits associated with the *'reaction of the public to reductions in the incapacity benefit rolls'* (p. 4).

¹¹ The total cost/budget for PTW was not available at the time of writing. The IFS report presents unit costs rather than total costs

Furthermore, the model does not take into account any effect that Pathways might have on competition in the local labour market which might affect the probability of non-IB jobseekers obtaining employment, for example. The authors acknowledge that the calculations are based on the measured outcomes for the pilot areas, and it is difficult to extrapolate these findings to estimate the likely impact of a full national roll-out of Pathways. Finally, and importantly, the report highlights a number of uncertainties surrounding the 'net benefit' calculations, particularly in relation to the longevity of the impact of Pathways.

It is appropriate to conclude therefore, that while this study employed relatively sophisticated techniques and was part of a comparatively well-funded research and evaluation programme, the headline figures provide only a summary indication of the overall impact of a programme as large and complex as Pathways. This needs to be borne in mind in considering how it might be possible to arrive at a quantitative estimate of the ESRC contribution to the impact estimated by this relatively robust study that is nonetheless surrounded by uncertainties (as acknowledged by the researchers and implicitly by DWP, who published the report).

The uncertainties surrounding the estimation of the impact of Pathways are illustrated starkly by the findings of a subsequent quantitative study of Pathways, published in 2009 and discussed below.

2.8.4 Impact of Pathways in the expansion areas, 2009

A report by Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Sergio Salis of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research¹² was published by DWP in 2009. This examined, for the first time, the impact of Pathways outside of the initial pilot areas, using precisely the same techniques as those used for the evaluations in the pilot areas. This study focused on the six Districts into which Pathways was expanded in April 2006 and – in contrast to the pilot evaluation studies – found no significant impact of Pathways on any of the main outcome variables, i.e. work, earnings and self-reported health outcomes. Analysis by sub-group also failed to reveal any significant effects.

The report discusses some of the reasons why these results may have emerged, in contrast to the broadly positive findings from the 2006 – 2008 reports. For example, it is pointed out that there were some differences in approach, in particular a focus in the expansion area study upon people who actually made a claim as opposed to those who enquired about benefits (as was the case in the pilot area studies). It is also noted that there may be statistical factors relating to sample sizes that may affect the interpretation of the findings. Finally, it may be the case that there are differences in the resources devoted to Pathways between the pilot and expansion areas.

¹² *The impact of Pathways to Work on work, earnings and self-reported health in the April 2006 expansion areas*, Research Report No. 601. Department for Work and Pensions, 2009.

None of these observations fully explain why there was a noticeable difference between the most recently-published evaluation finding and those for the pilot areas. The 2009 report was published only during the fieldwork phase of our study and work is ongoing on the Pathways evaluation, so it is clearly too early to draw any firm conclusions. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the Bewley *et al* finding suggest that a degree of caution should be employed in using the Adam *et al* cost-benefit findings as a definitive indicator of the overall economic impact of Pathways to Work. At best, it is a working estimate that may be used to derive indicative measures of the policy impact of ESRC in the case of Pathways to Work.

3. Role of research in policy development and implementation: policy and researcher perspectives

3.1 Introduction

In this Section we summarise the perspectives of two key groups – government policy makers and academic/applied researchers – regarding the influence of the research that has been undertaken in relation to Pathways to Work and the welfare to work agenda generally, and that funded by the ESRC more specifically.

The impact of research on policy has been researched intensively by a number of scholars including, for example, Professor Sandra Nutley and her colleagues¹³, who point to the ‘... *absence of a strong and compelling evidence base documenting improvements in public service arising from increased research use ...*’ (298).

The research synthesised by Nutley et al provides a number of insights that are relevant to the task of estimating the ESRC contribution to Pathways to Work. Key points from the extensive research literature include:

- Not all research has – or is intended to have – an impact on public policy;
- Where research can be demonstrated to have an impact, this is rarely straightforward or direct in nature, with research messages often being ‘*mediated, blocked or amplified*’ in the process (ibid, 297);
- Research impact can – in principle – be categorised in terms of conceptual (or ‘enlightenment’) uses and more pragmatic ‘instrumental’ applications;
- Research use is ‘*complex and contingent ... (and) ... multichannelled, multifaceted, interactive, iterative and transformative ...*’ (ibid, 298);
- Where research is used in practice, it is often adapted rather than simply adopted, in many cases involving the bringing together of research evidence with other types of knowledge;
- Traditional, positivist-based, linear models of research use do not adequately describe the iterative, interactive and social ways in which research is typically used in policy development and/or practice;
- ‘*While we now know much about research use, there is much yet still to uncover*’ (ibid, 316).

In the context of this study, these statements suggest that any attempt to derive a simple quantitative estimate of the impact of social science research on policy outcomes needs to be placed in a much wider context that recognises the complexities involved in the processes through which research influences policy and practice. In particular, insights gained through qualitative understanding needs to be integrated with quantitative analysis.

¹³ Nutley, S. M., Walter, I. and Davies, H. T. O. (2007) *Using Evidence: how research can inform public services*, Policy Press, Bristol

3.2 The role of research in early policy decisions

Our consultations revealed a broad consensus among policy and research informants that the initial introduction of Pathways to Work was a reaction to political disquiet about the coexistence of employment growth with perceived large and rising numbers of 'inactive benefit' claimants. In addition, by 2001 the medical testing regime for Incapacity Benefit was experiencing very long backlogs. Initiatives such as NDDP and ONE had been introduced but – particularly in the latter case – were not felt by politicians to be producing results rapidly enough. As a result, there was a strong political push, in particular from the then Prime Minister to 'do something' to address this issue.

The Prime Minister set up an independent review chaired by Martin Taylor of WH Smith, which brought together Welfare to Work information and medical research/evaluation studies and relied mainly on evidence from evaluation of the ONE pilots and NDDP¹⁴. Key findings from these studies included:

- Take-up of these initiatives was relatively low and participants tended to be people who were nearer to the labour market than a 'typical' IB claimant;
- The role of job brokers and advisors is very important, as are the associated funding and contracting regime;
- Employers engaging with these programmes tend to be larger and more focused on the public sector than a 'typical' employer;
- Qualitative research in particular highlighted the need for flexible and responsive services to meet the needs of participants and to address their perceived barriers to work;
- While many positive lessons emerged, there was little evidence (particularly for ONE) of a significant impact of these initiatives on the probability of individuals moving off benefits and/or into work.

The (unpublished) review concluded that provision for disability (e.g. Remploy etc) was mainly aimed at people with relatively severe disabilities, but there was not sufficient provision for others with less severe conditions. The review adopted a bio-psycho-social model of disability – influenced in particular by the work of Gordon Waddell and colleagues¹⁵ - which focuses on the propensity of the individual to be able to deal with their situation. This implies that there is a need to work with people on the labour market side as well as the medical side. The review also identified that work incentives were worse for IB claimants than for any other group, mainly due to the financial risk associated with coming off benefits.

The review concluded that there was a need for an integrated approach involving JCP advisors, changes to the benefit system and in particular improvement in the

¹⁴ Stafford, B. et al (2007) *New Deal for Disabled People: third synthesis report – key findings from the evaluation*. DWP Research Report 430; Green, H. et al (2003) *Final effects of ONE*. DWP Research Report 183.

¹⁵ See for example Waddell, G. (2002) *Models of disability: using low back pain as an example*, Royal Society of Medicine Press. This paper was cited by policy respondents as a very important influence on the thinking behind the Green Paper.

risks associated with moving into work. There was also a need for health and rehabilitation advice in the system, hence the need to work with the NHS.

3.3 Research influences on the 2002 Green Paper

As described in section 2, the 2002 Green Paper is a key document, setting out the Government's proposals to introduce— subject to consultation - the Pathways to Work initiative, without specifying full implementation details. The document itself lists 32 references to research-based publications (including evaluation studies) and Table 3.1 lists 10 references which were identified by policy informants as being a good indication of the research that was influential in the thinking behind the Green Paper.

Table 3.1 2002 Green Paper – key references identified by policy interviewees

Author(s)	Title	Institution(s)	Date
Green, H., Marsh, A. and Connolly, GH.	The short term effects of compulsory participation in ONE: survey of clients, cohort 2, wave 1	Office for National Statistics Policy Studies Institute British Market Research Bureau	2001
Rowlingson, K. and Berthoud, R.	Disability, benefits and employment	Policy Studies Institute	1996
Green, H. (and 5 others)	First effects of ONE	Office for National Statistics Policy Studies Institute British Market Research Bureau ECOTEC	2000
Lawless, P., Martin, R. and Hardy, S.	Unemployment and social exclusion: landscapes of labour inequality	Regional Studies Association	1997
Nickell, S. and Bell, B.	The collapse in demand for the unskilled and unemployment across the OECD		1995
Acheson, D. <i>et al</i>	Independent inquiry into inequalities in health - report		1998
Blackwell, T., Burns, P. and Hardy, S.	Attitudes on mental health in the workplace	Work Foundation Industrial Society	2001
Legard, R., Lewis, J. Hiscock, J. and Scott, J.	Identifying the work-related capabilities of Incapacity Benefit claimants	National Centre for Social Research	2002
Grewal, I. (and 4 others)	'Disabled for life?': attitudes towards and experience of disability in Britain	National Centre for Social Research	2002
Ashworth, K., Hartfree, Y. and Stephenson, A.	Well enough to work?	Centre for Research in Social Policy	2001

3.4 Influence of research on policy development following the Green Paper

One policy respondent stated that:

“Research was fundamental in coming up with the details of the policy. I would suggest that research represented around three-quarters of the overall influence on detailed implementation decisions”

It was suggested that evidence-based approaches were used in contrast to what one respondent labelled a ‘man in the pub’ mentality that influences the thinking of some politicians, and also to address the concerns expressed by the disability lobby, many of whom were sceptical about the proposed PTW initiative. In general there was some fear expressed by some of these groups that PTW would be used as a means of restricting the availability of benefits to people who are not capable of work and/or forcing people to take inappropriate employment in order to cut back on public expenditure.

