UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

'Great expectations: the role of the self in the evaluation of vacancies by long term unemployed men in a buoyant labour market'

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ABSTRACT

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THE ROLE OF THE SELF IN THE EVALUATION OF VACANCIES BY LONG TERM UNEMPLOYED MEN IN A BOUYANT LABOUR MARKET

By Susan Jane Cooke

This thesis evaluates the relevance of different theories in accounting for continuing long term unemployment, through two pieces of linked empirical research. The first piece identifies a buoyant labour market in Southern England which is populated with vacancies the demands of which could be met by a substantial proportion of the registered long term unemployed in the area. The second piece of empirical work is a small scale qualitative study which seeks to understand why jobseekers may not make applications for jobs they are capable of performing.

Findings suggest that accounts of long term unemployment need to record social psychological factors, in addition to the economic and human capital explanations that tend to inform policy and programmes. In contrast with the common portrayal of the long term unemployed as lazy, victimised, unskilled, ill educated, and de-motivated by financial disincentives, the study identifies resistance to a variety of vacancies and a determination on the part of the long term unemployed to 'hold out' for work that is challenging, matches their self perception and at which they can shine, at least as much as for their reservation wages. Despite reporting demoralising and distressing experiences they maintain the capacity to act in what they eloquently identify as their self interest, which they define very broadly. The psychology of work literature and the concepts of self esteem, identity and status should be accorded a more substantial role in understanding jobseekers' self interest. The study argues that concerns of this type are likely to be more important in the evaluation of vacancies as a result of increasing supplies of human capital amongst the working age population.

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the study and the context in which it is located. The point of departure is the dominant political view regarding the labour market and some of the problems that are understood to affect its efficient functioning. The chapter describes the basis of these views and identifies two issues that are seen as particularly problematic - long term unemployment and labour market inactivity. It goes on to suggest ways in which the conception and understanding of these problems may be challenged, as may the policies directed to their amelioration. The specific aim of the study, which is supported by the two pieces of empirical work, is broadly to contribute to understanding of long term unemployment, and is discussed in detail at the end of the chapter.

Policy aims and the importance of human capital[1]

Participation in lifelong learning[2], improvements in numbers and levels of National Vocation Qualifications and their equivalents, and increased take up of further and higher education are all objectives of the present New Labour government. Most of the drivers that lie behind the aim for higher standards in these areas are linked to the practical benefits of education and training *vis a vis* employment and the economy. Two are of particular importance (Hillage and Pollard, 1998; Gray, 2001).

Firstly, the outputs of education and training, in the shape of skills and abilities are of fundamental importance to the success of businesses in generating economic growth. In order to avoid perpetuating growth of a low wage economy, in a global market, it is suggested that businesses need to be able to compete on the grounds of product quality and added value rather than cost (e.g. White, 1992 p. 29-33; NSTF, 2000, p. 21; Haskel and Holt, 1999; UK Employment Action Plan, 1998, Hepworth, 2004).

Secondly, as the proceeds of economic growth are primarily distributed through the labour market, the broadest possible participation in it is portrayed as a necessity, not only for the economy[3] but also for social inclusion and cohesion and a reduction of poverty. In the UK the link between unemployment and poverty has been widely

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[1] Unless otherwise stated human capital refers to experience, qualifications and skills.

[2] In this study concern is not with basic literacy and numeracy skills, the need for and benefits of which are uncontested in our society. The sorts of targets that are relevant are, for example, that 50% of adults should be qualified to NVQ3 or equivalent by 2002 and 28% to NVQ4; 60% of 21 years olds are expected to achieve NVQ3 or equivalent. Full details of the targets can be found at www.dfee.gov.uk/statistic

[3] Generating employment is not particularly difficult - controlling inflation, when labour is in short supply as a result of job creation, is the real challenge. By increasing labour supply through policy to bring lone parents, the disabled and unemployed into the labour market, the inflationary pressure of high levels of employment can be relieved (Dickens, Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000, p. 96)

demonstrated (Atkinson, 1997), as has an arguably more tenuous link between unemployment and social exclusion (EU, 2002, p. 85; Felstead, Gallie and Green, 2002, p. 25; UK Employment Action Plan, 1998; Campbell, 2001; cf. Levitas, 1998, 2001; Cousins, 1998).

Encouraging and facilitating participation is therefore an important objective, and education and training contribute to the individual's ability to participate. A virtuous circle can be created by enabling the existing and potential workforce to contribute to economic growth through the deployment of their skills and to share in its rewards through labour market participation, which is itself facilitated through education and training.

Potential problems

Potential problems exist in relation to the government's position both in relation to skills and to labour market participation. Firstly, it is notoriously difficult to identify the skills and qualifications that are likely to lead to the desired outcomes and it is questionable whether the solution to the issues raised lies within the scope of education and training in the first place. There are profound difficulties in separating recruitment difficulties based on skill shortages from other recruitment problems (Green and Ashton, 1992), and therefore, in identifying areas in which training will increase labour market participation and productivity. Vacancies may attract only applicants who are considered insufficiently skilled because rewards and employment conditions are considered inadequate by potential applicants, who consider their skills warrant higher rewards.

Theories of qualification inflation (e.g. Dore, 1976) and credentialization (e.g. Collins, 1979; cf. Brown, 1995, p. 32) are critical of any straightforward, unambiguous connection between education, training and qualifications and the benefits discussed above. Daniel (1990, p. 134) suggests that the skills demanded by employers alter with those supplied by the education system. Extensive research is conducted in an attempt to ensure the optimum supply of skills to employers, but researchers generally have to use demand for and possession of qualifications as a proxy for requirement and possession of skill (NSTF, 2000, p. 17). If demand for higher level qualifications is subject to distortions, as suggested by the inflation and credentialization theses, their use as indicators of demand for skill demand and supply may be contested.

Neither is the recruitment process free from bias and distortion. Characteristics of applicants make them more or less attractive to employers, regardless of their skills and qualifications. Employers may consider applicants unsuitable for reasons such as unemployment duration, ill health, age or lack of social capital (Atkinson, Giles and Meager, 1996). As the service sector becomes increasingly dominant, issues of social and cultural capital, personality (e.g. Brown, 1995 p. 40; Leidner, 1991, p. 156)

appearance and other 'genetic' characteristics may become even more relevant in the selection process (Dore, 1996). Difficulties of this type are not amenable to training and education. Employers' reports of recruitment problems are unlikely to overtly reflect these types of concerns, but employers' surveys are, nevertheless, used as a major source of information which feeds into training and education provision.

Some of the connections that underpin the government's aims are, therefore, problematic. The consequences of a misdiagnosis of skill needs are predominantly negative, particularly where education and training are predicated on the basis of their importance to labour market success. Underemployment is one such result (European Employment Observatory, 2001) and its effects include worker dissatisfaction (Allen and van der Velden, 2001, p. 447) and difficulty in filling unattractive job vacancies, as well as inefficiency in the use of limited resources. Equally, a misdiagnosis of skill requirements perpetuates actual skill shortages and problems for employers, prospective workers and the economy, leading to a situation in which underemployment coexists with skill shortages, because the 'wrong' skills are available within the workforce.

Secondly, whilst a large literature reports the problems faced by potential workers whose qualifications, skills and experience do not match that required by employers not all long-term unemployed people lack skills and qualifications. Equally, not all work is skilled - vacancies of an unskilled nature can be hard to fill - and many long-term unemployed people do not attempt to compete for unskilled posts. Not all unemployment or non-employment is, therefore, related to an absence of training and education, or preventable through it.

In the UK, Jobcentres fill less than half of the unskilled vacancies they advertise (Labour Market Review, Autumn 2001). Failure to fill this type of vacancy can not be attributed primarily to skill shortages and is not necessarily indicative of the rejection of applicants by employers. In many cases the number of applicants for unskilled and ill-rewarded Jobcentre vacancies is extremely low, according to administrative records. The number of people who make an initial application and then attend a prearranged interview is even lower. A national survey of 4208 respondents (Bottomley, McKay and Walker, 1997) found that nearly a quarter had not applied for a vacancy in the month prior to their being interviewed. Evidence nevertheless suggests that applications to menial jobs far outstrip their availability. A study from the US (Pease and Martin, 1997) calculated that an average of 21 applications (not all from registered jobseekers) were received for each job advertised in 'want ads' which the authors considered suitable for unskilled and uneducated poor jobseekers. For those who applied to 'want ads', the odds of success were clearly poor. The relevance of such studies for this project lies not in what they reveal about the unfavourable ratio of job applicants to vacancies, but about the ratio of

applications to registered unemployed. In the American study the most popular unskilled jobs received up to 300 applications, yet there were over 100,000 registered jobseekers in the area at the time. Jobseekers clearly applied for far fewer jobs than they were considered by the authors to be capable of undertaking.

Closer to home I have had first hand experience of the 'choosiness' identified by Layard (1986, p. 64) and Meade (1997), for example, whilst working for a period of fifteen years as an advisor to unemployed people[4]. The role of the Job Centre advisors is to protect the National Insurance fund by detecting inadmissible claims and reducing the length of time individuals are dependant upon benefits. They encourage and assist individuals to undertake employment, as received wisdom suggests it is in their own, as well as society's, interests for them to do so. Advisors have to assist unemployed people into work by submitting them to vacancies or to pre-employment, job search or training programmes. They have also to ensure, with the threat of sanctions, that job search activities are sufficiently energetic; that jobs are actually applied for as instructed and that positions are not rejected when offered. After the first thirteen weeks of registered unemployment the quality of any vacancy for which a jobseeker is submitted is irrelevant to whether or not sanctions are considered, aside from the fact that the work must be for over twenty four hours per week.

As an advisor I met different sorts of jobseekers, the majority of whom found work within three months of making a claim to benefit. Of those who did not three broad types could be identified in common sense terms. There were those who the vast majority of employers would not employ, but who were willing to apply for most vacancies which they could access geographically and in which they would be better off financially than they were signing on. A great deal has been written about these people who are typically low skilled, barely educated, unqualified, isolated and poor in terms of social, as well as financial, capital. Many live with their parents well into adulthood and those who have partners and children of their own are usually housed in the private rented or social housing sector.

I also met jobseekers whom employers would welcome with open arms but who would not consider applying for their vacancies. These jobseekers are typically used to working in middle class occupations, possess human and social capital, live in either permanent private rented or mortgaged accommodation with a family, car, driving licence, various financial commitments, such as insurances or pension plans and have a stable and successful work history.

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[4] A more detailed discussion of the effects of my history within the Employment Service and as an insider researcher are to be found in the introduction to chapter two, the methods chapter.

Additionally I met some people who did not to want to work because they had developed a satisfying life outside the labour market. They were resistant to attempts to help them return to the labour market as they do not see participation as in their interests and were not burdened by a work (in the sense of employment) ethic.

All presented challenges and each required different solutions. The problems presented by the first group are amenable to interventions directed at employers, such as employers' subsidies and, in certain circumstances, to training and have been addressed with disputed degrees of success primarily through New Deals. The problems presented by the last group are addressed similarly, through the aspects of New Deals and the Restart process which concentrate on coercion, behaviour modification and education and training. The needs and problems of the middle group however, remain unaddressed and little understood. The main difficulties I experienced were with this group and stemmed from their greater expectations, fostered by prior labour market success and education. They had expectations of obtaining positions that resembled in some ways those they had held previously. As far as most could see nothing had changed that would make this unreasonable. Jobcentre vacancies, with which I was attempting to match them, were often obviously not the sort they wanted, although they in many instances would have exceeded employers' expectations in terms of their human capital. Vacancies were rejected despite the fact that the jobseekers in question were totally committed to participating in the labour market, possessed mainstream work ethics and suffered greatly through their experiences of unemployment. This study focuses mainly on this group and attempts to understand more fully the reasons for their unemployment, which appear unlikely to be based on human capital limitations or alternative norms, more fully.

Alternatives to human capital explanations

Social science offers several different ways of understanding unemployment. Economic 'search' theories, for example, concentrate on explaining unemployment in terms of the efforts and methods used in seeking work. They also suggest that the unemployed restrict the sort of work for which they are willing to apply, usually on financial grounds, and this reduces their chances of securing employment. To create an environment conducive to low levels of unemployment, vacancies must have the potential to make jobseekers financially 'better off in work'. Benefit traps, and arguably levels of benefit (Carling, Holmlund and Vejsiu, 2001; OECD, 1994, part 1d; cf. Wadsworth, 1993) act as a disincentive to taking jobs where financial penalties would be incurred.

A range of social psychological theories has also been developed that consider the evidence and effects of psychological damage amongst the unemployed. Such damage demotivates individuals and affects job search behaviour. In extreme cases it can lead to

the 'discouraged worker effect', a state which leads individuals to withdraw entirely from seeking work (e.g. Scheitzer and Smith, 1974). Rather than suggesting that jobseekers' decisions limit the number of vacancies for which they apply on the basis of available rewards, psychological explanations predominantly portray unemployed jobseekers as paralyzed by their unemployment experiences.

Theories of vocational choice from within the field of work psychology may assist in understanding unemployment in terms of jobseekers' positive actions and be relevant to the problematic middle group. Initial choices of occupation may be seen as the result of interplay between experience, predisposition and inherited aptitudes, and changes are the result of attempts to increase congruence between these and job characteristics, or, in the case of unemployed people, at least maintain it. Job search behaviour, therefore, may be seen as the outcome of the impact of these variables, although the notion of "choice", particularly for the long-term unemployed, is generally problematic.

Sociological theories acknowledge negative effects of unemployment and concentrate on social milieu, rather than psychological disposition, as moderating its effects and influencing decisions and actions. Actions are seen as the result of the way problems are interpreted in the context of networks, family, friends, class, and in the light of various forms of capital.

Each type of theory is able, partly, to account for a lack of applications to unskilled work from unemployed jobseekers, but there is inconsistency between and untapped potential in these positions that require examination. Search theories generally assume resistance motivated by economic self interest; social psychological theories, resignation in the face of seemingly insurmountable barriers or action limited by psychological constraints; and sociological theories, that responses to unemployment and job search behaviour are contingent on social context.

Aims of the study

The main purpose of this piece of work is to contribute to our understanding of long term unemployment through the evaluation of competing theories put forward to explain its continuation. It aims to clarify some of the inconsistencies noted above, to demonstrate ways in which different theories may complement one another, and to suggest that, when brought together, they assist in creating a more rounded understanding of the subject. At the same time it builds a critique of New Labour's assessment of the problem of long term unemployment.

To achieve these aims I have conducted two empirical studies. The first seeks to ascertain the impact of human capital and other objective mismatches in understanding why numerous vacancies exist alongside male long term unemployment in the generally

affluent Bournemouth and Poole conurbation in Dorset. The second looks at economic, social and psychological reasons for this phenomenon in a similar area amongst a smaller sample of men.

