

# **Work, Poverty and Progression for low-skilled workers**

**Kathryn Ray**

**Policy Studies Institute, London**

UKCES Convention 2010: Skills, Jobs, Growth

8-9 Feb 2010, the Business Design Centre, London

# The research study

- A study of the work experiences of a group of low-skilled workers over five years
- Three participating groups, all low-skilled (qual level 2 or below)
  - out-of-work lone parents (claiming IS and joined NDLP)
  - lone parents in part-time work (claiming WTC)
  - long term unemployed (claiming JSA and joined ND25+)
- Quantitative and qualitative longitudinal data
- Today's focus on experiences of progression in work and the role of training & skills

## **‘Work-benefit cycling’ and poor quality employment**

- ‘Broken’ employment trajectories (over 2 years) associated with low skills
- Also lower job quality: less likely to have benefits such as sick pay, holiday pay, pensions or opportunities for training or promotion
- BUT some movement into ‘better jobs’ over 2 year period

## Enablers and barriers to work progression

- Workers were enabled to progress where this was supported in workplaces
  - Barriers to taking up opportunities (eg caring responsibilities)
  - Other sources of support important (family, friends, colleagues, advisers)
- Taking steps to progression not supported at work was perceived to be 'risky'
  - Difficulties in converting training into work progression
  - High quality advisory support crucial
- Progressing at work had little resonance for many people
  - Stability prioritised over progression
  - Attitudes could be changed through guidance/coaching

## Key implications

- Given poor quality temporary work - quality of initial job placement important + ongoing support for job re-entry
- Better development of internal career ladders (accessible to those with caring responsibilities)
- Proactive, high quality careers advice, to successfully engage people and to link training choices with viable career paths

## For more information:

Kathryn Ray, Senior Research Fellow,  
Policy Studies Institute  
50 Hanson Street, London W1W 6UP  
k.ray@psi.org.uk  
020 7911 7525

For more information on the evaluation of the Employment Retention and  
Advancement (ERA) Demonstration, see  
[http://www.mdrc.org/project\\_14\\_63.html](http://www.mdrc.org/project_14_63.html)