Effectively, the research indicated the need to merge together the welfare to work, benefit and health systems. This meant building in the NHS element, emphasising the support that is required in order to help people to gain and retain employment, in the light of research findings which suggest that most people on inactive benefits would prefer to work if possible, if appropriate opportunities were available and if they had good quality advice and support.

This evidence-based approach contrasts with a ‘man in the pub’ route, which would have implied a greater focus on conditionality and restricting the level and/or availability of benefits, based on the assertion (typically not supported by robust evidence) that large numbers of people on IB are perfectly capable of working, but prefer not to do so because of a benefit regime that is perceived by many people as being too generous and not particularly successful in distinguishing genuine claimants from ‘malingerers’.

The general opinion amongst researchers is that – in line with Nutley et al (2007) - it is very difficult to assess the extent to which research evidence has specifically influenced policy development. That is not to say, that research is not seen as having any impact. One argument is that government commitment to evidence-based policy research means that in theory, any research can only add to this evidence base and be beneficial. The difficulty is in isolating and quantifying that impact.

One researcher was unaware of any particular academic research that has been used by policy makers to inform the development of Pathways to Work, although did suggest that research from think-tanks such as IPPR was more likely than academic research to influence policy decisions.

Key research influences were identified by policy respondents and researchers to be as follows:

- The research findings from the ONE and NDDP evaluations which identified strong underlying aspirations and motivations to return to work among people coming onto IB;

- The research studies reported in the Green Paper that summarise the barriers to employment perceived by people on inactive benefits, including declining health due to length of time out of work, low levels of confidence, a perception that there are limited suitable job opportunities and worries about the financial implications of returning to work¹⁶;
- The work of Gordon Waddell and colleagues on models of disability,¹⁷ and particularly on back pain which fed into the initial independent review. Four key elements of a desired response were identified;
 - (1) The need for a degree of ‘push’ to encourage people in to the labour market;
 - (2) The need for early intervention, once people move onto inactive benefits (or indeed before they claim benefits);
 - (3) The need for a culture change among advisors to ensure that they address the health as well as the labour market needs of claimants;
 - (4)in particular concerning definitions of and attitudes to ‘sick and disabled’ – need to move towards ‘health conditions and disability’ as a more appropriate way of defining the issue.
- Gordon Waddell has also worked closely with members of the DWP Corporate Medical Group on a range of medical-related issues, for example the medical testing process, which was felt to be in need of reform.

3.5 The influence of the national evaluation of Pathways to Work

There are mixed opinions¹⁸ amongst researchers as to the extent to which the national evaluation has influenced the development of the Pathways to Work initiative (see section 2.8 above for an overview of the findings). For example, one suggested that that the role of the national evaluation was not necessarily to inform policy development. Instead, the evaluation was about providing an independent view (using quality data that could not be collected in-house by DWP) as to whether Pathways was working or not. Their own perspective was – following the above reasoning - that DWP has made very little, if any, use of the evaluation findings in developing Pathways. This view was not shared by all research respondents, as outlined below.

Another researcher also shared this uncertainty, highlighting that the decision to roll-out Pathways nationally was taken after the interim evaluation undertaken by IFS, but before the results from the national evaluation were available. Hence, the extent to which the national evaluation has influenced policy development in relation to Pathways to Work was seen as debatable.

¹⁶ *Pathways to Work: helping people into employment*, Cm 5690, 2002, chapter 2

¹⁷ Waddell, G., Aylward, M and Sawney, P. (2002) *Back pain, incapacity for work and social security benefits: an international literature review and analysis*, Royal Society of Medicine Press.

¹⁸ This was a relatively small scale qualitative study with a purposive rather than statistically-based sampling strategy. It is therefore not possible to provide an accurate indication of the extent to which the range of views is held more generally within the research community. The evidence does point, however, to a divergence of views within this group.

Other researchers were more positive about the influence of the national evaluation although again it was felt to be very difficult to quantify that influence:

“I would like to think that the research (national evaluation) was influential in shaping policy and that we weren’t just blowing into the wind”

Suggested positive influences highlighted were as follows:

- The findings from the national evaluation – and in particular the quantitative studies and the IFS cost-benefit analysis - did give ‘a feel of approval’ for Pathways and provided justification for the continuation of the initiative through emphasizing the key achievements and employment gains. In this sense, the national evaluation was seen as confirming the belief of policy makers that ‘Pathways works’ and providing support for the decision to roll out the initiative beyond the pilot areas;
- In contrast to the respondent referred to in the first paragraph of this section, other researchers felt that the qualitative research programme (part of the national evaluation) resulted in some recommendations for change, for example regarding the number of Work-Focused Interviews that it would be appropriate to undertake. These were seen to be influential in addressing some particular delivery problems, in relation to ‘blockages in the system’. However, it was stated that there may well have been other influences on this particular decision-making process.
- The qualitative research involved a longitudinal survey, with feedback provided to DWP on an on-going basis. Again, although it was seen as being almost impossible to quantify, it was felt that these results may have had some influence on policy development in relation to Pathways to Work, although respondents found it difficult to pinpoint specific findings and the routes through which they may have influenced policy;

3.6 Influence of ESRC-funded research

DWP respondents were unable to estimate the contribution of ESRC research to the research input into Pathways to Work. This is primarily due to the fact that DWP relied heavily on an extensive commissioned programme of research and evaluation, with limited recourse to wider research findings or other sources such as seminars, conferences, journal articles, informal consultations etc.

One DWP interviewee did emphasise, however, that the selection of researchers or institutes to undertake research or evaluation studies related to Pathways to Work (and indeed other policy initiatives) was strongly influenced by the academic reputation of the individuals or organisations concerned, regardless of their specific views or past findings. Having said this, current or previous receipt of ESRC funding was not mentioned as an explicit factor influencing research commissioning decisions

Researcher perceptions were that ESRC funding is likely to have had some influence on the development of the Pathways to Work initiative. One argument is that ESRC funded research is likely to have had an indirect effect on policy development, as ESRC research has been important in developing understanding of the Welfare to Work agenda more generally. For example, the Institute for Fiscal Studies received

funding from the ESRC to research means of reducing the number of people claiming incapacity benefit. This is obviously a key focus of Pathways.

Furthermore, although the national evaluation was funded by DWP, ESRC funding was viewed as having an important role in terms of supporting the development of skills and techniques that were used for the evaluation. A respondent stated that *“without the ESRC funding we would not have been able to do the evaluation”*.

For example, the evaluation utilised a ‘tax and benefit microsimulation model’ which was built and sustained by an ESRC funded research centre based at the Institute for Fiscal Studies. This was used to measure the financial benefits of Pathways to Work, i.e. for every £1 spent, how much both the individual and the exchequer are better off. This is a good illustration of the role that ESRC has played in capacity-building, through supporting the training and development of researchers, for example, and building the infrastructure (such as research centres¹⁹) through which long-term strategic projects such as the ‘TaxBen’ model can be developed, tested and ultimately applied directly to policy development and evaluation.

The qualitative interviews yielded some very valuable insights into the relationship between research and policy in the context of Pathways. Our overall conclusion, however, was that the most fruitful avenue to follow in attempting to identify the contribution of ESRC to the research that was felt by DWP informants to have influenced key decisions in relation to Pathways to Work, is to focus on the published material cited in the Green Paper and other key documents published subsequent to the introduction of Pathways to Work. This process, and the resulting findings, is described in sections 4 and 5.

3.7 Other research influences on the implementation of Pathways to Work

Following on from the research influences on the Green Paper, policy and research informants identified research by Waddell and Burton²⁰ as having an influence on the national roll-out of Pathways to Work. This publication draws primarily on medical-related research, and our investigations suggest that there are no links between ESRC and this particular stream of research activity and publication.

The way that Pathways to Work is positioned treats work as being ‘therapeutic’. The Waddell research highlights that in relation to work for sick and disabled people, there is a broad consensus across multiple disciplines, disability groups, employers, unions, insurers and all political parties, based on extensive clinical experience and on principles of fairness and social justice that when their health condition permits, sick and disabled people (particularly those with ‘common health problems’) should be encouraged and supported to remain in or to (re)-enter work as soon as possible because it:

- is therapeutic;

¹⁹ ESRC has funded a research centre at IFS since 1991

²⁰ *Is work good for your health and well-being?* (2006)

- helps to promote recovery and rehabilitation;
- leads to better health outcomes;
- minimises the harmful physical, mental and social effects of long-term sickness absence;
- reduces the risk of long-term incapacity;
- promotes full participation in society, independence and human rights;
- reduces poverty;
- improves quality of life and well-being.