Findings are likely to have a number of potential implications, an important example of which is mentioned here. If, as hypothesised, application behaviour is influenced by past labour market, training and educational experiences, training and education policy must be seen to have a bearing on the speed with which jobseekers obtain work. Conventionally, education and training are conceived of as ways of facilitating access to the labour market, but the contention of this study is that, in certain circumstances, they act to delay re-employment. This will be the case particularly in an environment in which skills needs are predicted inaccurately; where characteristics of jobseekers (other than their training and educational achievements) make them unattractive to employers; and where the expectations and aspirations of jobseekers are raised through education and training but not met in accessible vacancies. Depending in part on the experience of unemployment, if vacancies are not available that require deployment of the skills resulting from investments in training and education or experience in the labour market, it is conceivable that even the most dissatisfied jobseeker may opt to continue unemployment, at least on what is perceived as a temporary basis. The aim of extending participation in labour market would, in these circumstances, be negatively affected, particularly in the presence of income maintenance programmes.

Plan of the thesis

In chapter one a body of literature in respect of each of these approaches is considered. Each is evaluated in terms of competing claims from within its field and its usefulness in terms of this study. The chapter concludes by summarising issues that remain unresolved despite the insights provided. The second chapter concentrates on the methodology employed in the empirical studies which are conducted in order to address the gaps identified. Two distinct studies were necessary due to the nature of these gaps. The first section of the chapter addresses the methods deployed in the quantitative study which contrasts vacancies available in the Bournemouth and Poole travel to work area with the characteristics of long term unemployed jobseekers. The second section looks at the selection criteria and structure of the qualitative study which seeks to ascertain why jobseekers may fail to apply for vacancies for which they meet employers' criteria.

Findings relating to the quantitative study are presented in chapter three and to the qualitative study in chapters four and five. Chapter four identifies aspects of vacancies that appear important to respondents, ways in which they are so and the extent to which respondents would be prepared to sacrifice them in order to secure work. Chapter five looks at some of the reasons these aspects of work are important and why some

respondents are much more flexible than others in relation to them. Chapter six reviews and brings together the two parts of the study summarising the conclusions to which they lead and considering policy implications. This final chapter also addresses the limitations of the thesis and areas for future research.

Chapter 1 Who says what about unemployment

This chapter provides an overview of various theories which constitute the main approaches to long-term unemployment. The sections deal in turn with: mismatches between employers' demands and jobseekers' characteristics, in terms of technical and social skills or employability; job search techniques, efficiency, effort and motivation from a economic perspective; and, finally, the literature which situates application behaviour within the individual's social and psychological context[5].

Mismatch approaches

I have used the term 'mismatch approaches' as an umbrella for two arguments. Both suggest that there is a lack of congruence between the human capital characteristics of jobseekers and those required by industry and contribute to education and training and employment policies. The first focuses on the negative impact of mismatches on the economy, employment rates and the quality of employment at a macro level. The second takes a micro perspective and considers the impact of mismatches on duration of unemployment. Mismatches are understood to lead to long-term unemployment because jobseekers are unable to find and secure vacancies that match their human capital and other characteristics. In the first and second sections the main aspects of each argument will be put forward and claims evaluated. The relevance and impact of each in terms of this study will be discussed subsequently.

The Macro perspective

A combination of information from three sources is used to inform knowledge of demand for and supply of skills: i) changes in occupational and industrial composition and movements within, out of and into the labour market; ii) experienced or predicted recruitment problems; and iii) changes in the task content of occupations (see Campbell et al, 2001, p. 20).

Data give rise to the general position that: the occupations likely to see the most growth in the future are those with a high skill content (e.g. Wilson, 2000a); a lack of skills impacts on businesses' performance (e.g. Blake, Dods and Griffiths, 2000; Haskel and Holt, 1999); and upskilling within occupations has occurred (e.g. Felstead, Gallie and Green,

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[5] The division of the literature is based on the fact that those theories contained within each share a common perspective, but they are not mutually exclusive in terms of the issues they address. For example, in the first section, which I have entitled 'mismatch approaches', skills issues and employability are the focus. The concept of employability, as will be seen, touches on issues regarding the amount of effort invested in jobsearch by the jobseeker. This is also the focus of the economic and psychological literatures which consider search effort to be either dependant on cost benefit calculations and a major factor in long term unemployment, or to be damaged by the experience of long term unemployment.

2002; Atkinson and Hills, 1998; Gallie, 1991, 1996). However, the picture is full of inconsistencies, which, whilst acknowledged in some of the academic literature, are arguably not reflected to the same degree in policy. This section seeks to present both the findings that support policy prescriptions and those that undermine them.

Occupational & industrial change

Haskel and Holt (1999, p. p. 3-4) explain that, at a given level of employment growth, the number of posts in all occupations and industries would be expected to increase by the same percentage, everything else being equal. However, the labour market is affected by numerous exogenous factors[6], such as the exchange rate or consumer spending patterns (e.g. Wilson, 2000a). Models of these factors, together with past trends, are used to infer how employment growth will be apportioned between occupations and industries. Shifts in the occupational and industrial composition of the labour market are expected to alter demand for skilled workers.

In addition to structural changes, movements of people through retirement and migration create demand for replacement workers. Labour market quitters leave behind them posts for which skills may be required, whilst removing their own skills from the supply. Job changers also create openings, as they move between posts that demand different levels and types of skill. The sum of these and structural changes gives rise to predicted demand. Predicted demand for skills is compared with the supply of qualifications, as indicated by the Labour Force Survey, Census of Population and data on newly qualified entrants (Wilson, 2000a; DfES, 2000). The difference between predicted demand and supply indicates the skills that are likely to be in short supply and this informs training and education policy.

Recruitment Problems

Employers contribute information about their recruitment experiences in response to regular surveys amongst which are the Employer Skills Survey (ESS), the Industrial Trends Survey (ITS) and the British Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey (BCC) (Blake, Dods and Griffiths, 2000)[7]. Attempts are made through these surveys to identify and quantify existing and short-term skill shortages, as well as to allow employers

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[5] Details of the projection models used to account for these factors are to be found in 'Projections of Occupations and Qualifications', (2000) Appendix A, figure A.1, p. 124, produced annually by the Institute for Employment Research.

[7] Many other studies are conducted but analysis is 'be-devilled by differences in methodology, terminology, phraseology and ambiguities' (Blake, Dods and Griffiths, 2000, p. 18). The ESS replaced the Skills Needs in Great Britain in 1999 and is run annually on behalf of the DfES. It involves questionnaires being sent to 27,000 establishments across all sectors and 4000 face to face interviews. The ITS covers 800-1500 firms in the manufacturing sector only. The British Chamber of Commerce survey covers 9000 firms, split 40:60 between the manufacturing and service sectors.

to comment on the skills that they consider important amongst their workforces or prospective workers.

Respondents to the ESS, which is the most comprehensive, are asked to identify the reasons for hard to fill vacancies by choosing from the options in figure 1. Where the problems are reported to be due to reasons 4, 7, or 8, they are classed as 'skill shortage' problems; the others represent 'recruitment difficulties'.

Figure 1 Response options from the ESS

1. Too much competition
2. Not enough people interested
3. Poor terms and conditions (e.g. pay)
4. Low number of applicants with skills
5. Low number of applicants with desired attitude & motivation
6. Low number of applicants generally
7. Lack of work experience
8. Lack of qualifications
9. Company location
10. Unsociable hours
11. Poor career progression

(Source: table 2.17, Employers Skill Survey, 2002)

Figure 2 Response options from the ITS

1. Orders and sales
2. Skilled labour
3. Other labour
4. Plant capacity
5. Credit or finance
6. Materials or components
7. Other

(Source: Blake et al, 2000, p. 16)

The ITS asks a question about the factors that are likely to impact on output over the coming four months, and employers have to select the most important reasons from the list in figure 2.

Finally, the BCC survey asks employers if they have recruited in the last three months and whether they experienced difficulties. If so, they are asked to identify the type of workers they found difficult to recruit from the list at figure 3.

Figure 3 Response options from the BCC survey

1. Skilled manual and technical
2. Professional and managerial
3. Clerical
4. Unskilled and semi-skilled

(Source: Blake et al, 2000, p. 50)

Findings[8] from the 2002 Employers Skill Survey (see figure 1) suggest that:

- The number of vacancies employers find difficult to fill satisfactorily have been reasonably stable over the past three years.
- Skill shortages are particularly pronounced in the construction sector. This is consistent with findings from the 1999 survey: that 22% of all skill shortage vacancies were in craft and skilled trades (Hogarth and Wilson, 2001).
- Hogarth and Wilson (2003b, p.15) refer to the results of the ESS 2001 to suggest that in England 80% of all vacancies were unrelated to skill shortages.
- For Britain and for the South West, only 8% of companies (excluding those in agriculture and fisheries) reported having had vacancies that had been difficult to fill due to skill shortages.
- Generic skills, including communication, customer handling and team working skills, are increasingly sought by employers.

Blake et al (2000) suggest that an increase of one percent in the number of employers reporting skill shortages equates to a decline in employment of between one half of one percent and one percent.

Changes within occupations

Data about the occupational composition of the labour market and recruitment problems is supplemented with information about the ways in which jobs are internally changing over time. Technological advances and competition are generally seen as factors that have led to jobs becoming more demanding in terms of skill. The extent to which this is the case has to be taken into account when interpreting changes in the structure of the labour market and planning education and training provision. Employees' skill use, rather than skill or qualification ownership, is the focus of these studies, allowing problems relating to credentialism or qualification inflation (which will be discussed shortly) to be circumvented to an extent.

[8]These are not necessarily the key findings of the authors of each of the studies but they encompass issues that are particularly relevant to this study.

Initially, in the absence of a benchmark from which to assess change in the skill content of jobs, employees were asked questions in relation to their current jobs and those they occupied five years previously. Gallie (1991) used the 1986 Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) survey data to evaluate the upskilling / deskilling and polarisation hypotheses of skill change and found that:

> 'Those that already had relatively higher levels of skill witnessed an increase in their skill levels [over preceding five years], while those with low levels of skill saw them stagnate' (Gallie, 1991, p. 348).

Atkinson and Hills (1998) undertook a similar study comparing the results of the 1997 Skills Survey[9], with the SCELI data. Several questions were again included in order to reduce reliance on qualifications as a proxy for skill use. Respondents were asked what qualifications it would be necessary to hold, firstly to obtain and secondly to do, their current job and the one they held five years earlier. They were also asked about the length of training involved at both points in time, and how long it had taken and would it now take to learn to do the job well. The study was repeated and augmented using the 2001 Skills Survey (see Felstead, Gallie and Green, 2002), which also provided data about the use of generic skill. Some findings, which have been selected because they are broadly relevant to this study, rather than because they are representative of findings generally, follow.

- There had been an increase of the proportion of jobs in which respondents thought it would be necessary for new entrants to have qualifications in order to secure a post from 62% in 1986 to 69% in 1997.
- 29% of respondents mentioned 'educational or technical qualifications' as the most or second most important attribute needed to get jobs. 35% mentioned 'motivation' and 49% 'previous experience of similar work' (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 27).
- Training times have increased over the period 1986-1997, with 28% compared with 22% of jobs requiring over two years training according to respondents (Atkinson and Green, 1998, p. 100). A quarter of jobs required a training period lasting more than two years and 61% less than three months (Atkinson and Green, 1998, p. 100). 20% of jobs could be learnt in less than one month (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 28).

[9] The Skills Survey was designed to be representative of employees aged 20-60 in full-time employment in Britain and included 2467 respondents.

- More respondents reported increasing use of all generic[10] skills (with the exception of physical strength) than reported a decrease in usage (Atkinson and Green, 1998, table 9, p. 112).
- In 2001 - approximately 7.1 million jobs required level 4 or above qualifications for entry, while there were 7.4 million individuals in Britain in possession of this level of qualification. For degrees, the figures are 4.2 million graduate jobs compared to 4.8 million graduates (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 31). There are approximately 6.4 million people qualified to level 3 but only 4 million jobs which demand these qualifications on entry (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 31). There are 6.5 million jobs (27% of all jobs) that require no qualifications and only 2.9 million economically active people who actually possess no qualifications (Felstead et al, 2002, p. p. 28-31). The mismatch in these terms lies in lack of demand for qualifications, rather than lack of supply (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 50).
- For males, level 1 or 2 qualification entry requirements have no significant impact on pay. There are considerable surpluses of workers with lower and intermediate level qualifications (Felstead et al, 2002, p. 76). Nacett (2001, cited in Campbell et al, 2001, para.1.17, p. 5) shows that earnings of those at level 2 are below those of level 1 qualifications.
- Generally there has not been a polarisation between the skills of those at either end of the occupational hierarchy (Atkinson and Green, 1998, p. 117).

The National Skills Task Force used evidence such as that presented above to suggest that: 'there is still a significant element of employment in relatively low-skilled jobs,' as well as concluding that an upskilling of the workforce is necessary (NSTF, 2001, p. 137). Between 1981 and 1998, the number of people in personal service, sales and customer service, and operative and elementary occupations, fell by only 200,000 and the number of jobs in these categories is expected to rise again by 2009. Additionally, because these jobs experience high turn over of staff, five and a quarter million vacancies are expected to arise in these occupations between 1998 and 2009. In these jobs, customer care skills and communication skills are likely to be increasingly demanded (NSTF, 2000, p. 40). Arguably, these are not the skills likely to be imparted through expanded educational provision, but are in many ways dependent on personality and social background.

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[10]The usage of the following 10 generic skills was measured in each study: Literacy Skills; Physical Skills; Number Skills; Technical 'Know-How'; High-level Communication; Planning; Client Communication; Horizontal Communication; Problem-Solving and Checking Skills plus Computing skills (2002, p. 34). Generic skills are those that are transferable between occupations (see Campbell et al, 2001).

Evaluation of the macro skills mismatch approaches

Commentators have identified a range of problems in what is described above. The use of the term 'skill' is questioned. Researchers, even as they use qualifications as proxies for skill, doubt their equivalence. Evidence of over qualification and under-utilisation of skill leads to questions about the reliability of the data collection methods and sources used. Before addressing these issues, a brief outline of three arguments: job competition, credentialism and human capital theory, which affect the way the data are perceived, is in order.

The job competition model is a queue theories which suggest that the number of desirable jobs in the labour market is limited, as are the number of jobs overall. Attractive jobs are filled first by the most attractive jobseekers, i.e. generally those with the highest levels of qualifications. The availability of other (relatively less) attractive jobseekers does not increase the number of attractive jobs available to them, nor the number of jobs *per se* (Sakamoto and Powers, 1995, p. 229).

The job competition hypothesis suggests that qualifications are used in the recruitment process to determine the suitability of applicants. Their possession is a signal of higher potential receptiveness to future training and investments (Thurow, 1975), rather than being indicative, in themselves, of any particular knowledge or technical skill (Groot and Oosterbeck, 1994, p. 317-318).

The credentialism thesis claims that the content of qualifications is largely immaterial as productivity is the result of 'on the job' learning and experience. The acquisition of qualifications is an exclusionary device that allows certain groups to indicate their moral and cultural superiority and to gain advantage by so doing (e.g. Collins, 1979). Neither position, therefore, treats qualifications as indicators of skill, nor accepts that job growth is dependent on the supply of skills. As such, the endeavours described above, to measure skill demand and changes etcetera, are of limited relevance.