3.8 Other influences on the development of Pathways to Work

A range of other influences on the development of Pathways to Work were cited by researchers and policy respondents.

3.8.1 Government priorities

The Pathways to Work initiative was a high profile policy change. It was suggested by one respondent that *'it had been in the sights of government for a long time'*. Although implementation was a gradual and incremental process, there was a definite intent and momentum towards implementing Pathways anyway, regardless of what research may, or may not have said. The notion of 'conceptual influence' is important in this context; however, the overwhelming conclusion from the interview phase of our study was that neither policy-makers nor researchers were able to identify any such direct 'conceptual' impact on the early development of Pathways to Work.

3.8.2 Feedback from DWP staff

Feedback from DWP working on the ground and directly involved in delivering Pathways to Work was seen as being likely to have informed policy development. For example, initially, by default people had to attend four or five meetings as part of Pathways, but in reality only turned up to a couple. Hence, the number of meetings was reduced, with one researcher indicating that this was directly as a result of feedback from DWP staff²¹.

3.8.3 Lessons from abroad

Finally, one researcher suggested that much of the thinking in relation to this policy area has come from the US. The 'Workfirst' programme from California in the early 1990s²² was cited by interviewees as resulting in a major change in direction for

²¹ Our research did not investigate the internal mechanisms through which staff feedback was sought and used by DWP. It is important to note, however, that the research and evaluation programme – particularly the qualitative elements – entailed considerable consultation with DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the delivery of Pathways.

²² See, for example, Bliss, S (2001) 'Beyond welfare and work first: building services and systems to support California's working poor and hard to place'. Conference Paper, Manpower Demonstration Research Corp.

welfare policy. This programme found that there was a positive reaction to the rationale that people ‘need a job now’, because having a job in itself addresses a lot of the issues that cause difficulties to them entering the job market in the first place. The Pathways to Work initiative is seen as one of the programmes that reflects this thinking.

3.9 Key research influences on Pathways to Work: synthesis

The documentary and interview research described in sections 2 and 3 above suggest that research findings did have some influence on the implementation and development of the Pathways initiative, particularly in relation to detailed implementation and the integration of medical and related support with more conventional labour market interventions such as WFIs. Having said this, the consensus of informed opinion is that the decision to develop a major policy initiative to address the issue of a large number of IB claimants, with little evidence of significant off-flow into employment at a time of economic growth was essentially a political one.

Bringing together the consultation evidence, the ‘story’ of the relationship between research and policy development in relation to Pathways to work can be summarised as follows:

3.9.1 ‘Something has to be done’: limited research influence

Around 2001, there was a strong feeling that ‘something had to be done’, driven partly by concerns over the exchequer costs of high numbers of IB claimants, partly by evidence of significant skill shortages in some sectors and areas (increasingly filled by inward migrants) and partly by a perceived ‘man in the pub’ view that a substantial proportion of people claiming IB were indeed capable of work but were discouraged from seeking work by a relative generous benefit/testing regime.

Our assessment – supported by documentary research and interviews – is that research findings played a limited role in the decision to ‘do something’. By implication, therefore, research funded by ESRC is highly unlikely to have had anything but a minor influence on the initial decision to pursue the policy direction that eventually became Pathways to Work.

3.9.2 ‘What should be done?’: influenced by medical-related research and evaluation of NDDP/ONE

Having decided that ‘*something had to be done*’, the work that led up to the publication of the 2002 Green Paper focused primarily on ‘*what should be done*’ and in so doing drew on a wide range of research and evaluation findings.

Two main types of research findings played a particularly important role in shaping the recommendations that were eventually set out in the Green Paper. Firstly, the medical-related research synthesised by Waddell and colleagues – as described in section 3.3.4 above – which derived from a research tradition (i.e. medical research, occupational health, epidemiology etc.) which is linked only tangentially with social research in general and ESRC-funded research in particular.

Secondly, evaluations and studies relating to ONE and NDDP played an important role in identifying ‘what works’ and – of equal significance – ‘what has not worked to date’. These studies were, for the most part, commissioned by DWP or predecessor organisations and undertaken by academic and/or applied research institutes or consultancy organisations. Many of these institutes and/or individual researchers have links with ESRC funded research, and the extent and nature of these links are a key focus for investigation in this study. This is explored in more detail in section 4.

3.9.3 Detailed implementation and development: key role for evaluation

Following the publication of the Green Paper and subsequent consultation, our investigations suggest that research – and in particular research-based evaluation – played an even more important role in the ongoing development and implementation of the Pathways programme, from 2003 onwards.

DWP invested significantly in Pathways research and evaluation between 2003 and 2009, and evaluation work was ongoing at the time of writing, reflecting the fact that Pathways was seen as a key policy initiative, deserving of substantial investment in specifically focused research and evaluation activity.

3.9.4 Indirect but important role for ESRC research

Influences on the Pathways programme from research activities beyond the scope of the specifically commissioned research and work were limited.

This means that the influence of ESRC is likely to have been felt indirectly, for example through some combination of:

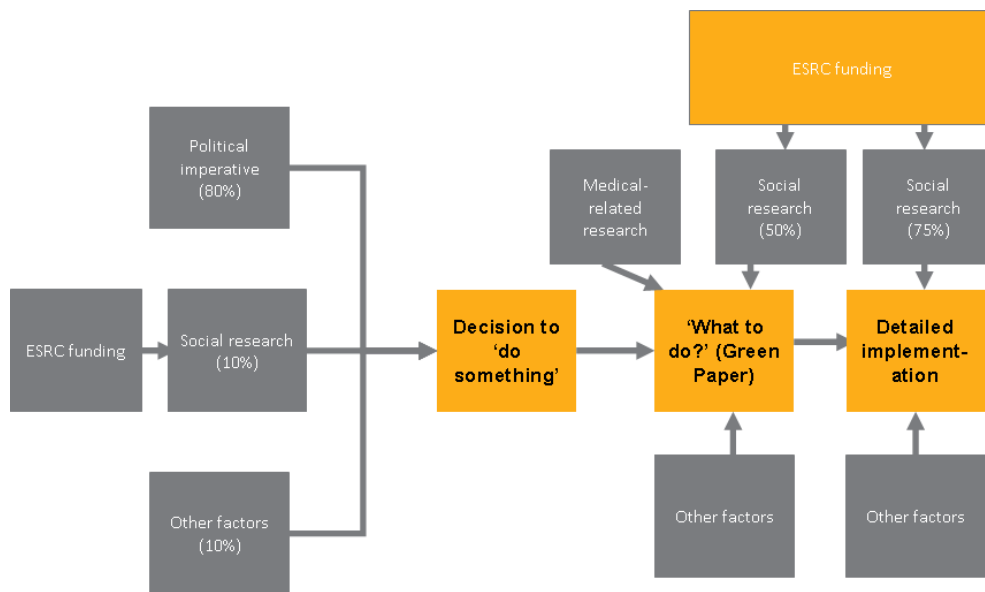
- ESRC contribution to the basic infrastructure of social research (as illustrated by the case of the Institute for Fiscal Studies)
- other ESRC-funded research undertaken previously or contemporaneously by the individuals and organisations undertaking Pathways research
- ESRC-funded research undertaken by researchers not directly involved in Pathways research that has informed or influenced Pathways research in some way.

DWP’s policy of publishing all research and evaluation reports enables us to build up a comprehensive picture of research influences based on analysis of the published material.

The nature of ESRC influence on Pathways to Work can therefore be summarised in Figure 3.1. This shows that direct influences are likely to be very limited in scale or scope, but that there is – in principle – considerable scope for indirect influences, operating through the directly commissioned work which represents the key source of research influence on Pathways to Work. Our study sought to identify ‘conceptual’ influences on the development of Pathways, through the interviews, document review and a review of media reporting/comment. However, as illustrated in Figure 3.1, this evidence suggests strongly that research influence on Pathways is primarily instrumental rather than conceptual, using the terminology suggested by Nutley *et al* (2007).

The percentages in the boxes are based on our considered interpretation of interviewees' responses regarding the influence of research on the different stages of policy development and implementation. In particular, a key policy maker was very clear that research played a minor role (estimated at 10 per cent) in the initial decision to 'do something', but stated explicitly that research represented at least 75 per cent of the influence on decisions about detailed implementation.

Figure 3.1: ESRC influence on Pathways – conceptual model



4. Research influences on Pathways: detailed analysis

4.1 Introduction

As noted above, our conclusion from the fieldwork phase on the study was that quantitative measures of the relative role played by social science research and ESRC-funded research can best be derived through detailed analysis of publications and citations, as opposed to more extensive interview fieldwork, which provides useful qualitative insight, but limited quantifiable evidence.

The desk research and consultation process described above led to the identification of over 70 research publications that can be said to have had an important direct influence on the Pathways to Work initiative. In turn, these can be divided into categories according to the time period in relation to the development / implementation of Pathways. In addition, we can identify indirect research influences through analysis of citations and references in these 70 key publications. This section describes the analysis process and emerging results.

4.2 Research prior to 1997

We identified 7 documents published prior to the election of New Labour in 1997, which are felt to have contributed to the development of Pathways.