Human capital theory, on the other hand, advocates the position that the potential for the creation of attractive jobs is limited only by the supply of attractive jobseekers prepared to work for the going rate. From this perspective, human capital is raised through education and qualifications, rather than simply signalled by them. Productivity is increased through the deployment of skills acquired in the education and training process. Findings regarding skills shortages and the like are therefore highly relevant, particularly to the government and the European Community which currently favour this perspective.

However, a report specifically addressing the issues faced by the Bournemouth and Poole area highlights the some of the inconsistencies in the argument. One of the area's

assets is 'a proven ability to attract/retain graduates'. The paper goes on in the same paragraph to say,

> 'how long those graduates stay, however, will depend on the ability of the area to continue to provide good quality knowledge-based jobs' (Hepworth, 2004, p. iv).

There is an inherent contradiction in this sort of argument - if the presence of graduates creates the dynamism for a movement to a high skill, knowledge based economy and it is only their absence that prevents it, the area does not need to be concerned about providing knowledge based jobs - they are potentially there and the presence of graduates releases the potential.

Defining 'Skill'

In addition to the differences espoused in these wide ranging theories, there are more detailed qualifications and objections to the mismatch approach. The Institute for Employment Research acknowledges shortcomings but concludes that:

> 'It is plain that any naïve comparison of projections with out-turns will reveal many detailed and often apparently quite major discrepancies. However, the reasons for these 'errors' are complex and are often as much due to problems with measuring what has happened in the past as with predicting the future. Such difficulties should not detract from the objective of trying to form as meaningful a picture as possible of likely future developments' (cited in Haskel and Holt, 1999, p. 10).

Thornley, (1996, p. 161), however, suggests that the notion that, 'skills are measurable and linked directly to technological change or education and training, and reflected in pay grades', is a naïve position in itself and one that undermines human capital and upskilling / deskilling literatures. Gallie, Crompton and Purcell (1996), less strongly, stress the socially constructed nature of skills. Elias, McKnight and Kinshott (1999) acknowledge that the concept of skill is not clearly defined or regulated, despite its wide usage. The latter, in a paper entitled 'Redefining Skill' (1999), explain changes to the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system, including the re-grading of particular occupations on the basis of the qualifications typically held by employees. Because Standard Occupational Classification is designed to reflect skill levels this clearly assumes a link between skill and qualifications that others question. Since the Standard Occupational Classification system is a fundamental building brick of much of the work about supply and demand for human capital I would suggest that this is a fairly considerable assumption. In a review of work and occupations, Abbott (1993, p. 203) notes that authors across various countries have shown that occupational categories,

such as the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) used in the UK, are not 'immediately meaningful'.

Qualifications and skill

The use of qualifications as indicators of the possession of skill, whether referring to the current position or making predictions, is problematic (Felstead, Gallie and Green, 2002). Research (e.g. Allen and van der Velden, 2001) shows only a weak relationship between education mismatch and skills mismatch. Workers who self-report over-qualification do not necessarily feel they have more skills than are necessary to perform their work tasks. This suggests that qualifications do not equate to skills. The authors claim to have, 'established beyond reasonable doubt the distinction between schooling and skills' (ibid., p. 449).

Green, McIntosh and Vignoles (2000) found that, whilst approximately 30% of employees in the SCELI study (1986) and the Skills Survey (1997) were in jobs that did not really require the qualifications they had, lack of particular skills prevented them being able to work at a level their qualifications suggested they should. A lack of numeracy skills amongst those with high level qualifications, for example, acted as a barrier to obtaining the type of work to which, as graduates, they may have aspired. Whilst the skill surveys that attempt to ascertain demand have managed to overcome these problems to a degree, predicting supply of skills depends entirely on qualifications.

The NSTF (2000, p. 63) acknowledges that the assumption that unqualified people are unskilled is not sustainable. A 50-59 year old is apparently four times more likely than a 40-49 year old to possess no qualifications, but it is stretching credibility to accept that they are four times less likely to be skilled. Researchers (or employers) that look to qualifications as the sole indicator of skill clearly exclude people who may have the necessary skills but who lack the paper to prove it. Arguably this is an important factor in the continuing unemployment of older workers who are likely to be relatively less qualified merely because of the increased emphasis on certificating skill in recent years.

In a similar vein, evidence shows that no return is associated with surplus education. Overeducated graduates earn no more than unqualified workers doing the same job (Dolton and Silles, 2001), suggesting two possibilities. Again, qualifications do not indicate skill levels and over-educated graduates are no more productive than the unqualified - in which case the concept of the over-educated worker is flawed along with the majority of analysis that assumes a connection between education and skill. Alternatively, it may be suggested that skill levels account for only a small part of firms'

productive capacity[11], in contrast to the human capital argument that underlies the focus on skill mismatches.

Too much or too little education?

There is plentiful evidence from the US, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK that a large proportion of workers are under-employed or over-educated (e.g. Dolton and Silles, 2001[12]; Green, McIntosh and Vignoles, 2000; Livingstone, 1996; Battenberg and de Witte, 2001). Over-education has increased since 1986 from 30% of workers to 37% in 2001 (Felstead, Gallie and Green, 2002, figure 4.3, p. 48). Over-education or underemployment are difficult concepts, over and above the skills/qualification equation problems already discussed. As Green, McIntosh and Vignoles point out, a person with 1 CSE is over-educated in a job that demands no qualifications. Livingstone (1996) however, refers to 'work skills' rather than qualifications:

> 'Studies reveal that since the early 1970's at least a third of the employed North American workforce have work-related skills that they could use in their jobs but are not permitted to use. As education attainments have increased, this actual under use appears to have grown to include over 40 percent of the entire workforce and half of those under twenty-five.' (*ibid.*, pp. 76-7).

This matters, not only because over-education or under utilisation represents an ineffective deployment of resources, but for the reasons identified by Battenberg and de Witte (2001, p. 91),

> 'In our opinion it is not the supply of credentials that is the basic problem but the supply of highly skilled occupations. Our study clearly indicates that the main difficulty is that employees who are under-employed occupy more and more jobs. This blocks the path of the less educated workers to regular employment.'

Nicaise (2001, p. 315) concludes that 'bumping down' (the process described by Battenberg and de Witte) is responsible for the earnings of the men in his study, which are 'far below potential earnings under full employment'. 'Bumping down' will not be avoided, according to Green (2001), merely by reskilling or upskilling the unemployed and non-employed.

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[11] The Skills in England Research Report 2001, found that 20% of differences in profitability were attributable to differences in human capital (2001, p. 8).

[12] 42% of graduates entered non graduate employment and, after six years, 22% were still in jobs for which a degree is not necessary to do their work (Dolton and Silles, 2001, p. p. 21-23 and p. 25)

Under-education also occurs, although to a lesser degree. Taking both under and over-education, Felstead, Gallie and Green (2002) found that only half of workers had jobs that matched their qualifications in 1986 and this had fallen to 45% by 2001[13].

So problems with matches certainly exist, but it is debatable whether under or over-education is the more pressing problem. It is also questionable whether this evidence points to a mismatch between skill supply and demand, inefficiency in the recruitment process or both (Hogarth, 2003a).

Reliability of data

The ESS, ITS and BCC quarterly survey rely on employers' perceptions of their recruitment situation. Employers' perceptions, and particularly those addressed in the ESS, are subject to limitations. Arguably the difficulties originate from the extrapolation of responses about applicants to the labour force. Employers' responses to questions about applicants are treated as indicative of the shortcomings of jobseekers generally. Employers have experience only of applicants and can only comment upon them. They have no knowledge of the characteristics and achievements of non-applicants. Individuals may choose not to deploy their skills - a qualified teacher or nurse may not practice as such, for example[14], and therefore not apply for a vacancy. It would be questionable to conclude from an employer's response that insufficient applicants had the required skills, qualifications or experience, that there was a shortage of these characteristics in the labour force generally. Even if the surveys are fully representative, it is only possible to say that employers perceive that a shortage exists. Additionally, the House of Common Select Committee on Education and Employment (2001, paras. 14-15) recognises that employers may forego placing vacancies with some outlets (particularly Jobcentres) in order to keep numbers of applicants to a manageable level. Equally, vacancies may attract only applicants who are considered insufficiently skilled, but other suitable jobseekers may fail to apply given what they consider unappealing conditions, for example. Under these circumstances it is unclear how employers' perceptions can be used to identify skill shortages in the population.

Similarly, Green and Ashton (1992) question employers' accounts of skill shortages on the basis that they may conflate technical and social skills. The 'good bloke syndrome' (Green and Ashton, 1992, p. 296), suggests that employers want to recruit people with

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[13] In this study over / under qualified indicated that the job-holder had qualifications at a higher / lower level than would have been necessary to secure the job at the time of the study.

[14] The BBC (17th November 1999) reported that the NHS hotline, set up to attract fully trained nurses back into the health service had received 8500 calls since its inception. This suggests that at least 8500 nurses who have been trained are not working in the field for which they trained.

certain social characteristics and, faced with a shortage of applicants demonstrating these characteristics, report skill shortages.

Another problem stems from the potential limitations involved in asking jobseekers to compare their current job with that which they were doing five years previously, and then to draw conclusions about skill changes from their responses. Where remarkable events occur in people's lives they may be able to accurately date them (Parkin, 1997, p. 33), as well as non-remarkable events for which they act as cues (Baddeley, 1997, p. 214). However, it is difficult to see how respondents could be sure, particularly if they were working in the same job five years previously, that their answers related to the relevant time and were accurate. This problem was recognised in the 2001 Skills Survey (Felstead, Gallie and Green, 2002, p. 51).

Three further points could be raised with reference to the employee skill studies. It is unclear how employees know what qualifications are necessary to get the job they currently hold. This is particularly so if there has been no recent recruitment to a similar post or in non-bureaucratic organisations without standardised and detailed recruitment practices. Secondly, a potential issue relating to studies that rely on respondents to provide retrospective details, as in the SCELI study, is that respondents may have been upwardly mobile between the periods they are asked to comment upon. Whilst Gallie (1996, p. 138) addresses this issue and reports measures that control for such eventualities, controls for the effect of seniority or increased experience within the same posts are not reported. It seems feasible that experience and seniority are likely to increase the level of task complexity and skill usage, regardless of any upskilling of the post *per se*. Finally, there is also the potential for an element of social desirability to creep into responses. The more emphasis is placed on educational qualifications as a mark of success, the more likely it is, I would suggest, that respondents report the need for them for the posts they occupy.

Interpretation of data

Finally, empirical studies produce mixed support for the human capital mismatch hypothesis as an explanation for long-term unemployment. Comparison between the characteristics of the stock and flow of registered unemployed people, for example, demonstrates which factors are important in explaining why some people find jobs more quickly than others. Over the age of forty five, Warren (1997) found that ownership or otherwise of qualifications has little impact on chances of finding employment. Meadows (2001a) in her work with young people 'at the margins of work', suggests that a lack of qualifications on their own are not a significant barrier to employment. A combination of no qualifications and a criminal record, addiction, poor health and homelessness are, however, significant. Other evidence suggests that, despite the large number of unskilled

vacancies, unqualified jobseekers remain unemployed for longer than more qualified jobseekers (Philpott, 1998). The unqualified experience 11% unemployment rates, whereas for NVQ5 the figure is 3%; NVQ4, 3.5% and at NVQ3 the figure is 4% (Campbell et al, 2001, figure 2.1, p. 6). Arguably however, age discrimination may account for some of the difference between the unemployment rates for qualified and unqualified, since older people are much less qualified than younger people. Additionally, the fact that unqualified people are unemployed for longer than average perhaps reflects the comparative lack of incentives attached to the sort of work they are likely to secure, and consequently lower levels of applications. According to a queue perspective longer durations of unemployment for the unqualified suggest that a redistribution of human capital is necessary to increase occupational mobility. Human capital limitations are, nevertheless, seen as largely responsible for the disproportionate growth in long-term unemployment, in most European countries over the past twenty to thirty years (e.g. Nickell and Bell, 1996, p. p. 306-307; OECD, 1994, part 1a), although, as we shall see shortly, some economists suggest that it is the 'choosiness' of jobseekers that accounts for the increase.

Summary

The claims and evidence put forward in the mismatch approaches discussed thus far do not appear to provide clear cut explanations for long term unemployment and show that many factors operate simultaneously in the area of skills supply and demand. The inference, that it is a lack of quality in the existing or potential workforce that necessitates competition on the grounds of cost and leads to a low wage economy in the global market, is therefore questionable (e.g. Went, 2000; Gray, 2001). The claim that as the quality of the labour force improves, so will the quality and quantity of jobs is also (e.g. McLaughlin, 1994, p. 26; Gray, 2001; Jagger, Morris and Pearson, 1996; OECD, 1994.2c).

The dominance in policy terms at a national and supranational level, (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2002) of one aspect of the argument - human capital inadequacies – therefore seems hardly to be justified. In 1992 McLaughlin suggested that active labour market policies and an emphasis on the human capital deficiencies of the long-term unemployed created the impression that it was the unemployed themselves who were to blame for their circumstances, deflecting attention from economic performance. The identification of human capital deficiencies and particularly the notion of employability (Peck and Theodore, 2000) which is considered shortly, now lays responsibility for aspects of economic performance with employee, rather than governmental or employer decisions or capacities and continues to place responsibility for long-term unemployment with the long-term unemployed.

Furthermore, some of the policy responses to the issues raised – such as an increase qualification targets – seems misplaced, even if the basic premise of mismatch approaches is accepted. The UK Employment Action Plan (1998) calls for urgent action to raise the quality of education and training to reduce the number of people without qualifications. However, Felstead, Gallie and Green (2002) suggest that:

> 'Although Britain's supplies of intermediate skills tend to lag behind those of other similar countries in Europe, the numbers of jobs demanding these qualifications is substantially less than the supplies available in the workforce' (2002, p. p. 79-82).

Wilson (2000b, p. 11) considers the proportion of jobs that are likely to be held by people with different levels of qualifications and notes:

> 'It is especially difficult to sustain the argument that the changes in employment shares for the lower level qualifications represent changing patterns of demand. Rather they reflect what has been happening to the supply of qualifications and the labour market's ability to absorb this supply'.

The arguments presented above may not directly affect individuals' application behaviour[15] in the sense the term is used here but they provide a background against which it occurs. Wilson (2000a) recognises that:

> 'It is important to bear in mind that persons qualified at higher level may find employment at the expense of less well qualified people who may be displaced into less demanding jobs. Moreover there is the possibility that an increasing number of newly qualified persons may find themselves in jobs which they regard as not matching their expectations' (ibid., p. 50).

This last point introduces the idea that jobseekers and changers are more than just potentially skilled workers who will respond automatically to the availability of jobs with applications. They have expectations that must be considered. The quote concerns the newly qualified who are not the subject of this study. However, it is equally likely that the previously qualified long-term unemployed or non-employed, or even the unqualified with years of experience, have expectations. These expectations may not been met as they are pushed to the back of the queue and into less and less demanding and rewarding work by the newly qualified, each time they try to re-enter employment. This is one of the central issues addressed in chapters four to six.

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[15] The term 'application behaviour' is used, as distinct from the term 'job search', because the latter refers to the methods jobseekers' employ in their search for work, in the sense of the sources they use and the amount of time they input to reading job ads, for example, neither of which are relevant here. Application behaviour, on the other hand, concentrates on jobseekers' attitudes towards vacancies – what they consider acceptable and why.

Micro perspectives

From the point of view of the individual, the employability literature suggests that (i) possession of the technical and generic skills (or what are termed 'assets'), is a condition necessary but insufficient to secure employment. Four additional conditions are also considered essential. (ii) Jobseekers and workers must be able to deploy their assets. This means being effective at sourcing vacancies, and includes a willingness to be occupationally and geographically mobile (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). Presentation is also important - (iii) jobseekers need to be able to convince employers of their suitability as workers *per se* and in relation to specific posts, once they have been identified. In other words, jobseekers need to be able to present their assets, whether skill based or personal, in such a way as to impress recruiters (Jones, 1996, p. 117). (iv) Jobseekers also need to be free from the constraining effects of their social and family circumstances. Adequate childcare provision, for example, would enhance the employability, and therefore employment prospects, of a lone parent. In some accounts this dimension of employability may also refer to the cultural aspects of individuals' lives (see Levitas, 1998, p. 27; Green, 2001, p. 1362). Finally, (v) jobseekers need to be able to access labour markets in which their assets are in demand (Tamkin and Hillage, 1999). A combination of assets and these four factors sum to an individual's 'employability', which is indicative of their chances of re-employment. Failure in any of these areas can lead to long-term unemployment, even in comparatively buoyant labour markets.

This definition of 'employability' is of relatively recent origin. It follows alterations in emphasis and content of the concept that have mirrored changes in the labour market (e.g. Finn, 1999a). From meaning 'able and willing to work', the concept had evolved by the 1980s into meaning having the capacity to gain initial employment, maintain employment and obtain new employment if necessary, or into what Glazier (1998, p. 47) terms 'initiative employability'. In a flexible labour market, individuals may have to change jobs frequently during their working lives (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996) and initiative employability is needed in order to do this successfully. Employability, thus defined, can usefully be divided into two categories: access ability and performance ability (Philpott, 1998, p. 104): 'access ability' encompasses the second, forth and fifth points above, and 'performance ability' points the first and third.

The likelihood of an unemployed person returning to work is considered to be enhanced if their awareness of, and access to, vacancies is maximised. This notion underpins the active labour market policies detailed in the UK Employment Action Plan 2002 (p. 14) and stems from evidence that, in the absence of assistance with job search, jobseekers are not as proactive as they might be in their search for work. In the 1970s, for example, a typical unemployed person applied for just one vacancy per month (Layard and Philpott,

1991). Bottomley, McKay and Walker, (1997) found that almost one quarter had not applied for any vacancies in the four week period upon which their study concentrated. In order to enhance access Jobseekers Allowance replaced Unemployment Benefit in 1996. Merely the change to the name of the benefit paid to people registered as unemployed and looking for work, suggests that access to vacancies became a more central concern. With Job Seekers' Allowance a whole system of interviews and requirements were introduced that firmly encouraged jobseekers to stay in touch with labour market opportunities. By 1999, 84% of registered unemployed had applied for at least one job in the four weeks prior to their interview, compared with 75% in the latter stages of Unemployment Benefit (Rayner, 1999, p. 3).

Social and family circumstances have been shown to be associated with unemployment and labour market participation rates, because of the ways they limit access. Partners of registered unemployed jobseekers are much less likely to be employed than are partners of those in work (e.g. Irwin and Morris, 1993; Gregg, Hansen and Wadsworth, 1999; DWP & HM Treasury, 2001, p. 6, para. 2.10). As a consequence, 'work rich' (where both partners work) and 'work poor' households (where neither partner works) have developed, with poverty being associated significantly with the latter.

Other groups have also experienced a decline in labour market activity, including older workers. Only one in nine men over 55 returned to work having been made unemployed between 1990 and 1996, compared to 50% of men aged 45-49 (DWP & HM Treasury, 2001, para 3.11, p. 13). These groups, together with young people who have never worked and lone parents, are seen as unattached or only weakly attached, to the labour market, limiting access ability (Green, 2001). Additionally, practical issues, such as transport limitations (Meadows, 2001b) and childcare expenses are also recognised barriers to employability and therefore employment (e.g. Irwin and Morris, 1993).

Performance ability is particularly important to the long-term unemployed and labour market returners because it is recognised that many entry-level jobs are low paid and insecure. In order to 'disentangle themselves from the "revolving door" and the "low-pay-or-no-pay" cycles,' individuals must be able to perform to an extent that allows them to, 'climb beyond the first rung of the job and pay ladders' (Philpott, 1998, p. 104-105). Employability approaches suggest that jobseekers need to be able to demonstrate their ability to perform at higher levels in order to progress, once they have re-entered the labour market. This is especially relevant in view of the projections that manufacturing jobs are likely to continue to be replaced by low paid jobs in the non-traded, or personal / protective, sector of the service sector (OECD, 1994.2c; Philpott, 1998; NSTF, 2000, p. 40; Manning, 2004).

Performance employability is important, too, for the currently employed, given that the firm can no longer be seen as a source of job security (Finn, 1999a, p. 4). Security resides instead in the ability of workers to move between firms and even occupations, through the course of their working lives. Sennett (1998) notes the lack of commitment demonstrated by employers to their workforces.

So the concept of employability is more expansive than the macro mismatch approach described above, which was concerned primarily with the technical and generic skill shortcomings of potential workers. It provides a framework through which it is possible to understand the unemployment of skilled and qualified, as well as unskilled and unqualified, people. In this approach human capital explanations are supplemented with concern for the way in which human capital is 'sold' by potential workers and the practical and cultural restrictions they face, when considering duration of unemployment.

Evaluation of employability theories

There are several possible limitations with this approach. The most important is, arguably, its concentration on supply side factors. The approach emphasises that characteristics of applicants, over and above their assets, make them more or less attractive to employers. It does not consider the reasonableness of employers' recruitment decisions.

As far as assets are concerned, for the 27% of jobs that the Skills Survey revealed required no qualifications at all (ibid., 2002, p. 28) employability can not necessarily be said to increase in response to increased assets. In fact, in relation to these vacancies, enhanced assets would lead to higher levels of over-education and arguably make them harder to fill. The ESS demonstrates that over 80% of unfilled vacancies are unfilled for reasons other than lack of skill.

On a practical level, previous experience of similar work, which 49% of respondents to the 2001 Skills Survey suggested was important to success, requires the maintenance of a limited number of occupations, in order to ultimately increase employability. This contrasts with other aspects of employability which suggest that it is enhanced by jobseekers adopting a flexible approach to the sort of occupations they are prepared to undertake. There are tensions between the need to be flexible, whilst demonstrating the commitment and experience employers' seek.

Additionally, the approach fails to acknowledge the position of jobseekers with human capital and a strong work ethic who spend many hours each week seeking what they consider desirable vacancies for which competition may be intense, but who fail to apply for the more easily secured vacancies available in their local area.

In respect of the other factors implicated in employability, employers have been shown to consider applicants unsuitable for reasons typically associated with unemployment duration, ill health, age or lack of social capital (e.g. Atkinson, Giles and Meager, 1996; Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001). Jobseekers may increase their supplies of human capital or assets through life long learning (as per the UK Employment Action Plan, 1998, for example)[16], but there is little they can do to surmount these other barriers. Arguably, as the service sector becomes increasingly dominant, social and cultural capital, personality (e.g. Brown, 1995 p. 40; Leidner, 1991, p. 156; Dench, Perryman and Kodz, 1998), appearance and other genetic characteristics may become even more relevant in the selection process (Dore, 1996). Even if it were possible to identify the aspects of personality and appearance that maximised jobseekers' employability, it is not possible to imagine what steps could be taken to facilitate improvements.

Equally, if the recruitment process can not be seen as objective and free from bias and subjectivity, (see Baron and Pfeffer, 1994, for example) employers' attitudes towards applicants are not fully determinable in advance. This leads to an element of circularity in the employability argument as it becomes possible, only in the light of the results of the recruitment process, to judge an individual's overall employability. Only when applicants are unsuccessful can they be said to be less employable overall than successful applicants. Equally, unsuccessful candidates are less employable in the view of the specific recruiter and not necessarily recruiters generally, so jobseekers' ability to act strategically is reduced. The fact that an individual may apply for a number of very similar posts and be successful in some but not others, suggests that the power to define employability lies very much in the hands of employers. It also suggests that employability is relative and affected by the competition faced (Thurow, 1975), rather than a constant for which jobseekers can aim.

Whilst low quality, low skill vacancies exist, the avoidance of the 'revolving door' arguably requires that they remain unfilled, particularly in current circumstances where employers have little incentive to train the staff they find difficult to recruit in the first place, to do a different job. Philpott's claim (1998, pp. 104-105) that observable performance ability increases employability and leads to escape from the revolving door is debatable. Evidence from Australia, for example, shows that, in reality, a significant proportion of labour market re-entrants get stuck in the peripheral labour market, never being able to

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[16] 'National Action Plans for Employment' are drawn up annually by members of the European Union, under Article 128 of the Treaty establishing the European Community. 'Improving Employability' is the first of four 'pillars', which support the co-ordinated European Union employment strategy (see DfEE, 1999; Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 30, for details).

break through to insider jobs[17] (Finn, 1999b). Entry level jobs pay around one half median weekly earnings and mobility in the UK across pay deciles is now lower than in the 1970s (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000, p. 518).

For jobs in personal and protective services, distribution, hotel and catering, and retail work, it is difficult to envisage a situation in which higher skill possession and usage would change the often part-time, precarious and ill paid nature of this work. In these sectors it can be argued that the nature of the work prevents significant increases in productivity, which, in these approaches is tied firmly to employment chances and rewards. On the other hand, Coyle (1995, cited in Campbell et al, 2001, p. 47) notes that within the NHS funding limitations make it impossible to hire more highly skilled workers, even though they could be used efficiently. Presumably the same applies across other public service organisations and some private sector organisations too. Whilst some companies have adapted to competition by moving to the production of higher value goods, others are not in a position to do so, due to the nature of their businesses or capital constraints, as much as human capital limitations (NSTF, 2001, p. 119).

So the greatest challenge to employability approaches arguably stems from uncertainty expressed above about the future shape of the labour market. If the 'high road' (Wheelock, 1999, p. 79) which offers better quality work to all does not materialise, despite improved levels of qualifications, two questions come to the fore. Firstly, in whose interest will it be to accept unattractive work, which fails to make use of or reward human capital and secondly, to where will those trapped by the revolving door, due to their relatively low levels of human capital escape? For some commentators doubts about the capacity of the labour market to act as a vehicle to lift sections of society out of poverty, reduce inequality and increase social cohesion, leads to calls for the uncoupling of income and employment (e.g. Gorz, 1999; Levitas, 1998, 2001).

Summary and evaluation of skills mismatch and employability approaches

Overall, mismatch approaches offer some explanations for why some jobseekers find their options severely limited in terms of the vacancies for which they can apply and why this matters. Macro approaches predict that human capital mismatches will be implicated in long term unemployment in the area of the study. A substantial proportion of vacancies should be inaccessible to jobseekers in the first of the two studies because they fail to meet employers' acceptance criteria. Mismatches should also form part of an explanation for long term unemployment according to employability approaches. They suggest that respondents are likely to lack a sense of connection with the labour market and the ability

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[17] Cain (1976) provides a dated but exceptionally clear exposition of different ways of conceiving of the labour market in terms relevant to Finn's comments.

to market themselves effectively to employers. Their social backgrounds may also act to constrain their labour market opportunities.

The first empirical study quantifies the extent to which jobseekers in the Bournemouth and Poole travel to work area possess the human capital demanded by employers in the area. This establishes the context in which to place responses to the second study which focuses on jobseekers' accounts of their application behaviour.

Search approaches

The term 'search approaches' is used here to group together a number of positions that have in common a particular notion of human nature and are suggestive of how individuals behave when seeking work. From this perspective, behaviour is motivated by a desire for benefit maximisation and is rational (Straussman, 1993, p. 55). Predominantly, but with some exceptions (e.g. McFadyen and Thomas, 1997, p. 1467), benefit is viewed in terms of material rewards and cost / benefit calculations.

The basic premise is that the actions of jobseekers influence their chances of re-employment at a given level of vacancies. Rogers (1998, p. 634) states the standard job search model as follows:

> 'Individuals are assumed to maximise expected lifetime wealth by choosing between continuing to search and accepting a wage offer that is drawn from a known offer distribution. The value of the search equals income when unemployed minus search costs plus the discounted present value of continuing to search in the next period...'

Individuals stop searching when they receive an offer that exceeds their reservation wage. Rogers continues,

> 'The reservation wage is the wage at which the discounted present value of accepting a job at that wage is equal to that of continuing to search.'

This suggests that unemployment can be treated as a function of job search (Arberg, 2001, p. 132), which itself can be broken down into the following components:

- Methods: how jobseekers search for work, particularly in terms of the sources of vacancies they use and the offers their search produces (e.g. Blau and Robins, 1990; Osberg, 1993; Lindeboom, van Ours and Renes, 1994, Saks and Ashforth, 2000).
- Search intensity or effort: how much time and energy jobseekers invest in actually sourcing vacancies and making applications to them and offers produced (e.g. Charlot and Decreuse, 2001; Kulik, 2000, Vuori and Vesalainen, 1999; Wadsworth, 1991).
- Restrictions: the limits placed by jobseekers on the range of jobs they are prepared to apply for and undertake; and flexibility with regard to what are

considered suitable openings and how far they are prepared to compromise their restrictions (e.g. Arberg, 2001, p. 132; Daniel, 1990, p. 172; Layard, 1986, p. 64; Wadsworth, 1991).

This section is organised around these topics and the factors that impact upon the decisions made in respect of them. Background is provided together with examples of some empirical research which supports or challenges theory. Search approaches are then evaluated and consideration given to how they may be used to inform this study.

Jobsearch methods

The probability of obtaining work depends on the probability of receiving an offer and of accepting it (e.g. Wadsworth, 1991, p. 18; Berman, 1997, p. 254). Search methods are important to the first part of this equation. Some are more effective than others and use of different methods has been found to vary quite systematically (Blau and Robins, 1990; Thomas, 1997, p. 675).

Formal methods, for example, include the use of Jobcentres, employment agencies and press advertisements to source vacancies. Informal methods include 'word of mouth,' and recommendations (which depend on social networks and are discussed more fully in due course), and speculative approaches to employers. Generally, informal methods have been shown to be the most effective and popular way of securing work (e.g. Daniel, 1990; Drentea, 1999, p. 327; Holzer, 1987, Blau and Robins, 1990, Lindeboom, van Ours and Renes, 1994; cf. Wegener, 1991 (with reference to Germany)). However, as Lindeboom et al., (1994, p. 47) point out, the effectiveness of search methods depends as much on the ratio of jobseekers to employers using it as it does on any inherent superiority of different methods.