4.3 Research input to the 2002 Green Paper, 1997-2002

We undertook a review of the research that was used to inform the development of the 2002 Green Paper, based on analysis of the Green Paper document and interviews with people who were involved in its development. Seventeen such documents were identified, in addition to ten publications that were cited directly in the Green Paper itself.

4.4 DWP commissioned research and evaluation, 2003 onwards

The DWP commissioned a range of organisations to assist in its research relating to Pathways to Work. They also commissioned a consortium of research organisations led by the Policy Studies Institute to conduct an independent evaluation of Pathways to Work. This research programme has resulted in 40 publications to date.

4.5 Researchers, research centres and institutes

We undertook a desk-based review of authors named within DWP reports on disability, incapacity and employment matters. They are listed along with their frequency of authorship in Appendix 1.

4.6 The role of ESRC

Our consultations found that, while the key role of research in general was acknowledged, policy makers did not mention ESRC as a direct influence (even when prompted); researchers were more likely to acknowledge the role of ESRC (when

prompted), but the impact is seen as indirect rather than direct, through for example researcher training, methodology development, data sources etc.

It is clear, therefore, that the key to identifying ESRC impact is to examine in as much detail as possible the ESRC links with the research sources noted in section 3. The initial thinking behind the study was that other routes such as the media and ‘informed public opinion’ in the form of think tanks, pressure groups etc., may provide some links to ESRC. Our investigations have failed to reveal any evidence of explicit links through these channels. We therefore concentrated our resources and attention on collating and analysing the research outputs cited in key documents and/or by key informants, in particular investigating any direct or indirect links with ESRC funding.

4.6.1 ESRC contribution to pre-1997 research

Policy makers’ views that the decision to introduce Pathways was not primarily informed by research, but was rather a political imperative, are supported by our literature and media review, which finds little/no reference to social research in general, not to mention ESRC-funded research or researchers, suggesting strongly that ‘conceptual’ influence on the policy process in relation to Pathways was minimal.

Table 4.1 summarises our analysis of the ESRC contribution to the seven publications that were identified through our research as playing an important role in influencing thinking on ‘Pathways-related’ issues leading up to the election of the New Labour government in 1997. The findings suggest a very limited role for ESRC in this early stage of policy thinking, although note that ESRC-supported authors are cited fairly frequently in these documents, suggesting a relatively strong indirect impact.

Table 4.1: Pre-1997 research – ESRC contribution

	N	Ratio
Publications identified	7	
Publications with ESRC link	1	0.14
Authors	13	
Authors with ESRC link	2	0.15
Authors cited in references	114	
Cited authors with ESRC link	44	0.39

It was beyond the scope and resources of this study to examine or review in detail the specific publications included in this table. However, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of these publications fall into the ‘conceptual’ rather than ‘instrumental’ category, suggesting perhaps some indirect conceptual impact from ESRC research during the pre-Pathways period. This is an issue that clearly merits

further investigation – in the context of this or other policy initiatives – to more fully understand and measure (if possible) conceptual impact.

4.6.2 ESRC contribution to the 2002 Green Paper and related developments

Table 4.2 presents an analysis of the ESRC contribution to research directly related to the 2002 Green Paper, published over the period 1999-2002. The findings suggest a markedly increased contribution from ESRC, as compared with the period prior to 1997. The relatively high ratio in relation to publications largely reflects the fact that many of these publications are multi-authored and an ‘ESRC link’ is defined as having at least one author who is present in the ESRC Repository. **For this reason, we feel that the author-based measure is the most robust for the purposes of developing quantitative measures of ESRC policy impact.**

Again, there are some indications that indirect (in some cases ‘conceptual’) influences through citations are of particular importance at this stage of policy development. As noted above, this requires further investigation before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Table 4.2: Green Paper related research 1999-2002 – ESRC contribution

	N	Ratio
Publications identified	17	
Publications with ESRC link	10	0.59
Authors	60	
Authors with ESRC link	18	0.3
Authors cited in references	67	
Cited authors with ESRC link	27	0.4

Table 4.3 focuses specifically on the ten publications that respondents felt were particularly influential on the 2002 Green Paper, and presents some detail regarding the ESRC links associated with the individual authors and/or the research institutions concerned. It is significant that we were able to discover ESRC links with all 10 publications reviewed²³. In total, 33 authors or contributors were named in the Green Paper, of whom 16 could be linked in some way with ESRC. These figures, and the detailed analysis that underpins them, suggest that ESRC funding played an important part in supporting the research (and the individual researchers in particular) whose views and findings had considerable influence over the proposals that were put forward in the Green Paper.

²³ Note that publications for which individual author names were not provided were excluded from this analysis.

Table 4.3: Referred to in Pathways to Work: helping people into employment, DWP 2002

Report Title	Date of Report	Institute	Commissioner	Author	ESRC Link to Authors
The Short-term Effects of Compulsory Participation in ONE - Survey of Clients: Cohort 2 Wave 1	December 2001	Office for National Statistics, the Policy Studies Institute, and the British Market Research Bureau International	DWP	Hazel Green, Alan Marsh, Helen Connolly	<p>Alan Marsh:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1995-97: produced a conference paper entitled "Changing patterns of family support" for a grant project entitled "Explaining the growth of lone parenthood in Great Britain" (led by Richard Berthoud); 2007: presented a paper entitled "The next steps in welfare to work?" as part of the then-ESRC-core-funded Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) seminar programme
Disability, Benefits and Employment	1996	Policy Studies Institute	DWP	Karen Rowlingson, Richard Berthoud	<p>Karen Rowlingson: (sits on the ESRC Research Grants Board)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1995-97: Involved in a grant project entitled "Explaining the growth of lone parenthood in Great Britain" (led by Richard Berthoud); produced a conference paper, a chapter of a book and a book as outputs 2005: produced a paper entitled "Inheritance in Britain: survey data on expectations, experiences and attitudes to bequeathing" which was submitted at a seminar for the (then) ESRC-core-funded Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) <p>Richard Berthoud:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 58+ ESRC project outputs since at least 1998; Key member of the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-social Change

Report Title	Date of Report	Institute	Commissioner	Author	ESRC Link to Authors
First Effects of ONE	November 2000	Office for National Statistics, the Policy Studies Institute, British Market Research Bureau International, and ECOTEC	DWP	Hazel Green, Alison Smith, Robert Lilly, Alan Marsh, Clare Johnson, Shaun Fielding	<p>Alison Smith (now Alison Smith Koslowski):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2006: Post Doctoral Fellowship in Sociology at the University of Edinburgh <p>Alan Marsh: see above</p>
Unemployment and Social Exclusion: landscapes of labour inequality	February 1997	Regional Studies Association		Paul Lawless, Ron Martin, Sally Hardy	<p>Paul Lawless:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1993-2001: 5 papers on Sheffield, regeneration, the labour market and transport infrastructure <p>Ron Martin:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1988-1989: Award entitled "The impact of real wages disparities in unemployment and migration" 1998-1999: Award titled "The Geography of Private Shareholding: Mapping 'popular capitalism' in Britain" 2000: Conference paper "The local impact of the new deal: does geography matter?" part of "The Geography of Workfare: Local Labour Markets and the New Deal"
The collapse in demand for the unskilled and unemployment across the OECD	1995	Oxford Review of Economic Policy		Stephen Nickell, Brian Bell	<p>Stephen Nickell:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in at least 89 ESRC project outputs since at least 1989, including major research projects on poverty, unemployment and labour markets across the world. <p>Brian Bell:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1999: Journal article "Getting the unemployed back to work: the role of wage subsidies" for the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Fiscal Policy led by Richard Blundell

Report Title	Date of Report	Institute	Commissioner	Author	ESRC Link to Authors
Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report	1998		Minister for Public Health	D Acheson, and a panel including Hilary Graham, Director of the ESRC Health Variations Programme at Lancaster University	The report in question, "Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report" was an output of the ESRC project "A Matter of Life and Death: Social and Spatial Inequalities in Health" led by Mary Shaw
Attitudes on mental health in the workplace, with proposals for change	2001	Industrial Society/ Work Foundation	Department for Health/ Working Minds, London	Theo Blackwell, Patrick Burns, Sam Hardy	<p>Sam Hardy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2000: Conference paper "Gender, restructuring and new public management: changing management identities in three public sector organisations"
Evaluation of the Capability Report: Identifying the Work-Related Capabilities of Incapacity Benefits Claimants	February 2002	National Centre for Social Research	DWP	Robin Legard, Jane Lewis, Julia Hiscock, James Scott	<p>Jane Lewis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2001-2007: 30+ outputs relating to risk, families and welfare, mostly articles for various journals.
'Disabled for life?' attitudes towards, and experiences of, disability in Britain	August 2002	National Centre for Social Research	DWP	Ini Grewal, Sarah Joy, Jane Lewis, Kirby Swales, Kandy Woodfield	<p>Ini Grewal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2001-2004: a number of publications on ethnic inequalities in quality of life and older people <p>Jane Lewis: see above</p> <p>Kandy Woodfield:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked to the Research Methods research programme; has worked for NCSR for 12 years.
Well enough to work?	July 2001	Centre for Research in Social Policy	DWP	Karl Ashworth, Yvette Hartfree, Augusta Stephenson	<p>Karl Ashworth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1999: Book "Work and young men" from the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Fiscal Policy 2001: Book "A new approach to poverty dynamics" for the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Fiscal Policy

4.6.3 ESRC contribution to detailed implementation of Pathways to Work

Our investigations confirm that specific decisions about the components of Pathways were seen as heavily driven by research findings. There is little/no evidence of ESRC-funded research playing a direct influencing role, but ample evidence that ESRC played an important indirect role by supporting leading researchers and research centres, helping with capacity building, new methodologies, data sources etc. and training researchers²⁴.