Whilst methods are not mutually exclusive, in practice, jobseekers rarely employ all to an equal extent. Method selection may be affected by experience of success or failure and, relatedly, duration of unemployment. Saks and Ashforth (2000, p. 278) identify three job search models which can contribute to explaining how methods are chosen and alter over time.

The sequential model is an organised approach which starts with a plan and is followed by intensive search. Failure to secure work results in a return to the planning stage, more extensive use of formal methods to generate leads and more intense searching. The learning model, as the name implies, suggests that jobseekers become more accomplished at seeking efficiently and intensively over time. They tend to rely more on informal sources of vacancies as time progresses. The emotional response model infers that the efficiency of job search does not improve over time. Jobseekers are affected psychologically by their failures and frustrations and ultimately reduce the use of informal

sources in locating vacancies. To use these sources requires characteristics, such as self-esteem, the supply of which dwindles in the face of rejections (Ellis and Taylor, 1983). If account is taken of the literature which suggests that social networks shrink during sustained periods of unemployment (Gallie, Gershuny and Vogler, 1994; Granovetter, 1973), there is also a rational explanation for a move away from informal sources of vacancies.

Choice of search methods, in terms of the dominance of formal or informal sources, may also be influenced by jobseekers' knowledge of the recruitment practices of the employers. Different occupations, industries and organisations of varying sizes are associated with dissimilar recruitment practices (Lindeboom et al, 1994; p. 47, Thomas, 1997, p. 677). A jobseeker with experience of a particular occupation or industry may, therefore, tailor their search methods to coincide with recruitment practices.

Search effort

Insurance based benefits are intended to allow jobseekers to secure employment that is appropriate to their human capital accomplishments. The unemployment insurance (UI) system in the US, for example, attempts to,

> 'reduce the possibility that re-employment in a recipient's usual (and presumably, most productive) occupation will be delayed or prevented because he is "forced by circumstances" to seek employment in one of the lower paying occupations for which he is also qualified' (Stone 1982, p. 299).

Whether or not the system works as intended depends on whether recipients of benefits use their time to seek work or use it instead for leisure or activities not associated with finding employment (St. Louis, Burgess and Kingstone, 1986, p. 93). Although the importance of search effort is not debated, the way in which it should be measured, and the impact of different factors on it, is.

The way in which search effort is measured appears very relevant to the conclusions that can be drawn in respect of it but choice of measurement frequently appears insufficiently justified in much of the literature. Measurement options include:

- the amount of time spent searching for work (Barron and Mellow, 1979; Holzer, 1987, p. 601)
- the number of methods used (e.g. Wadsworth, 1991; Holzer, 1987, p. 601)
- the number of contacts made with employers (Lindeboom and Theeuwes, 1993, p. 332; St. Louis, Burgess, and Kingston, 1986)

- applications made (Layard and Philpott, 1991; Bottomley, McKay and Walker, 1997; Rayner 1999).

The first and second measures say nothing about the efficiency or range of the search. Search in these cases is affected only by the amount of effort and resources jobseekers are willing to expend – the factors that impact on effort in this sense are discussed in a moment. The third and fourth measures take account of effort but also reflect the impact of restrictions and flexibility and labour market conditions. Contacts and applications will be made only if the initial impression created by the vacancy is such that the jobseeker considers it potentially suitable, and this will be the case only if it matches their restrictions, or is deemed to on the basis of their flexibility.

Regardless of which type of measurement is used, search effort is usually investigated using self-report methods. Large discrepancies have been found between reported and actual contacts with employers. For example, in one study an average of 2.61 contacts were reported in the week of the study, but only 1.75 were confirmed (St. Louis, Burgess and Kingstone, 1986, p. 97). One fifth of the participants in that study were found not to have made any contacts. The authors concluded that self-reported effort (however measured) needs to be interpreted cautiously.

The amount of energy expended in search effort is impacted by a number of different factors. Theory and evidence suggest that the time (in terms of sacrificed leisure) and costs (such as bus fares, phone calls etc.) involved in job search, limit search effort (Barron and Mellow, 1979; Johnson and Klepinger, 1994, p. 696). In view of the impact of costs, it has been argued (e.g. Tannery, 1983; Ben-Harim and Zuckerman, 1987) that more generous benefit levels may induce more search effort by lessening the relative burden on jobseekers. Wadsworth's findings (1991, p. 31) support the view that benefits, through financing job search, increase search effort and therefore the arrival rate of offers.

The influence of benefits is, however, debated. Whether the jobseeker considers investments in search worthwhile depends upon the potential rewards / costs deriving from them and the cost of search and anticipated returns are compared by the jobseeker with the costs (and benefits) of being unemployed. This is affected by benefit levels which reduce the cost of being unemployed, and the value attached by the individual to leisure. Nickell (1998, p. 813) suggests that a 10% increase in replacement ratios[18] and a

[18] The replacement ratio is the proportion of previous earnings represented by the level of benefit payable. The generosity of benefits varies across welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Nickell, 1998).

year added to maximum periods of entitlement to benefit would increase unemployment by 25%.

In terms of disincentives to search (and to accept offers), focus is on both the level (e.g. Layard, 1986, p. 45; Atkinson and Micklewright, 1991; Nickell, 1998, Carling, Holmlund and Vejsiu, 2001), and duration of entitlements (e.g. Meyer, 1990; Atkinson and Micklewright, 1991; Carling, Holmlund and Vejsiu, 2001). Lindeboom and Theeuwes (1993, p. 342) suggest that benefit levels influence search intensity, and duration of benefits (i.e. how long entitlement lasts) influence the reservation wage. For some the way the system is administered is important in moderating the effects of benefit level and duration (e.g. Atkinson and Micklewright, 1991; Johnson and Klepinger, 1994; Blackmore, 2001).

Other factors in addition to benefits systems influence search effort. Vuori and Vesalainen (1999, p. 535), for example, suggest that support from a significant other may have an affirmative impact on the job search process. Deterioration in the family's financial situation increased job search during the year of the study, but a poor financial situation in its own right did not predict search activity. Wadsworth (1991, p. 29) found that single men searched less than married men. The former were said to be free to value leisure more highly than are married or cohabiting people. Search effort may be seen as the produce of self interested action in the presence of work incentives but it may be affected by emotional responses to the experience of unemployment in some cases.

Low morale, or what is termed 'duration dependence'[19] (Payne, Casey, Payne and Connolly, 1996; van Ham, Mulder and Hooimeijer, 2001) reduces search effort according to 'scarred' or 'duration effect' models (Layard, Nickel and Jackman, 1991; Wadsworth, 1991, p. 25 & 30; Arulampalam, 2001) and coupled with negative ascription by employers (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2000) consequently reduces job offers. Equally, Charlot and Decreuse (2001) consider claims that job seekers invest more effort in their job search in the early stages of unemployment because at that stage anticipated rewards are at their greatest - as anticipated rewards decline over time, so, rationally, does search activity.

On the other hand, the 'search theoretical model' suggests that with duration, individuals become, in some senses, more employable (McFadyen and Thomas, 1997 p. 1465), even if search effort does diminish. Expectations respond to the passage of time and reservation wages decline in response to duration. Ljungqvist and Sargent (1998, p. 532-533) suggest that job seekers decrease their reservation wages in response to the reduction in skill they experience in the early stages of their unemployment and continue to decrease them to a point at which, after about three years, their loss of skill seems no

[19] This concept is similar to that of the 'discouraged worker' mentioned earlier.

longer relevant. This increases the proportion of vacancies that are acceptable on grounds of pay.

Overall support for the search theoretic model and the scarred model varies. Roed, Oddbjorn and Goldstein (1999, p. 1215), for example, conclude that the employment probability for the average worker declined only 10% over the first two years of unemployment due to scarring, whilst unobserved heterogeneity[20] was very important in accounting for continuing unemployment in their Norwegian study. However, for older people and those with no experience of the labour market, duration effects were significant in explaining continuing unemployment. Gershuny and Hannan (1997, pp. 13-14) suggest that unobserved heterogeneity is not a major cause of repeated spells of unemployment: instead duration effects are the most plausible explanation. This position is supported by Van den Berg and Van Ours (1994) in relation to the UK, but not other European countries.

Search effort is nonetheless important to chances of success. Vuori and Vesalainen, (1999, p. 531) found that, with the exception of marital status, only job search intensity predicted re-employment. Traditionally identified factors such as age, duration of unemployment, level of education and work involvement did not, in their Finnish study.

Restrictions and flexibility

It is this area of the search literature that has the most relevance to this study. Claims offer some interesting insights and are suggestive of why the various policies designed to reduce duration are as they are.

Flexibility has been shown to be important to the chances of securing employment. However, in the mid-eighties Layard (1986, p. 64) suggested that jobseekers were not optimally flexible. He identified the 'choosiness' of jobseekers regarding acceptable work as the main reason for the increase in long term unemployment experienced in the UK over the preceding thirty years. For Berman (1997, pp. 254-255) an increase in the rate of unemployment of 2.1% between 1978 and 1990 (in Israel) is explicable in terms of a decline in the acceptance rate (either of applicants or employers) from .85 to .59 over the period. This is attributable either to,

> 'a reduction in the quality of the stocks [of vacancies or jobseekers] or the extent to which they suit each other [and] will appear as a reduction in the efficiency of the matching function...and higher levels of unemployment at a given level of vacancies.' (Berman, 1997, p. 290)

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[20] Unobserved heterogeneity refers to characteristics which are unknown to the researcher but may be perceived by employers and considered negatively.

Whether vacancies have become less suitable for jobseekers, whilst jobseekers have remained unchanged in what they expect and offer; whether vacancies have remained the same and jobseekers have become more demanding and choosy; or whether neither or both have changed and some other factor is increasing the mismatch is not clear. According to Layard, however, jobseekers at the time of his research were no worse a match to vacancies than they had been in previous years. Nickell (1998) similarly suggests that the unemployed had become less enamoured with available jobs but also the possibility that employer's requirements were not matched by what jobseekers had to offer.

Daniel (1990, p. 172) cited the importance of flexibility on individuals' chances of gaining employment between the five and ten month stages of unemployment. In his study 55% of men said they would accept any sort of work, within limits (Daniel, 1990, p. 98)[21]. This figure is much higher, however, than those produced by Bottomley, McKay and Walkers' study (1997), and displayed at table 1. Blau (1992 p. 742) found that less than 50% of job offers made to unemployed seekers are accepted, based on self reports of job offers. Of those who found work between 33% and 38% had received more than two offers before they did so, and of those remaining unemployed between 20% and 23% had received at least one offer. Nothing was known about the quality of offers and as the sample was skewed towards low income searchers the offers may have been part-time, temporary or of poor quality. Thomas (1998, p. 647) found that 42% of respondents in his study reported looking for a particular sort of work; 53% any sort and 5% were searching for 'particular' and 'any' simultaneously. Despite fairly mixed findings, such data nonetheless raise the prospect that jobseekers are indeed not optimally flexible.

Thomas (1998) examined the effect of broad or selective search on unemployment spell and industry mobility. Greater stocks of industry specific human capital (which was measured through tenure and previous earnings) were predicted to, and did, increase selectivity and decrease industrial mobility (Thomas, 1998, p. p. 653-657). However, the hazard rates of each type of search were virtually the same and Thomas found that job waiting, which is implied in terms such as 'choosiness', does not explain the UK's unemployment experience. Fallick (1993) researched the effects of macroeconomic conditions within a jobseekers previous industry. Searchers from declining industries were found to look more broadly and decrease their reservation wages in respect of new industries than those from thriving industries, suggesting pragmatism.

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[21] Flexibility was negatively correlated with skill level in Daniel's findings and unfortunately the 'within limits' referred to remained undefined.

Table 1 Specificity of job sought by duration

Duration	Any job (row %)	Range of jobs (row %)	Particular job (row %)
Up to 2 weeks	38	29	33
6-9 months	42	30	28
1-2 years	34	35	32
2-3 years	39	35	27
3-4 years	49	27	21
4-5 years	46	23	30
Over 5 years	51	21	28

(Source: adapted from Bottomley, McKay and Walker, 1997, figure 6.5, p. 110)

Being flexible may carry a price, however. The effect of changing occupations on future prospects is a conscious consideration of the unemployed (McCormick, 1990; Payne et al, 1996, p. 46; cf. Korpi and Levin, 2001, p. 133), apparently with good cause. According to McCormick (1990, p. 300), employers, plagued with uncertainty about job applicants, will consider their current status when evaluating them as future employees. It appears that being unemployed may be preferable to accepting work at below a jobseeker's skill level, as this signals to employers that she or he has fewer skills than they actually possess. Individuals with skills are expected to be in skilled work or waiting to secure it. This is one of the factors McCormick considers deters skilled workers from taking interim jobs, and is another disincentive to flexibility. Similarly, evidence suggests that participation in low status training has a detrimental effect on the employment probabilities of young professionals (Bonnal, Fougere and Serandon, 1997, p. 701). This was due to the level of performance participation in such schemes signals to employers.

The OECD Jobs Study suggests that job growth (of any type) should be encouraged and that: 'Many new jobs are likely to be low-productivity, low wage jobs,' in the service sector (OECD, 1994. 2c). Ministers of the OECD's Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee (1997) agreed upon the necessity of encouraging jobseekers to accept low paid work, with the expectation that they could move from it, up the career ladder with the aid of training (OECD, 1997), as discussed in the mismatch section. Jobseekers, therefore, need to be flexible with respect to their reservation wages, in order to benefit from the increasing number of low paid jobs.

Reservations wages are generally found to be based on previous earnings (Bottomley et al 1997; Gallie and Vogler, 1994, p. 133; Daniel 1990) and needs (Bottomley et al 1997).

Unsurprisingly Daniel (1990) found that unemployed men who had enjoyed higher levels of remuneration in their past employment were more inclined to drop their wage requirements in order to secure employment that they considered intrinsically rewarding. Men who had worked in lower paid employment had not the financial scope to do so and sought re-employment primarily for its extrinsic rewards, at original levels of reservation wage. Other research in the UK has found that qualifications, debt, driving license, age and gender were all associated with the level at which reservation wages were set (Marsh, Callender, Finlayson, Ford, Green, and White, 1999, p. p. 82-83).

Reservation wages, however rigid, are often found to be reasonable. Only 12% of the unemployed job seekers who were actively seeking work and who said they were seeking a particular type of work, wanted jobs that paid more than the going 'rate' according to Gallie and Vogler (1993). Evidence from Belgium suggests that men to some extent 'safeguard their employment at the expense of underutilisation of human capital and lower earnings'. The average Belgian male had sacrificed 11.8% of his expected earnings in order to take a job (Nicaise, 2001, p. 315). In terms of flexibility Blau (1992) found that two thirds of his sample accepted work that paid at a level below their reservation wage.

In contrast, however, Marsh et al (1999, p. p. 82-83) found that, amongst their sample of people registered for between 26 and 65 weeks, the mean weekly wage expectation was substantially higher than the average wage reported for those who were in work by the time they were interviewed. Nicaise, (2001, p. 314) suggests, in contrast, that the way in which reservation wages of the unemployed are usually compared with wages in the population, makes them appear to be above average when in fact they are not.

Discussion

Search approaches can be seen as problematic in several ways. Firstly, the typical economic conception of human behaviour is questionable; secondly, even if pay and reservation wages are crucial components of job search, the position taken in relation to them is also questionable; thirdly, there are issues concerning the interpretation of jobseekers' responses to questions relating to flexibility and restrictions, which stem in part from the methodologies commonly used; and fourthly the term 'choosiness' is too vague to be of use in addressing jobseekers' concerns.

Assumptions about human motivation

Search approaches begin with assumptions about human nature which lead to the formulation of economic models that are contested. There is growing evidence that individuals do not always act in a financially self-interested way (Charness and Grosskopf, 2001, p. 302; Hayakawa, 2000). Even if non-pecuniary concerns are built into

models of job search, as suggested by McFadyen and Thomas, (1997, p. 1467), they can not sufficiently identify or accommodate relevant variables. As Gershunny and Hannan (1997, p. 5) point out, actors have to deal with competing objectives in terms of duty, morals or ideology that are, to an extent, contradictory.

Some more specific assumptions seem barely plausible. Wadsworth (1991, p. 29), for example, suggests that, 'older workers, both male and female, search less than their prime-wage counterparts', because, 'their expected return from search will be lower given their shorter time horizons'. There are several objections that can be raised to this conclusion. Firstly, older workers may (realistically) consider their chances of obtaining work are so slim, that they think of their unemployment in terms of a prelude to retirement and therefore search very little. Secondly, they may consider themselves to be physically incapable of the type of work they are used to doing – in construction, for example - and again see their unemployment as leading to retirement. Thirdly, others may feel fit and able and resent age discrimination on the part of employers which is what they feel prevents them obtaining work and reduces their effort. They may feel that they have proved themselves in a particular job or industry and not wish to change. Being connected in this way may reduce the range of methods they use in their search for work and lead to them being categorised, by some measurements of search effort, as investing less than younger people. Finally, older people may search less because – given their disadvantage in the labour market they find only poorly paid jobs are available to them and this alone, as economic theory suggests, may reduce their incentive to search.

Another objection stems from the assumption that jobseekers' have perfect knowledge of the range of wage offers they will attract (Rogers, 1998, p. 634). Rogers (1998, p. 656) also suggests that unemployment benefit recipients act in response to their expectations with regard to future benefits. She concludes that jobseekers' expectations appear to be reasonably well founded and that, whilst not displaying perfect knowledge of their future entitlements they tend more towards this than towards the opposite extreme. Similarly, others claim to have identified a so called 'entitlement effect' (Fredricksson and Holmlund, 2001, p. 377) in which it is suggested that individuals, particularly uninsured jobseekers will be inclined to increase their search effort if insurance based benefits are generous. They anticipate that they will be better-off in the future if they are entitled to insurance based benefits, and, to be so entitled, they have to have worked and paid sufficient contributions. Overall I suggest that these claims invest jobseekers with too strong an economic character and far greater knowledge than they actually possess.

Non-material aspects of pay

Even if financial considerations are paramount, pay may not be seen simply a source of material support. Issues such as a fair day's pay (see Akerlof and Yellen 1990, p. 255 for a formulation of the fair wage-effort hypothesis) or entitlement (e.g. Moore, 1991), for example, may influence application decisions as substantially as does the prospect of an improved financial position. For some people the source of their income matters, and in-work-benefits, for example, can not be viewed in the same light as wages because pay has a symbolic significance.

Earning the minimum or a low wage may reflect upon self-esteem. Low paid work may or may not lead to financial hardship but either way its acceptance can signify failure (Arneson, 1990). This is arguably more likely in the presence of a legal minimum wage. The level of the minimum wage is set according to social criteria, in that it is designed to prevent poverty, not as an acknowledgment of the productivity or capability of workers. As such it may be conceived of as a social concession to those who have difficulty, in a market economy, attracting pay sufficient to avoid poverty. Accepting pay at this level may, in certain circumstances, be seen as an acknowledgment that one is amongst the least able, in what is portrayed as a meritocratic society.

The impact of a symbolic conception of pay on application behaviour is not directly considered in search theory, although it is arguably highly relevant to application behaviour and is one of the central points of chapters four and five. Whether job seekers are prepared to sacrifice improvements in their material well-being which could stem from the acceptance of in work benefits, for example, because they consider symbolic aspects of low pay unacceptable needs investigation. Additionally, attempts to escape the perceived stigma of unemployment or the insistence of a spouse, parent or friend may induce a job seeker to reduce his or her reservation wage, with no consideration whatsoever of productivity or desert.

Search theories efficiently predict the effects of various restrictions on the chances of re-employment but are not designed to address the reasons for restrictions, beyond the usual economic assumptions. Whilst it is possible to locate all psychological and social activity within an economic frame work of costs and benefits, to do so explains little. In the sense that all activity is self interested and based on cost / benefit calculations, it can be classed as economic. Individuals attempt to maintain psychological health or social position, for example, by rejecting experiences which, on balance, are detrimental and by selecting those that are beneficial which clearly involves a cost / benefit calculation. However, since what is beneficial or in one's self interest is discovered in social life and psychological functioning, rather than in the economic sphere, it is to these approaches that we now turn. Alone search theories and economic approaches do not allow us to

understand application behaviour but, in conjunction with other approaches that allow job seekers to qualify their reservation wages and take account of a far wider range of variables, their value can be fully appreciated.

Methodological issues

The way in which terminology is used by respondents and interpreted by researchers and the fact that many models are formulated and tested on quantitative secondary data (Blau, 1992, p. 738) raises methodological concerns. I feel there are two particular problems with asking people about what sort of work they would consider and interpreting responses as restrictions on job type or occupation.

Firstly, if a vacancy is rejected because it does not meet minimum wage requirements this is not an indication of whether or not other aspects are acceptable, or even that pay was a primary concern. Jobseekers may appear to reject vacancies because they are low paid, but they may in fact also have a view to the acceptability of the tasks they typically associate as being involved in low paid work – such as cleaning or care work, for example. Studies frequently do not allow for qualified responses or any understanding of the way in which terms are interpreted by the respondent. In the light of this criticism, one of the primary intentions of this study is to explore attitudes to different jobs on the basis of their constituent parts.

Secondly, anecdotal evidence suggests that figures indicating that upwards of fifty percent of job seekers are willing to apply for or accept 'any sort of work' are vastly overstated. I believe inflated figures are again the result of methodological limitations. Whilst job seekers may state a willingness in response to questions[22], to undertake any sort of work, this may not be reflected in their job application behaviour. They may not actually apply, for one reason or another, for all the available work of which they are aware and for which they appear objectively suitable. This includes jobs that match their reservation wage requirements and is not necessarily because of a high value attached to leisure or an uncostly experience of unemployment. Blau (1992, p. 751) found that, even though over two thirds of his sample accepted work that paid at a level below their reservation wage, between 53% and 57% did not accept the first job offer they received.

Jobseekers, like everyone else have preconceived ideas. They operate with an abstract sense of acceptable work, so that they unconsciously select a range of limited

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[22] Noon and Blyton (1997) discuss the use of the lottery question in the Employment in Britain Survey (Gallie and White 1993) and point to the fact that although 68% of those surveyed said they would continue to work, there was nothing in the question or its analysis to indicate that they would have continued in work they could feasibly obtain or already possessed. The usefulness of the question in measuring committment to work is doubtful given that most people are not in a position to freely choose their jobs. This example is mentioned here because it demonstrates the importance of the wording of questions in terms of what answers are deemed to reveal.

possibilities, amongst which any would be acceptable. The concept of the 'reference group' (Sherif, 1948, cited in Turner, 1990, p. 285) is used to signify the social source of norms that subtly influence behaviour. Individuals identify with particular groups and make comparisons that guide their behaviour with reference to those groups specifically - not with all others. In a similar way the range of vacancies job seekers consider, even when they perceive they are considering all, may exclude some that are simply out of bounds. 'Any sort of work' can not necessarily, therefore, be interpreted literally.

Choosiness

Why jobseekers should have become more 'choosy' in the mid 1980s is unclear. Layard (1986) suggested that the duration for which unemployment benefits are payable and the laxness of the administration of the system, which allow choosiness are primary factors in explaining long term unemployment. However, it is difficult to see how weaknesses in the administration of the benefits system can make individuals more choosy – rather they may allow individuals to indulge their preferences more so than if the administration was tight.

One potential economic explanation for 'choosiness' or inflexibility with regard to vacancies may perhaps be couched in terms of investment returns - people may have become less flexible regarding the work they are prepared to undertake due to their increased investments in education and training, for example. In economic terms this is a straightforward proposition and one that is supported theoretically. However, as well as, or instead of, (and we may or may not know which, depending on the way questions were worded) seeking a return on their investments, inflexibility may result from expectations of a particular future to which training and education give rise. For a fuller understanding of inflexibility regarding suitable work the constraints of economic approaches must be reduced and other approaches admitted.

Summary

The search approaches considered above concentrate in the main on the actions of jobseekers. The exception to this is an acknowledgement in some quarters that employers discriminate against the applications from the long term unemployed. Whether this bias is based on long term unemployed jobseekers' already established duration of employment, or due to other characteristics shared by people who are long term unemployed is contested. The emphasis is on the adequacy and efficiency of jobseekers' search behaviour. Inadequate behaviour leads to continuing unemployment because it fails to produce sufficient job offers. In general, the actions taken are self-interested so that a lack of effort stems from a lack of incentive to invest; inefficiency, on the other, stems from lack of knowledge and can be reduced through education.

Another factor which helps to explain unemployment from this perspective is the level of flexibility demonstrated either when searching for jobs for which to apply or when deciding whether or not to accept offers. Inflexibility with regards to industry or occupation is generally considered to prolong unemployment, although some argue that job search outcomes are enhanced by concentrating on particular fields or occupations. Wage flexibility is another explanatory variable. Clearly, if jobseekers were prepared to work for no reward their chances of finding someone to take them on would be increased and on this basis reservation wages can be seen as barriers to employment.

As was seen throughout the text, challenges to these theories are to be found within the search perspective. They also emanate, as discussed, from perspectives with an entirely different ontological position and therefore a diverse view of human behaviour and motivation. In terms of this study the main criticism of search approaches is their failure adequately to address what are taken by individuals to be cost and benefits or what constitutes self interest. In the absence of this information it is arguably not possible to understand job search behaviour.

Social-psychological approaches

Social-psychology offers two approaches to labour market behaviour, which are broadly pertinent to this study and are discussed in turn. The first concerns work and includes: job satisfaction, attitudes to work and vocational choices; and the second unemployment and its psychological effects. In the third section the application of social psychological approaches to this study will be discussed.

Work

Job satisfaction

Life satisfaction is constructed from satisfaction with all aspects of life and job satisfaction[23], particularly if work is perceived as an important aspect of life, can heavily influence it. Job satisfaction is, according to Mortimer and Lorence (1989, p. 250) a 'positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's jobs or job.' This definition points to the fact that job satisfaction involves more than having an objectively good job, or not having a poor job[24] - subjective appraisal is crucial. Subjective appraisal varies

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[23]Job satisfaction is usually measured through self rated scales involving statements about how respondent feel about their jobs (see, for example, the Occupational Stress Indicator used by Forarty, Machin, Albion, Sutherland, Lalor and Revitt (1999)).

[24]McGovern et al. (2001) discuss the difficulties and possibilities relating to a distinction between good and bad jobs. Crow and Rees (1999, p. 6) refer to Runciman (1972) and James (1998) who suggest that analysis of winners and losers in social transformations should, 'pay attention to the states of mind or feeling, assessed with reference to degrees of "happiness" or "satisfaction"' and that 'this involves a shift in terms of the discussion, from things such as income, wealth...and

along with expectations, traits, work values, needs and interests. For satisfaction to be maximised a specific match is necessary between what an individual 'desires' (i.e. needs, goals, interests etc.) and the 'satisfiers' a job provides (Tinsley, 2002). Additionally, according to Tinsley (2002), satisfaction depends on a match between the abilities jobholders' offer and the demands of the job.

All approaches to job satisfaction broadly accept this position. The primary distinction between them can be seen in: the way they view actions, motivations and behaviour and sources of desires; how they consequently deal with very high levels of reported job satisfaction even in mundane work; the way results are analysed; and what they are seen to infer. Broadly, differences are reflective of whether trait, phenomenological or social cognitive approaches are adopted. Trait approaches are essentially concerned with individuals' psychological characteristics or personality. Phenomenological approaches consider the ways in which people experience the world, how they make sense of it and make their lives meaningful by interpreting events which produce 'reality' – objective reality is illusionary. Social cognitive approaches, on the other hand, are concerned with the way in which the thought (or cognitive) process helps individuals to make sense of their actions and interactions in the face of objective reality. Additionally, from a more sociological perspective, social structure is considered to impact on results. The theories discussed below fall loosely under these perspectives[25] and are discussed under the broad headings of Person-Environment (P-E) fit, Situational, Job Characteristics, and Social Information Processing models.

P-E fit models

Tinsley (2000, p. p147-148) cites Plato as the source of original concern regarding person-environment fit (P-E fit). P-E fit suggests that the best results in any situation stem from matching the characteristics of the individual with the characteristics of circumstances. In the case of work, if the characteristics of the jobholder match with the characteristics of the job, congruence, correspondence or fits are achieved. Dispositional and needs-satisfaction models follow this basic premise.

Dispositional approaches suggest that characteristics stem from inner states, dispositions, personality, traits and attitudes, which are relatively stable even in the face of changing environments (Arnold Cooper and Robertson, 1995; Staw, Bell and Clausen, 1986). Individuals bring these characteristics with them to their workplaces; the stability

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rights... to more subjective considerations'. However, Ravallion and Lokshin, (2001) identify some of the problems associated with trying to measure 'happiness' or 'life satisfaction' using subjective measures. These suggestions and critiques apply to attempts to identity what are 'good' and 'bad' jobs.

[25] Lease (1998) summarises the work on job satisfaction in her review of the literature (1993-1997)

of levels of job satisfaction is considered indicative of this (Staw et al, 1986, p. 59). Need-satisfaction models are another variation of the P-E fit approach which incorporate expectancy and need theories (Alderfer, 1977). Individuals may have differing needs, or similar needs that are felt with varying intensity; they may also expect their jobs to satisfy different needs. Jobs have characteristics, which may or may not meet these needs, again leading to different levels of satisfaction for a given post.