A key source of evidence for this lies in the 40 research/evaluation reports commissioned by DWP in order to inform decisions on the implementation of PTW. These studies include evaluation of the pilot and subsequent roll-out. ESRC-supported researchers and research institutes have been heavily involved in the evaluation of Pathways. Although this does not contribute directly to the estimated economic added value of Pathways, it is clear that ESRC support has enabled thorough and robust evaluations to be undertaken, which in turn has, to some extent, influenced decision-making in relation to Pathways.

We have analysed in detail the individuals who have been involved in producing these reports. In particular we have examined the extent to which individual authors are cited in the ESRC Social Sciences Repository. Summary findings are as follows:

- Out of 105 authors identified, 45 have at least one output listed in the repository, meaning that their research²⁵ has been to some degree supported by an ESRC award;
- Authors that have contributed to more than one PTW publication are particularly likely to have been supported by ESRC at some point. Nine out of the 13 authors that contributed to 3 or more PTW publications are cited on the ESRC repository.
- ESRC links were identified in relation to 25 out of the 40 research outputs reviewed, i.e. almost two-thirds of the publications had at least one author who has some association with ESRC.
- In contrast to the pre-1997 and 'Green Paper development' periods, the contribution of ESRC to citations is relatively low, at 25 per cent. This may indicate a shift from 'conceptual' to more 'instrumental' influence. However, it should be noted that a very large number of authors were identified through the citation analysis, many of whom probably fall outside the social science research category and still others of whom are overseas researchers. Again, we suggest that further investigation would help to paint a clearer picture of the precise nature of this indirect influence on policy.

This analysis provides strong *prima facie* evidence of a powerful ESRC influence on many of the individual researchers and research teams that have contributed to the

²⁴ Indeed, one of the interviewees – a DWP researcher working on the Pathways evaluation – had recently completed an ESRC-funded PhD.

²⁵ Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the PTW research has been directly supported by ESRC; simply that the individual has produced at least one published output arising from an ESRC award.

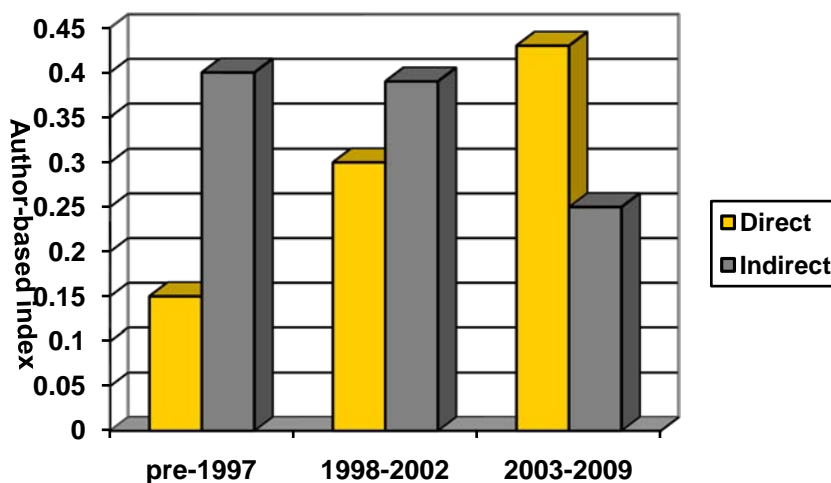
development of the PTW initiative. Section 5 explores how these findings can be incorporated into a defensible quantitative estimate of the contribution of ESRC to the impact of Pathways to Work.

While it is too early to draw firm conclusions, there are some indications from Figure 4.1 that the relative importance of direct (and largely ‘instrumental’) impacts of ESRC research seem to increase over time, whereas indirect (and possibly more ‘conceptual’) influences appear to be relatively more important at the policy development stage than it is during the implementation phase. This is intuitively attractive and further investigation should help to produce more robust findings.

Table 4.4: Research informing Pathways implementation, 2003-2009 – ESRC contribution

	N	Ratio
Publications identified	40	
Publications with ESRC link	25	0.63
Authors	105	
Authors with ESRC link	45	0.43
Authors cited in references	310	
Cited authors with ESRC link	79	0.25

Figure 4.1: Relative importance of direct and indirect²⁶ impacts over time



²⁶ Direct impacts refer to ESRC-supported researchers who are named as authors of at least one of the research papers listed in Appendix II. Indirect impacts refer to ESRC-supported researchers who are named as authors of at least one of the references cited in these papers.

5. Quantifying the ESRC contribution

5.1 Issues

The findings presented above can be regarded as *prima facie* evidence of a sizeable indirect contribution of ESRC funded research to the design, development and implementation of the Pathways to Work initiative. The results also corroborate evidence from interviews and documentary research that the ESRC influence has increased over time, and is particularly important in relation to the detailed proposals set out in the 2002 Green Paper and decisions made regarding the implementation of Pathways from 2003 onwards. For example, it is clear that the pilot evaluation – undertaken by a team containing several ESRC-supported researchers – was an important factor in the decision to roll out the programme nationally.

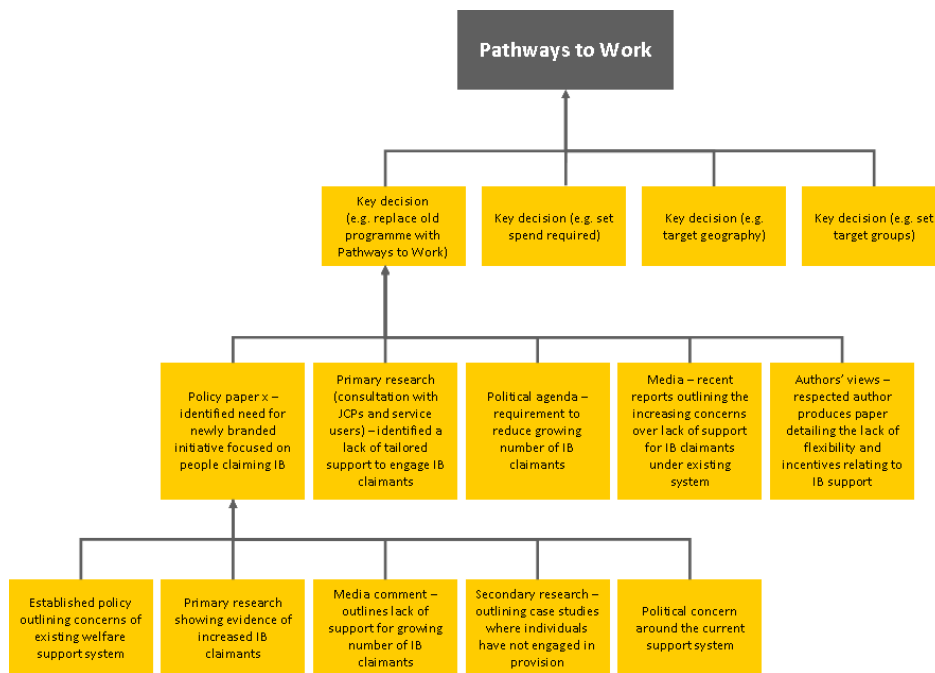
It has long been recognised²⁷ that quantifying the contribution of research in general, let alone ESRC-funded research in particular, is a considerable challenge. The ‘tracking back’ method is an experimental way of attempting to link research input to economic value added, as measured by evaluation findings. This study presents particular challenges in that:

- Our informants were unanimous in the view that the original introduction of Pathways was driven primarily by political and ‘public opinion’ factors, and only to a very small extent by research findings or insights;
- Evaluation results are contradictory and unclear²⁸, meaning that it is difficult to attach an agreed financial value to the impact of the Pathways programme, let alone the proportion of this impact that can be attributed to ESRC;
- Our research has revealed that much of the direct research influences on the initial establishment and development of Pathways came from outside what might be considered the ‘mainstream’ economic and social research community, mainly focusing on medical, occupational health and related research;
- We have established that ESRC impact is primarily indirect, operating mainly through the small number of researchers and research centres that have been cited by policy makers and DWP researchers as playing an important role in Pathways.

Despite these issues and challenges, we have attempted to establish a metric for ESRC influence based primarily around the following model, which policy interviewees felt was a useful – albeit still fairly simplistic – representation of the policy development process:

²⁷ http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Taking%20Stock_tcm8-4545.pdf

²⁸ In particular, see the most recent evaluation report, which suggests that Pathways has had limited, if any, impact in the ‘expansion areas’. Bewley, H, Dorsett, R. and Salis, S. (2009) *The impact of Pathways to Work on work, earnings and self-reported health in the April 2006 expansion areas*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 601



5.2 ESRC influence on Pathways: quantitative estimates

Our initial estimates are based around our detailed analysis of the 60 or so publications that were agreed by all interviewees to have contributed in some way to the introduction, design and detailed implementation of Pathways, including its ongoing evaluation.