According to the need-satisfaction model, job satisfaction is dependent on the congruence between the values a worker brings to their job and the objective characteristics of that job (cf. Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977, p. 428). In the case of an extrinsically orientated worker, job satisfaction may result from being well paid; for an intrinsically orientated worker, challenges may be important, for example. Needs theories are suggestive of why certain outcomes will be valued. Growth needs, which include a psychological need for justice, honour, and self-actualisation, are at the top of the 'needs hierarchy' (Maslow, 1943, cited in Arnold, et al, 1995, p. 213-215). Over and above physiological needs, however, the source of needs becomes clouded. Some are socially created; others are psychological and the former are difficult to separate from expectations. Zierden (1980, p. 307) states the position as follows:

> 'an expression of satisfaction with a job may imply, therefore, a very complex qualifier, i.e. that the person is satisfied with the job given his expectations about the kind of jobs accorded to someone in his social station, and in view of the work alternatives which he perceives to be realistically open to him.'

This position takes account of structure as well as disposition. Likewise,

> 'Satisfaction implies a convergence between aspirations and achievement that reflects resignation as much as it does accomplishment.....dissatisfaction results from deprivation relative to one's expectations' (Ross, Mirowsky and Goldsteen, 1990, p. 1060).

Situational approaches

'Situational' approach considers why people report being satisfied in what are ostensibly mundane and routine jobs. Satisfaction with such work can be explained in dispositional terms, with workers who are satisfied in these circumstances not wanting or needing more from their work than extrinsic rewards. Low levels of education and the experience of this type of work itself can lead to extrinsic orientation (Blauner, 1964, cited in Gruenberg, 1980, p. 248). Dispositional explanations infer that those in mundane occupations are able to imagine as possible, more fulfilling work, but would find it less satisfying. Alternatively, Gruenberg (1980) suggests that individuals in mundane jobs, in fact, are faced with a choice between poor jobs and no jobs and choose the former.

Social structures limit people's possibilities thereby impacting on their expectations. However, they are neither unaware of other types of job, nor do they choose unfulfilling work. The reality of people occupying mundane positions is that they are the only ones accessible and individuals, therefore, eventually report coming to terms with them, in line with the claims of cognitive dissonance theories (CDT) (Aronson, 1980). CDT suggests that individuals rationalize experiences that are incongruent with their expectations, which would otherwise threaten psychological health (*ibid.,* 1980, p.141). They do this by changing their attitudes towards the result, rather than changing their behaviour in the future (Eichar, Norland, Brady and Fortinsky, 1991). Salancik and Pfeffer (1978, p.249) suggest that this is particularly the case if the individual attributes the cause of their circumstances as being beyond their control. Unemployed people who appear satisfied with their unemployment experiences may, for example, become so by emphasising the plentiful leisure time it provides, particularly if they consider there is little they can do to change their situations. Arguably, this should not be taken to mean, however, that all unemployed people who report being satisfied with their positions are necessarily deluding themselves.

Job Characteristics approaches

Job characteristics approaches (Hackman and Oldham, 1976) stress the importance of the immediate, objective nature of the job (Eichar, Norland, Brady and Fortinsky, 1991, p. 611), but interpretation is acknowledged to play a part. Hackman, (1969, cited in Glick, Jenkins and Gupta, 1986, p. 442) suggests that individuals redefine their jobs to meet their needs, goals and values, either cognitively or in practice by adjusting their job to spend more time on the aspects of it they enjoy. Leidner (1991, p. 54) identifies the fact that one way or another work and identity have to be reconciled:

> 'all workers look for ways to reconcile the work they do with an identity they can accept, either by interpreting the work positively or by discounting the importance of work as a basis of identity'.

Five characteristics have been identified in this approach as important in relation to job satisfaction: skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy and feedback. The presence of these characteristics gives rise to particular psychological states which, in turn, influence motivation, job satisfaction and performance (Hackman and Oldman, 1980, cited in Arnold et al, 1995, p. 395). These five characteristics have similarities with the nine factors suggested in Warr's vitamin model (1987) which include: opportunity for control (autonomy), skill use and interpersonal contact; variety; and environmental clarity (feedback). The presence of these characteristics in the work environment contributes to overall psychological well-being through their contribution to affective well-being, autonomy, aspiration, integrated functioning and competence (Warr, 1987).

Competence or self-efficacy is a recognised source of self-esteem (e.g. Mortimer and Lorence, 1979, p. 307-308) and contributes to a sense of a meaningful life. Competence can be demonstrated in any field but in western society the competence to be self-supporting through work is highly valued (Meade, 1997). The role of worker is contrasted with dependency. Challenges[26] faced at work provide the opportunity to demonstrate competence, increasing levels of task-specific self-esteem (Lopez, 1982, p. 336). Social self-esteem (Lopez, 1982, p. 336) is derived from the positive assessments and responses of others in relation to competence (Owens, Mortimer and Finch, 1996, p. 1377). Self directed or autonomous work is, according to Seeman (1983), non-alienating work. Given that psychological health depends, in part, on individual attributing meaning to their lives, they need to have a sense of power or control. The meaningfulness of an activity is enhanced through the amount of effort invested in it (Gove, 1994, p. 372). Work which does not always offer all these characteristics and is, therefore, considered objectively less satisfying than that which does. Negative aspects of work include powerlessness or alienation which refers to an individual's sense of a lack of control over events (Seeman, 1983, p. 173). Self estrangement,

> 'lies in the disjuncture between activity and effect – i.e., the individual's engagement in activities that are not rewarding in themselves – as Marx put it; alienated labour is "only a means for satisfying other needs"' (Seeman, 1983, p. 179).

Social information processing approaches

In social information processing approaches objective job characteristics are only marginal determinants of job perception and satisfaction. Social information processing (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978, p. 224) is a broadly social cognitive approach with phenomenological input. In contrast to job matching approaches, job tasks are seen as open to interpretation and inherently ambiguous and the context in which they exist influences interpretation. The approach emphasises the context of action, consequences of past choices, information about past behaviour and about what others think, as the major sources of work values, and particularly their expression, as well as how they impinge on satisfaction.

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[26] The importance of challenges on motivation and behaviour has been extensively researched but is contested (e.g. Lopez, 1982, p. 336; Klein, 1990, p. p. 646-647). In relation to work effort, expectancy theory, for example, suggests that individuals will experience challenges positively only if meeting them is considered feasible and the outcome of the task instrumentally rewarding and psychologically valuable. The context in which the individual is located and the social norms they perceive as operating in their environment also have an effect (Miller and Grush, 1988). Achievement theory, on the other hand, contests that the more difficult the challenge, the more motivation it is likely to generate because greater pride is derived from performing difficult as opposed to easy tasks.

In social information processing approaches individuals are seen as coming to terms with their present environment in order to rationalise their action in the absence of acceptable rewards and alternatives and give them meaning (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978, p. p. 231 & 244), in line with CDT.

Sources of work values

All jobs offer rewards to some extent. Rewards can be extrinsic and intrinsic, in terms of pay and/or security (extrinsic rewards), or interesting and challenging tasks (intrinsic rewards). Work values or orientations influence how these rewards are perceived by workers (Kalleberg and Loscocco, 1983, p. 79). Work values can be defined as 'the importance individuals give to a certain outcome obtained in the work context' (Sagie, Elizur and Koslowsky, 1996, p. 503). If workers value extrinsic rewards, and are therefore said to have an extrinsic orientation to work, they will judge their jobs on the basis of pay and security, for example. Watson (1997, p. 125), however, suggests that orientations to work are dynamic and plural. There may be no such thing as an orientation to work because, if a hypothetical job is valued on one dimension, such as pay, it does not mean that it is necessarily also valued for the security it provides, nor undervalued for the challenges it presents.

The process through which orientations are formed is the subject of much debate. For all but trait approaches, social interaction and structures are important. Orientations can be seen as a function of economic status (e.g. Grint, 1996, p. 27); age (e.g. Krau, 1989); learned from parents, peers and significant others (e.g. Krau, 1989); of levels of education and intellect (Blauner, 1964, cited in Gruenberg, 1980, p. 248); and, according to Keller, Bouchard, Avery and Segal (1992) and based on twin studies, genetic differences.

In all cases, the importance of job satisfaction *vis a vis* psychological well-being, depends, to a degree, on the centrality of work to the individual. Job satisfaction either stems from or leads to levels of job involvement – the causal direction is debated (Mortimer and Lorence, 1989, p. 250), but the two are positively correlated. The construct of job involvement refers to the centrality of the worker role generally, or a particular occupation, in an individual's self-concept. If the worker identifies strongly with their role, it will be an important aspect of the way they evaluate themselves. Bielby (1992, p. 284) suggests that an individual becomes committed to a role if the role provides a sense of identity or meaning. If work is not central to an individual's self-concept, they may report being more satisfied with life in a poor quality job, than in poor quality work where it is central.

How occupational decisions are made

Closely related to work values, which reflect the aspects of a job that the jobseeker considers are likely to provide them with job satisfaction, is the way in which the individual attempts to identify and secure what they are seeking. Various processes and methods have been put forward, some of which lend themselves to labour market decisions and are discussed here.

Decision making models

Standard decision making models have been assessed in relation to occupational choices. Lichtenberg, Shaffer and Arachtingi (1993) tested the Expected Utility (EU) and the Elimination by Aspects (EBA) models. The former assumes rational behaviour and suggests that optimal decision making processes involve a whole series of calculations in relation to all alternatives. This process has been criticised as being impossible for an individual to undertake (Lichtenberg et al, 1993, p. 238).

The EBA model, on the other hand, appears more manageable. Decision-makers view aspects (selected in order, on the basis of their importance) of alternative occupations, for example. All aspects that do not satisfy particular requirements lead to the rejection of the alternative, until only a small number of alternatives remain. If too many remain after one aspect has been considered another is introduced (*ibid.,* p. 240). Empirical evidence from Lichtenberg et al's study suggests the EBA model is commonly used, even though it is acknowledged to be less efficient in theory (*ibid.,* p. 247) than EU.

Specifically in the labour market context, 'self-to-prototype matching' (Moss and Frieze, 1993, p. 284) is another method deployed by jobseekers to identify jobs that would suit them. It suggests that prototypes, which are psychological pictures of a typical occupant of a post, are used to allow the jobseeker to compare the similarity of the typical occupant with their own self-concept. So if a particular prototype is seen as typically representing an occupation and this prototype / person is perceived as dissimilar from self-concept, the vacancy will not be considered suitable. This process involves more than consideration of tasks and skill, and the prototype may rest upon,

> 'features that may not be rationally related to the particular choice [of prototype] - features such as physical appearance, gender, and personality traits' (*ibid.,* p. 285).

In contrast, expectancy value theories suggest a more rational approach to vocational choices and application behaviour. Expectancy theories work on the basis that the performance of an act produces an outcome, which may or may not be valued and has an unspecified probability of occurring. Individuals' actions are prompted by their

assessment of the valence (i.e. psychological value of the outcome) multiplied by the probability of a particular outcome, in relation to the act (Alderfer, 1977, p. 659).

Fouad, (1994, p. 146) cites evidence that past performance exerts a powerful influence on what individuals believe they can achieve. If individuals think a particular outcome is likely and they value that outcome, they may be motivated to take the action they believe will lead to it. Expectations are formed from a realistic assessment of an environment. They contrast with aspirations that may be unrealistic and unattainable (Gati, 1993; Armstrong and Crombie, 2000). Expectations are grounded in perceived reality, whereas aspirations are arguably more akin to 'absolute hope', as defined by Halpin (2001). Compromise theory (Gottfredson, 1996) suggests that individuals adjust their aspirations to match or come near to matching their expectations. Gati, Shenhav and Givon (1993), however, found that the willingness to compromise is related to the importance of the aspect regarding which compromise was required. What is valued about working is compared to what is offered in a variety of jobs and suitable employment is identified on the basis of matches. Expectation includes perception of competition for posts and the likelihood of success and together these factors have been shown to predict job search effort (Feather and O'Brien, 1987; Ullah and Banks, 1985), and therefore success in finding work (Lynd-Stevenson, 1999). Other considerations include practical issues, such as travel or childcare; the reputation of the company and status considerations (e.g. Moss and Frieze, 1993). Judge and Bretz (1992) found that one of the factors that individuals took into account when making occupational decisions, was that the values of the occupation were congruent with their own.

Moss and Frieze found the expectancy models marginally superior in predicting job choices amongst the 86 MBA students. However, the average age of participants was 26 and they were highly educated: jobseekers, perhaps, do not possess sufficient information regarding the full range of jobs available to make or articulate decisions as predicted by expectancy value theory (cf. Schoon and Parsons, 2002, p. 263). The self to prototype model for selecting important aspects of occupations initially seems more compelling as an explanation of application behaviour amongst the long-term unemployed.

Hayakawa's (2000) 'bounded rationality' incorporates the way in which decisions are made with how aspects of a phenomenon become thought of as important. People are guided by the social and cultural norms of the society in which they are embedded. Individuals are seen as what Hayakawa (2000, p.1) calls homo sociologicus, rather than homo economicus where behaviour is the product of individual preferences. Briefly, Hayakawa goes on to note that the two are not diametrically opposed if the concept of bounded rationality is accepted (*ibid.*, 2000, p.5). Bounded rationality expresses the

notion that in the face of complex problems individuals will not behave entirely rationally because they are either unable to cope with all the knowledge required to make such a decision, or that they can not possess all the necessary knowledge. Hayakawa claims to bridge the gap between sociological, psychological and economic approaches by suggesting that bounded rationality may be supplemented by social and cultural norms to enhance the decision maker's decision making capacity. The norms used as heuristics in this way are those of the social groups to which an individual belongs.

> 'If a decision maker in a social setting makes use of this capital [the total life styles developed by the social groups to which he belongs] we need to know, on top of his usual budget constraint, his psychological motives, the social sanctions (pressures for conformity and sanctions against deviations) that are at work on his choices, and the cultural values shared by members of his society', (ibid., p.8)

Additionally, the decision maker is motivated to emulate the life styles of the social group to which he aspires or belongs in order to gain acceptance as part of that group (*ibid.*, p.11).

Despite the clear relevance and attractions of the theories discussed in the preceding section, most of which comes from the vast field of occupational or work psychology, they are not generally applied specifically to unemployed jobseekers as a means of understanding their application behaviour. Instead social-psychology's main contribution to knowledge of unemployment lies in explorations of how jobseekers feel about and cope with being unemployed.

Unemployment

Rather than emphasising vocational choices or decisions, about which so much has been written, social-psychological approaches to unemployment predominantly portray jobseekers as psychologically damaged by their unemployment experiences - as victims. In many accounts this is due to the absence of the benefits usually provided by employment (e.g. Jahoda, 1980; Warr, 1987). The numerous empirical studies undertaken however, provide evidence of a range of experiences, although most are negative to a degree.

Long-term unemployed jobseekers in particular, have been shown to suffer for example, from low self-esteem and lower than usual levels of mental health generally (Fagin and Little, 1984; Turner, 1995). Doctors in Fineman's study (1990) of professionals who worked with the unemployed reported that:

> 'Sheer boredom began to eat away at a sense of purpose and worth. The insomnia, backache, tiredness and loss of appetite took its toll.

> Emotionally there was a damping down: a life with no highs or lows, but everything uniformly grey' (ibid., p. 27).