On the basis of the quantitative and qualitative evidence collected and analysed to date, we have applied the following process. In each case we have suggested a ‘Social Research Impact Ratio’ to indicate the extent to which interviewees felt that social research influenced policy decisions at different stages. Clearly these figures are to some extent subjective and there are no accepted metrics or benchmarks. We are confident that these estimates provide a good reflection of the relative importance of social research in relation to Pathways, although we recognise, of course, that the overall findings may be sensitive to the assumptions made. For this reason we report below the results of a small-scale sensitivity analysis:

- Research played a minimal role in influencing the ‘big decision’ to introduce a radical new approach to encouraging people on Incapacity Benefit to seek work more actively (the ‘something has to be done’ decision). In the light of this we have estimated a ‘Social Research Impact Ratio’ of 10 per cent (or 0.1);
- Research played a much more important role in the development of the specific proposals contained in the 2002 Green Paper (the ‘what to do’ decision), although a key element of this research was outside of the remit of ESRC. This implies a Social Research Impact Ratio of approximately 50 per cent (0.5);
- Research and evaluation has been a significant contributor to decisions since 2003 in relation to the detailed implementation, adjustment and roll-out of Pathways to

Work (the ‘how to do it?’ decision). In light of policy respondents’ expressed views, we estimate a Social Research Impact Ratio of 75 per cent (0.75);

- The contribution of ESRC to the influence of social research on Pathways can be most sensibly estimated with reference to the proportion of authors of relevant publications that appear in the ESRC repository (i.e. have at least one ESRC-related output associated with their name). This information is used to create a series of ‘Author-Based ESRC Impact Ratios’ (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 summarises the outcome from this process. This suggests that ESRC research funding has been associated with 24 per cent of the total influence over Pathways to Work, including non-research influences. This does not necessarily mean, of course, that ESRC can claim credit for 24 per cent of the overall impact of Pathways to Work²⁹. However, it is clear that ESRC funding has played an important role in the development and implementation of one of the most significant New Labour policy initiatives.

Tables 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrate that the overall impact ratio figure is indeed sensitive to different assumptions about the Social Research Impact Ratio, but this does not have a major impact on the orders of magnitude involved. Estimated figures for the overall impact ratio range from approximately 0.2 to 0.27.

It should also be noted that, in general, researchers were less positive than policy respondents about the impact on Pathways of social research and ESRC research. Illustratively, applying Social Research Impact Ratios of 0.1, 0.3 and 0.5 to the three categories in Table 5.1 would result in an overall weighted ratio of around 15 per cent. For the purposes of the economic calculations presented below, we have used the figures in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: ESRC contribution to Pathways to Work – initial estimate

	Social research impact ratio ³⁰	Author-based ESRC impact ratio	Overall ESRC impact ratio (column 1 x column 2)	Weight (based on number of publications)	Weighted ESRC impact ratio
Pre-1997 research	0.1	0.15	0.015	0.11	0.002
Green Paper related research	0.5	0.3	0.15	0.27	0.04
Implementation-related research/evaluation	0.75	0.43	0.3225	0.625	0.20
OVERALL IMPACT RATIO³¹					0.242

²⁹ Indeed, the overall impact of Pathways has yet to be established, as evaluation work is still ongoing

³⁰ **Source:** estimates based on in-depth discussions with policy makers and researchers, and documentary review

³¹ Sum of the weighted ESRC ratios in the final column

Table 5.2: ESRC contribution to Pathways to Work, sensitivity analysis – lower estimate

	Social research impact ratio	Author-based ESRC impact ratio	Overall ESRC impact ratio (column 1 x column 2)	Weight (based on number of publications)	Weighted ESRC impact ratio
Pre-1997 research	0.05	0.15	0.0075	0.11	0.0008
Green Paper related research	0.4	0.3	0.12	0.27	0.032
Implementation-related research/evaluation	0.65	0.43	0.2795	0.625	0.175
OVERALL IMPACT RATIO					0.208

Table 5.3: ESRC contribution to Pathways to Work, sensitivity analysis – higher estimate

	Social research impact ratio	Author-based ESRC impact ratio	Overall ESRC impact ratio (column 1 x column 2)	Weight (based on number of publications)	Weighted ESRC impact ratio
Pre-1997 research	0.15	0.15	0.0225	0.11	0.0025
Green Paper related research	0.6	0.3	0.18	0.27	0.049
Implementation-related research/evaluation	0.8	0.43	0.344	0.625	0.215
OVERALL IMPACT RATIO					0.266

5.3 Economic value of ESRC impact on Pathways: initial estimates

As noted throughout this report, estimating the economic value of the ESRC contribution to the impact of Pathways to Work presents a number of challenges that have been exacerbated by the uncertainties regarding the overall economic impact of Pathways. In particular, initial positive estimates of the benefits to society from the Pathways pilots were followed by findings that suggest that these benefits may not be scalable to the national level. We have therefore taken a relatively conservative approach to the estimation and presentation of the economic value of the contribution of ESRC research.

In particular, it is important to note that the figures presented in this report are order of magnitude estimates based on a number of assumptions that are set out throughout this section of the report.

We explored three broad approaches to estimating the economic value of ESRC research that influenced Pathways to Work:

- Stated Preference
- Revealed Preference
- Cost-Benefit Analysis

Each is discussed briefly below.

5.3.1 Stated Preference

This has been reviewed in detail by Frontier Economics³². Essentially this approach involves asking respondents to provide an estimate of the value of ESRC by asking them to estimate what they would be prepared to pay to obtain the benefits of that research, had it not been available.

We tested this approach on policy respondents and it rapidly became clear that there was little mileage in pursuing it. This is primarily because respondents were unaware of the ESRC contribution to the research that they valued and were therefore unable to offer a meaningful response to our questions.

We therefore conclude that a Stated Preference approach is of limited, if any, value for 'tracking back' studies of this type.

5.3.2 Revealed Preference

This approach essentially entails identifying expenditure actually incurred on services similar to those under investigation in order to arrive at an estimate of the value of the service (in this case ESRC research) to the 'customer' (DWP on behalf of the taxpayer)³³.

For the purposes of this study, we have taken the (approximately) £10 million expenditure on research/evaluation relating to Pathways as an indication of the value placed by DWP on research in general as a contributor to the success of Pathways to Work.

Our investigations arrived at a (weighted) 'ESRC Impact Ratio' of 0.2 (for the time period covered by this research, i.e. 2003 onwards). We therefore estimate that the **value to DWP of ESRC research contributing to Pathways to Work is in the order of £2 million over the period 2003-2009.**

³² http://www.esrc.ac.uk/images/Measuring_the_Impact_of_ESRC_Funding_tcm8-4549.pdf

³³ See Frontier Economics (ibid) for a more detailed discussion in the context of ESRC research.

5.3.3 Cost Benefit Analysis

The final potential approach to estimating the economic value of the ESRC contribution to the impact of Pathways involves using the Cost Benefit Analysis findings produced by *Adam et al*³⁴ as a benchmark. Given the uncertainties surrounding these findings, our initial estimates have been based on the lower end of the net social benefit calculations presented in that report. Also, given that the cost-benefit evaluation findings were based on pilot areas only, **we have made no attempt to scale up the figures to the national level.** On this basis, our estimates are as follows:

- The national evaluation suggested a net measured benefit to individuals and the exchequer of £701 for each person in the pilot areas who enquires about incapacity benefits. Our investigations suggest that it is reasonable to conclude that ESRC research contributes around 24 per cent of this added value to society, resulting in a **net societal benefit from ESRC research of £170 for each person who enquires about incapacity benefit.**
- An alternative approach relates to the *Adam et al* estimate of the net societal benefit of each pound spent on Pathways to Work (£3.06 on the most cautious assumptions). **This suggests a net benefit to society of ESRC research of £0.74 for each pound spent on Pathways to Work.**

The final section of this report offers some initial observations and conclusions regarding the lessons learned from this exploratory study and the implications for future measurement of the impact of ESRC research.

³⁴ *A cost-benefit analysis of Pathways to Work for new and repeat incapacity benefits claimants*, DWP Research Report no. 498

6. The ‘tracking back’ method: comments and conclusions

6.1 General observations on the ‘tracking back’ approach

- This study has demonstrated that there is great potential to use ‘tracking back’ approaches to explore in some detail the extent and nature of the impact of social research, and ESRC research in particular, on the policy process.
- In particular our research has identified that ESRC impact is widespread, pervasive, takes place over a long period of time and operates through a wide variety of mechanisms, rather than working in a linear fashion through particular programmes, projects or other activities.
- There is some indication that indirect influences (through citations in policy and research documents directly related to Pathways) are more important than direct influences at the early stages of policy conception and development. Conversely, direct (and primarily more ‘instrumental’) impacts are relatively more significant during the piloting, implementation and evaluation phases of the policy cycle.
- Evidence from this study suggests that policy-makers place more emphasis on the value of social research than do the researchers themselves. However, policy-makers tend not to specifically cite ESRC as an influence on research or policy.
- Qualitative research with policy-makers and researchers revealed some important insights into the relationship between research and policy, but was less successful in identifying quantitative measures of the impact of research on policy, e.g. through a ‘stated preference’ approach.
- On the other hand, document-based research proved more useful than anticipated in providing relatively robust and reliable measures of the contribution of research to policy development. This is largely due to DWP’s practice of publishing the outputs from its funded research; this may not apply to other policy initiatives, departments or agencies.
- This suggests that a systematic exercise to catalogue the ESRC contribution to a range of policy initiatives - using an approach similar to that used in this study - may be valuable in adding to our knowledge about the policy impact of ESRC.
- We have been able to produce some estimates of the economic value of the ESRC impact on Pathways to Work which are based on thorough and robust research methods and realistic assumptions; however, **these estimates are only as good as the findings of the cost-benefit study of Pathways and we would urge caution in placing excessive reliance on our estimates at this stage.**
- Our emerging thinking is that it should be feasible to combine the best elements of the ‘tracking forward’ and ‘tracking backwards’ approaches to substantially improve our understanding of the policy impact of ESRC. We would welcome further discussion on this.

6.2 Specific observations on Pathways to Work

- From a policy-maker perspective, the decision to ‘do something’ in relation to moving more people from Incapacity Benefit to work was primarily a political one, driven by the then Prime Minister and his advisors.

- Researchers also shared the view that political factors were a strong influence on the introduction of Pathways to Work.
- However, the detail of what ultimately made up the 2002 Green Paper and the Pathways to Work initiative was seen by policy makers to be strongly influenced by research.
- The ‘tracking back’ approach from decisions or practice behaviours to identify research-based influences has highlighted the challenge of disaggregating the impacts of multiple influences and multiple research strands.
- Policy makers, and the researchers themselves, have found it difficult to highlight the specific influence of ESRC research on the Pathways to Work initiative. This is largely due to a lack of knowledge as to whether particular research, or authors, was/were ESRC-funded or not.
- There is emerging evidence that the ESRC has had some degree of influence on the Pathways to Work initiative, for example in relation to informing the production of the 2002 Green Paper, and in supporting the development of skills and techniques that were used on the National Evaluation of Pathways to Work.

6.3 Critical appraisal of the model used to measure ESRC impact

Quantifying the extent and financial value of this impact has proved to be, as expected, a challenging exercise. Nonetheless we believe that the estimates presented in this report are defensible and realistic - given the quality of the available data - and form a solid basis for future refinement of the ‘tracking back’ approach.

Having said this, there are a number of issues which should be highlighted in considering the merits of this approach and the potential for developing and utilising it more widely:

- We are confident that focusing on formal publications and linking these to relevant policy documents and other outputs is a fruitful way forward, particularly in the context of DWP, which has a very good record of publishing research findings and requiring authors to cite references as fully as possible. This may not apply, however, to all departments and all policy initiatives.
- There is clearly scope to develop and refine this bibliometric-based approach. Given the exploratory nature of the current study and the vast amount of material to be covered, it has not been possible to undertake a thorough bibliometric analysis. It is therefore possible that some biases may have crept in, for example through self-citation and/or the inclusion of a number of very closely related papers that might otherwise have counted as one output.
- We chose to focus on authors rather than publications. While there are arguments for both, we believe that the author focus is the most appropriate, given that ESRC funding and associated outputs are often based on individuals. It may be appropriate to consider how it might be possible to combine information on authors, institutions and publications, to provide a more synthetic, rounded measure. However, ESRC would need to consider the balance between effort and reward in pursuing such a line, given that our calculations suggest that more sophisticated approaches are unlikely to yield more robust findings. This is

particularly the case given the uncertainties surrounding the ‘denominator’ of the policy impact calculation, i.e. the estimated economic impact of the policy under consideration.

- An important caveat is that we have not applied any weights to the individual authors identified through this study. It is clear from the document review and interviews that a small number of individuals (some ESRC-supported, some not) have been particularly influential in relation to Pathways. On the other hand, some authors have made a limited contribution to Pathways and/or received only modest ESRC support. Our view is that the costs of trying to refine the measure (e.g. through weighting by number of publications or value of research grants received) are likely to be high in relation to the benefits in terms of a more ‘accurate’ measure of ESRC input into the work of identified authors or institutions.

Finally, we would like to re-iterate that the measurement of ESRC’s impact on policy is inherently an inexact science. We have demonstrated that it is possible to produce meaningful and defensible indicators of the order of magnitude of ESRC impact in the case of Pathways to Work. This indicates clearly a substantial direct and indirect contribution from ESRC to the conception, inception, development, implementation and evaluation of this particular policy initiative.

There is clearly scope to refine and improve the publications-based approach that we have employed. In particular, we believe that more intensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of policy and research outputs would help to further improve our understanding of the conceptual impact of social research. We do not feel, however, that substantial further investment in the detailed refinement of impact metrics per se is likely to yield significantly improved results. It may be possible to arrive at ‘purer’ measures, but we believe the cost could outweigh the benefits.

Finally, we should not lose sight of the central importance of engaging positively with policy-makers and researchers to further understand how policy can benefit even more than it already does from the insights generated by social science research in general and ESRC-supported activities in particular.

APPENDIX I

Authors associated with DWP research reports related to Pathways to Work



**Number of papers authored
out of the 60+ DWP reports
surveyed**

Name	
Anne Corden	7
Katharine Nice	7
Roy Sainsbury	7
Alan Marsh	6
Richard Dorsett	5
Hazel Green	5
Helen Bewley	4
Helen Connolly	4
Stuart Adam	3
Richard Berthoud	3
Carl Emmerson	3
Martin Mitchell	3
Bruce Stafford	3
Sue Arthur	2
Antoine Bozio	2
Vicky Davies	2
Abigail Davis	2
Josie Dixon	2
David Greenberg	2
Kari Hadjivassiliou	2
Alan Hedges	2
Clare Johnson	2
Diana Kasparova	2
John Kelleher	2
Jane Lewis	2
Andrew Thomas	2
Martin Wood	2
Penny Youll	2
Gerry Zarb	2
Faye Allard	1
Karl Ashworth	1
Adele Atkinson	1
Rossy Bailey	1
Helen Barnes	1
Anna Bee	1
Stephen Bell	1
Vicky Blackburn	1
Billy Blyth	1
Alex Bryson	1
Karen Burnt	1
Kim Burton	1



Camilla Child	1
Peter Craig	1
Nick Dean	1
Steve Dempsey	1
Sarah Dickens	1
Shaun Fielding	1
Naomi Finch	1
Andrea Finney	1
Christine Frayne	1
Alissa Goodman	1
Anne Green	1
Getinet Haile	1
Jon Hales	1
Yvette Hartfree	1
Oliver Hayllar	1
Dione Hills	1
Julie Hills	1
Julia Hiscock	1
Maria Hudson	1
Annie Irvine	1
Nigel Jackson	1
Graham Jones	1
Chris Kent	1
Simon Kirby	1
Genevieve Knight	1
Ken Lam	1
Robin Legard	1
Robert Lilly	1
Susan Lonsdale	1
Julia Loumidis	1
Claire Lyons	1
Stephen McKay	1
Karen Needels	1
Penny Nelson	1
Adrian Nelson	1
Camilla Nevill	1
Larry Orr	1
Jayne Osgood	1
Joan Payne	1
Tim Porter	1
Elsbeth Pound	1
Ali Protik	1
Marisa Ratto	1
Sue Regan	1
Rebecca Riley	1




Karen Rowlingson	1
Sergio Salis	1
Robert Schmitz	1
James Scott	1
Jan Shury	1
Laura Sirett	1
Alison Smith	1
Richenda Solon	1
Kate Stanley	1
David Stapleton	1
Augusta Stephenson	1
Vanessa Stone	1
Christal Stone	1
Kirby Swales	1
Wendy Sykes	1
Phil Taylor	1
Jean Taylor	1
Patricia Thornton	1
Mike Tibble	1
David Vivian	1
Gordon Waddell	1
Robert Walker	1
David Wilkinson	1
Kandy Woodfield	1





year	Title	Details	Organisation	Authors
1993	Invalidity Benefit: An international comparison	In-House Report 1	DSS	Susan Lonsdale
1994	Making a Claim for Disability Benefits	Research Report 27	Social and Community Planning Research	Alan Hedges and Andrew Thomas
1996	Disability, and Benefits and Employment	Research Report 54	PSI (Westminster)	Karen Rowlingson and Richard Berthoud
1996	Helping Disabled Workers: Disability Working Allowance & Supported Employment	Research Report 57	PSI (Westminster)	Gerry Zarb, Nigel Jackson and Phil Taylor
1997	Evaluation of the 1995 Changes to Disability Working Allowance	In-House Report 25	PSI (Westminster)	Sue Arthur and Gerry Zarb
1997	Early Customer Reactions to the Delivery of Incapacity Benefit	In-House Report 23	Cragg Ross Dawson Limited	Tim Porter
1997	Evaluation of the Incapacity Benefit Medical Test	In-House Report 26	DSS	Kirby Swales and Peter Craig
1999	New Deal for Disabled People: Early Findings from the Innovative Schemes	In-House Report 61	Tavistock Institute	Vicky Blackburn, Camilla Child and Dione Hills
1999	Costs of being in work : A review of literature and research	In-House Report 59	SPRU	Roy Sainsbury
1999	New Deal for Disabled People: early implementation	Research Report 106	CRISP, NCSR, SPRU, IER	Sue Arthur, Anne Corden, Anne Green, Jane Lewis, Julia Loumidis, Roy Sainsbury, Bruce Stafford, Patricia Thornton and Robert Walker



2000	First Effects of ONE	Research Report 126	ONS, PSI, BMRB, ECOTEC	Hazel Green, Alison Smith, Robert Lilly, Alan Marsh, Clare Johnson and Shaun Fielding
2001	Moving towards work: The short-term impact of ONE	Research Report 140	ECOTEC	Vicky Davies and Clare Johnson
2001	Recruiting Benefit Claimants: A survey of employers in ONE pilot areas	Research Report 139	IFF Research	Karen Burnt, Jan Shury, David Vivian and Faye Allard
2001	Incapacity Benefits and Work Incentives	Research Report 141	SPRU (York)	Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury
2001	Well enough to work?	Research Report 145	CRiSP (Loughborough), PSI	Karl Ashworth, Yvette Hartfree and Augusta Stephenson
2001	New Deal for Disabled People: An Assessment of the Cost Per Job	In-house Report 82	DWP	Nick Dean, Chris Kent
2001	Delivering a work-focused service: Interim Findings from the ONE Case Studies and Staff Research	In-house Report 84	Tavistock Institute	John Kelleher, Penny Youll, Penny Nelson and Kari Hadjivassiliou
2001	Moving between sickness and work	Research Report 151	independent researchers	Alan Hedges and Wendy Sykes
2001	The Medium-Term Effects of Voluntary Participation in ONE	Research Report 149	ONS, PSI, BMRB	Hazel Green, Helen Connolly, Alan Marsh and Alex Bryson
2001	The Short-term Effects of Compulsory Participation in ONE - Survey of Clients: Cohort 2 Wave 1	Research Report 156	ONS, PSI, BMRB	Hazel Green, Alan Marsh and Helen Connolly
2001	ONE year on; Clients' medium term experiences of ONE	Research Report 154	ECOTEC 	Vicky Davies, Laura Sirett and Jean Taylor


2002	Evaluation of the Capability Report: Identifying the Work-Related Capabilities of Incapacity Benefits Claimants	Research Report 162	National Centre for Social Research	Robin Legard, Jane Lewis, Julia Hiscock and James Scott
2002	Delivering a Work-Focused Service: Final Findings from ONE Case Studies and Staff Research	Research Report 166	Tavistock Institute	John Kelleher, Penny Youll, Adrian Nelson, Kari Hadjivassiliou, Claire Lyons and Julie Hills
2002	Longer term experiences of a work-focused service among lone parent clients in the ONE Pilots - "ONE client survey: Cohort 2 Wave 3"	In-house Report 103	ONS, PSI, BMRB	Helen Connolly and Hazel Green
2003	Final Effects of ONE	Research Report 183	ONS, PSI, NIESR, British Market Research Bureau (BMRB)	Hazel Green, Alan Marsh, Helen Connolly, Joan Payne, Diana Kasparova, Alan Marsh, Simon Kirby and Rebecca Riley
2003	Pathways to Work: Helping people into employment	Consultation response and action plan	SS for Work and Pension	
2003	Medical Evidence and Incapacity Benefit: Evaluation of a Pilot Study	Research Report 189	SPRU (York)	Roy Sainsbury, Anne Corden and Naomi Finch
2003	The Missing Million: Supporting disabled people into work		IPPR	Kate Stanley and Sue Regan
2003	ONE Evaluation: Summary of Service Delivery findings	In-house Report 108	BMRB International, DWP	Jayne Osgood, Vanessa Stone, Andrew Thomas, Steve Dempsey, Graham Jones and Richenda Solon
2004	The profile of exits from incapacity-related benefits over time	Working Paper 17	ISER (Essex), DWP	Richard Berthoud



2005	Improving the life chances of disabled people	Report	PM's Strategy Unit	
2005	Review of existing research on the extra costs of disability	Working Paper 21	DWP	Mike Tibble
2005	Incapacity Benefit Reforms Pilot: Findings from a longitudinal panel of clients	Research Report 259	SPRU, NCSR, PSI	Anne Corden, Katharine Nice and Roy Sainsbury
2006	Sanctions in the Benefit System: Evidence review of JSA, IS & IB sanctions	SSAC Occasional Paper 1	Social Security Advisory Committee	Anna Bee
2006	Early quantitative evidence on the impact of the Pathways to Work pilots	Research Report 354	Institute of Fiscal Studies	Stuart Adam, Carl Emmerson, Christine Frayne and Alissa Goodman
2006	New Deal for Disabled People Extensions: examining the role and operation of new Job Brokers	Research Report 384	CRiSP, University of Nottingham	Abigail Davis, Elspeth Pound and Professor Bruce Stafford
2006	Economic and social costs and benefits to employers of retaining, recruiting and employing disabled people and/or people with health conditions or an injury: A review of the evidence	Research Report 400	Mathematica Policy Research	Karen Needels and Robert Schmitz
2006	Pathways to Work: Findings from the final cohort in a qualitative longitudinal panel of incapacity benefits recipients	Research Report 398	SPRU (York)	Anne Corden and Katharine Nice
2006	Pathways to Work: Qualitative research on the Condition Management Programme	Research Report 346	PSI (Westminster)	Helen Barnes and Maria Hudson
2006	Pathways to Work from Incapacity Benefits: A study of experience and use of Return to Work Credit	Research Report 353	SPRU (York)	Anne Corden and Katharine Nice



2006	Incapacity Benefit Reforms Pilot: Findings from the second cohort in a longitudinal panel of clients	Research Report 345	SPRU (York)	Anne Corden and Katharine Nice
2006	Incapacity Benefit reforms – Pathways to Work Pilots performance and analysis	Working Paper 26	DWP	Billy Blyth
2006	Is work good for your health and well-being?	evidence review	Unum Cardiff et al	Gordon Waddell and Kim Burton
2007	Pathways to Work: Extension to existing customers (matched case study)	Research Report 418	National Centre for Social Research	Josie Dixon, Martin Mitchell and Sarah Dickens
2007	Long-term impacts of the New Deal for Disabled People	Research Report 432	DWP et al	Larry L. Orr, Stephen H. Bell and Ken Lam
2007	Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People: The cost and cost-benefit analyses	Research Report 431	CRiSP	David Greenberg and Abigail Davis
2007	New Deal for Disabled People: Third synthesis report – key findings from the evaluation	Research Report 430	DWP, CRSP, Department of Social Policy and Social Work (Oxford), IES, NCSR, Nottingham Policy Centre, SPRU, Abt Associates	Bruce Stafford with others
2007	The take-up rate of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance: Feasibility study	Research Report 442	PSI (Westminster)	Diana Kasparova, Alan Marsh and David Wilkinson
2007	Health, disability, caring and employment: longitudinal analysis	Research Report 461	Personal Finance Research Centre (Bristol), Institute of Applied Social Studies (Birmingham)	Adele Atkinson, Andrea Finney and Stephen McKay

2007	Pathways to Work: customer experience and outcomes	Research Report 456	National Centre for Social Research	Rossey Bailey, Jon Hales, Oliver Hayllar and Martin Wood
2007	The impact of Pathways to Work	Research Report 435	NIESR, PSI	Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Getinet Haile
2008	Qualitative research exploring the Pathways to Work sanctions regime	Research Report 475	NCSR	Martin Mitchell and Kandy Woodfield
2008	A cost-benefit analysis of Pathways to Work for new and repeat incapacity benefits claimants	Research Report 498	Institute of Fiscal Studies	Stuart Adam, Antoine Bozio, Carl Emmerson, David Greenberg and Genevieve Knight
2008	Evidence on the effect of Pathways to Work on existing claimants	Research Report 488	PSI (Westminster)	Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Marisa Ratto
2008	The Pathways Advisory Service: Placing employment advisers in GP surgeries	Research Report 494	SPRU, NCSR	Roy Sainsbury, Katharine Nice, Camilla Nevill, Martin Wood, Josie Dixon and Martin Mitchell
2008	Pathways to Work for new and repeat incapacity benefits claimants: evaluation synthesis report	Research Report 525	NIESR	Richard Dorsett
2008	The impact of Pathways on benefit receipt in the expansion areas	Research Report 552	NIESR, PSI	Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Sergio Salis
2009	Pathways to Work from incapacity benefits: A review of research findings on referral practices and liaison with service providers	Working Paper 57	SPRU (York)	Katharine Nice
2009	Review of international evidence on the cost of disability	Research Report 542	Mathematica Policy Research 	David Stapleton, Ali Protik and Christal Stone

2009	Pathways to Work from incapacity benefits: A study of referral practices and liaison between Jobcentre Plus advisers and service providers	Research Report 555	SPRU, NCSR, PSI	Katharine Nice, Annie Irvine and Roy Sainsbury
2009	The impact of disability benefits - A feasibility study	Working Paper 58	ISER (Essex)	Richard Berthoud
2009	Can we estimate the impact of the Choices package in Pathways to Work?	Working Paper 60	Institute of Fiscal Studies	Stuart Adam, Antoine Bozio and Carl Emmerson
2009	The impact of Pathways to Work on benefit receipt for the under 25s	Working Paper 65	NIESR	Helen Bewley and Richard Dorsett
2009	The impact of Pathways to Work on work, earnings and self-reported health in the April 2006 expansion areas	Research Report 601	NIESR / PSI	Helen Bewley, Richard Dorsett and Sergio Salis





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