Lewis and Sloggett (1998, p. 1283; cf. Makinen, 1999), using quantitative data from the Office of National Statistics and Census, conclude that there is a link between unemployment and suicide rates, independent of economic status, as measured through social class. Poor mental health can lead to fatalism and a lack of motivation prolonging unemployment spells through its impact on application behaviour. Jobseekers who experience unemployment in this way may give up trying to re-enter the labour market altogether in the face of negative feed back or a perception of lack of suitable vacancies (Ullah, 1987, p. p. 126-127). They experience the 'discouraged worker effect' mentioned previously.

Haworth and Evans (1987, p. 241), on the other hand, point to contradictory findings to show that unemployment can not be seen as a homogeneous problem and Fryer (1992a, p. 263) stresses that the impact of unemployment can never be taken for granted. In Shanfeli and van Yperen's study (1992) of unemployed graduates in Holland, for example, employment status was not found to have a detrimental effect on psychological health independently of 'personal vulnerabilities' (*ibid.*, p. 301). Shamir (1986, p. p. 69-70) found that levels of self-esteem amongst his sample of Israeli graduates, were not affected by employment status and that self-esteem did not affect job search activity, but that it did influence acceptable levels of pay and acceptable job content.

There are several potential sources for the differences in the accounts above. Some research acknowledges the effect of the environmental differences existing beyond their experimental frameworks. Shanfeli and van Yperen (1992), for example, conclude that their findings may well have been influenced by the way unemployment is regarded in the Netherlands. It is less stigmatising and attracts more generous benefit level than in other EU countries. Within the Dutch system between 40% - 50% of their sample were also undertaking unpaid work in their usual occupations. Turner (1995) includes socio-economic status, levels of education and labour market buoyancy as independent variables in his study of the effects of unemployment on mental and physical health, clearly associating the two.

The extent to which employment is valued will also influence results. Individuals who attach great value to working will be more distressed by not working than those for whom employment is only partially relevant to their self-concept (Ullah, 1987, p. 134; Turner, 1995, p. 214). Social factors can be important in understanding what is valued. Rantakeisu, Starrin and Hagquist (1999) consider shame in their Swedish study and found that 50% of the sample felt that they were regarded as lazy for not working, in spite

of the fact that Sweden, in comparison with the UK, had not then experienced any fundamental attack on rights to welfare (*ibid.*, p. 896).

The age and life cycle stage of respondents is another factor that may lead to differing conclusions. Much of the research is conducted with samples drawn from graduates or other young people and it is feasible that their responses will be different to those of older ex-workers (Mortimer and Lorence, 1979, p. 320; Gove, 1994).

Additionally, unemployment is a problem relative to employment, and previous labour market experience may mediate its consequences. A good deal has been written about the positive aspects of employment, in terms of material well-being and latent social and psychological benefits including, self-esteem, time structure and social interaction opportunities. In early studies, employment *per se* was seen as offering these benefits (Jahoda, 1981) and unemployment denying them. Subsequent studies have questioned this assumption on the basis that re-employment does not necessarily improve mental health to a level above that of unemployed subjects. The consequence is that not all work can be seen as offering latent benefits or improving levels of self-esteem and the self-concept (Wanberg, 1995, p. 51, Halvorsen, 1998; Fineman, 1987; Graetz, 1993). Equally, because unemployment experiences are judged in relation to prior employment experiences, not all unemployment is perceived as loss and positive re-employment experiences may be limited to individuals in particular sets of circumstances. Turner (1995, p. 215), for example, suggests that social class will have a bearing on satisfaction with re-employment because orientation to employment differs along class lines. Subsequent studies (e.g. Fryer, 1992a; Whelan, 1992) have re-focussed on the economic hardship that is caused by unemployment and questioned the claim that an absence of the latent benefits of work is the cause of the psychological ill health associated with it. Rantakeisu et al (1999) found that the level of serious psychological problems experienced by unemployed people varied with their financial circumstances. Those facing a greater degree of financial pressure were twice as likely to suffer these problems as those with less financial pressure.

The evidence is therefore mixed but received wisdom suggests that on balance the experience of unemployment is generally negative.

Evaluation of social-psychological approaches this study

Social-psychological approaches offer ways of understanding why jobseekers may not apply for all the vacancies of which they are aware, which they can physically access and which they match in human capital terms. The literature reviewed suggests that during unemployment psychological health can deteriorate. This is particularly likely if jobseekers valued their previous jobs, based their identities strongly in their work and if

the welfare, social and cultural systems in which they live are unsupportive. Low levels of applications to vacancies may result from the effects of unemployment on psychological health, either as a rational response to a seemingly impossible task, or as an inability to act because the effects of unemployment sap motivation.

Low levels of applications to vacancies from individuals with high levels of psychological health can not be understood in these terms. Long term unemployment is rarely explored from a vocational choice perspective, which seems to offer a more authentic understanding of the application behaviour of people who appear to have high levels of self esteem. Vocational choice approaches tend to stress that individuals seek congruence between aspects of work and their own subjective needs. If congruence is achieved, the literature on job satisfaction suggests that psychological health benefits. Since individuals are motivated to maximise their psychological health they are unlikely to apply for work that they anticipate will not be conducive to it. This potentially affects application behaviour by limiting the range of acceptable vacancies.

How and why some individuals maintain high levels of self-esteem and psychological health during unemployment is unclear. Claims regarding the stability of the self-concept and self-esteem suggest that exposures to incongruent exogenous factors (such as unemployment or particular negatively experienced jobs) have an impact (Demo, 1992) but the extent to which mature adults[27] are resilient to negative experiences is not agreed upon and evidence is lacking. Also explored was the distinction highlighted between expectations and aspirations. Expectations were reported to be evidence based whereas aspirations are less grounded. The latter can, in some circumstances, be brought into line with expectations and expectations can in turn be modified in the face of altering evidence. Some jobseekers, according to search approaches, clearly fail to modify their aspirations, expectations and behaviour to a level that allows them re-entry to the labour market. The resilience of self esteem and the dominance of expectation or aspirations are amongst the issues explored in the second study.

Summary of literature review and discussion of outstanding issues

When taken together the theories and literature reviewed offer a great deal of insight into the factors that contribute to continuing unemployment in a buoyant labour market. A brief summary and evaluation of the main arguments follow.

Both mismatches approaches suggest, firstly, that more (or different) training and education would reduce long term unemployment by making individuals more attractive to

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[27] Fouad, (1994 p. 128) in an annual review of the pre-entry literature commented on the frequency with which adolescents and young people constitute samples.

employers. In essence the mismatch literature discussed portrays the problem as one of jobseekers' inability to meet employers' demands. Secondly, it suggests that jobseekers, whilst initially having to accept less than satisfactory jobs, may enjoy progression and upward mobility through taking part in life long learning. This makes any job worth having as an initial step. Both from the point of view of the individual (although as the claim goes they may not realise it because they lack a work ethic and have become detached from the labour market) and from the point of view of society as a whole, low paid jobs are better than no jobs, particularly if people remain in them only briefly. Thirdly, mismatch approaches legitimise employers' demands with reference to global competition, coupled with a desire to maintain standards of living. Industry must be able to compete on grounds of quality to avoid competition on the basis of cost which would reduce standards of living.

Despite large amounts of evidence suggesting that the problems faced by employers in terms of skills shortages and gaps are over-stated, increasing human capital is one of the drivers of New Labour's education and training policy. In contrast, the problems faced by individuals who are under-employed or over-educated receive scant political attention. I argue in what follows that long term unemployment in the Bournemouth and Poole travel to work area stems as much from an unwillingness to accept underemployment as it does from a lack of skill on the part of jobseekers and that increased levels of human capital would worsen rather than resolve the situation in the absence of vacancies of good quality.

Search approaches suggest why jobseekers may fail to secure job offers through focussing on the efficiency of job search and search effort. They also suggest jobseekers may reject offers they receive. Inflexibility with respect to the industries and occupations and regarding wages was identified as a key factor. Economic approaches predict that jobseekers will hold out until they secure what they believe to be the best offer they are likely to receive, whilst taking account of the costs to them of waiting.

Since the approaches are put forward from an economic perspective financial incentives and disincentives are seen as 'carrots and sticks' and underlie explanations of motivation. Critiques of a purely economic approach to motivation generally were discussed, as was evidence which supports contesting views of its application to long term unemployment. The underlying premise on which economic accounts are based is arguably unproblematic: individuals do act in what they perceive to be their own self interest. Nonetheless, economic approaches fail to demonstrate empirically exactly how individuals decide what is in their self interest in labour market terms or, beyond financial factors, the content of such decisions. These are questions the second empirical study is

1intended to address, although they are answered to a degree by the social-psychological approaches to long term unemployment discussed.

In general, the social-psychological approaches considered suggest that self-interest is served, in labour market terms, in one of three ways. On one hand it is suggested that work which is congruent with how we see ourselves, and which confirms the positive characteristics we feel we have, leads to positive evaluation. Similarly, if work meets the needs our traits create it will be seen as satisfying. Others argue that jobs can be judged good or bad objectively and propose criteria that must be met in a psychologically healthy employment. Social-psychological approaches also suggest that after failing to secure desired work an individual's capacity to do so in the future reduces. In effect, long term unemployment causes continuing unemployment through the affect it has on motivation, effort and self-efficacy. There are clearly exceptions to this, however, with the subjects of some studies seeming impervious to the psychological distress experienced by others.

The outstanding issues which are not satisfactorily addressed in the literature reviewed, and the questions to which they lead, can be summarised as follows:

- Why, as some of the studies discussed suggested, are people with high levels of self-esteem more 'choosy' about the jobs for which they are prepared to apply?

The second study addresses these questions, as those reported generally draw short of concluding whether respondents are 'choosy' in order to preserve their self-esteem or whether high self-esteem provides them with a positive outlook that allows them to maintain an expectation of success. This distinction is a pertinent one that has the potential to impact on our understanding of long term unemployed jobseekers' application behaviour. The literature suggests that the self-concept is reasonably stable. In view of this I intend to use the study to investigate if and how the identity and esteem derived from successful employment experiences can be maintained after employment ceases and their effect on application behaviour. Arguably, providing unemployment is viewed by the jobseeker as a transitory state, psychological health may not be negatively affected, although flexibility will be. I want to investigate whether individuals actively seek to maintain previously earned positive self-concepts and whether this makes them unlikely to accept inferior work if the opportunity to maintain a positive self-concept by rejecting it exists. If it does, subjectively positive past labour market or educational experiences, upon which positive self-esteem is based, may be seen a factor that delays re-employment through discouraging applications for sub-standard vacancies. The job opportunities successful work histories present are, however, likely to be more numerous than would otherwise be the case, so at issue in terms of unemployment duration is the co-incidence between the increased expectations or aspirations and the increased opportunities that success brings.

- To what extent do mismatches between the demands of employers and the human capital or social characteristics of jobseekers account for long term unemployment in the geographical area of the study? Additionally, is this the most appropriate perspective to adopt or would a broader outlook that seeks to encompass any mismatch between the demands of jobseekers and what is offered by employers provide a more comprehensive picture?

The first empirical study will address these issues by comparing the demands and rewards of vacancies available in the Bournemouth and Poole travel to work area with the characteristics and demands of registered unemployed jobseekers in that area.

- What is the relative importance of practical barriers to work (such as cost / benefit calculations based on resources) and more affective social and / or psychological barriers?

Both studies address this question. In the first it is approached from a quantitative perspective, through an analysis of the numbers of vacancies that may be rejected by jobseekers on practical grounds, in contrast to those that may be rejected on affective grounds. In the second respondents are asked to weigh up the relevance of these factors in their continuing unemployment.

- What do jobseekers see as the source of any social psychological barriers they face and how do they account for their application behaviour? How useful are theories that provide an insight into job satisfaction in contributing to our understanding of long term unemployment?

The second piece of empirical research will address motivational issues. Through the use of semi-structured interviews respondents will be asked to evaluate their previous labour market experience and their unemployment experiences. They will be asked to describe how they see their futures and to discuss their main objections to any work for which they would not be prepared to apply.

Chapter 2 Methods

Introduction

The main aim of this chapter is to discuss the two distinct methodologies used in the empirical part of this study. However, it first addresses issues relating to my pre-existing experience of working with unemployed people.

The design and conduct of the empirical work and the analysis of data has been influenced by my biography and affiliation and work experiences. My exposure, predominantly to unemployed individuals rather than demand side of the labour market, has undoubtedly focussed my attention on the former and led me to investigate unemployment from their perspective. So, for example, when looking at matches between employers' demands and what job seekers have to offer I have not considered whether employers are justified in making their demands: if experience in particular tasks is demanded by an employer I have not sought to question whether or not experience would actually be necessary in order to perform the tasks involved. Demand for experience may, in fact, be used to increase the likelihood of it producing somebody with a suitable mentality or 'the good bloke' discussed previously, because experience is evidence that another employer looking for similar traits, found them in the applicant. My uncritical approach to this side of the equation is not meant to imply that I consider unemployment to be the responsibility of the individual job seekers or take employers' demands as legitimate. On the contrary, my time as an advisor has heightened the sense of injustice I feel for those who appear to have invested, as suggested, in education and training, whose expectations reflect their investment which are not met by the labour market. I have concentrated on the supply side in order to evaluate the notions that the creation of more jobs, regardless of type, will resolve the problem of long term unemployment and that increasing human capital necessarily improves an individual's prospects of employment *per se*.

I acknowledge that my initial impressions as to the most interesting issues concerning unemployment have been influenced by the fact that I have worked in relatively affluent geographical areas. I have identified on a personal level with many of the unemployed people I have advised and have deliberately designed this study to give them voice. Addictions, homelessness, illiteracy are clearly more fundamental barriers to work than those identified in what follows, but they are not the ones that give rise to the sorts of sentiments my customers have generally expressed, nor are they implicated in their unemployment.

Two methodologies are used because the questions addressed are ontologically dissimilar. We have seen that phenomena which are generally perceived as objective,

such as skills, for example, can in fact be viewed as socially constructed and lacking an objective reality. It is, nevertheless, possible to isolate and investigate these phenomenon using quantitative methods, once they have been so constructed and defined. Incidences of demands for a particular skill (as indicated through demand for qualifications) can be counted, as can those for driving licenses; the geographical accessibility of vacancies can be measured; and the pay attached to a vacancy can be taken into account in a similar way, without reference to interpretation or context.

Different methods need to be employed when one is attempting to explore the motivation behind actions. The practice of selecting variables and taking them out of context (to allow replication of findings and show cause and effect, for example), and of measuring phenomena (such as self esteem) with numeric scores, limits our understanding. Whilst data collected from semi-structured interviews are necessarily produced (as well as unavoidably analysed) 'out of context', respondents' superficial accounts of context are at least reasonably accessible. Additionally the quantitative methods deployed in the first investigation would be inappropriate in respect of understanding application behaviour because of the need to identify at the outset those variables that require investigation and to separate them from other influences. My experience as a Job Centre officer has led me to identify puzzles (Mason, 2000, p.6) which I recognise are conceptualised according to these experiences and must be open to revision in the light of the data my respondents provide (Bryman, 2000, p.267). The second piece of research, therefore, follows an iterative process in which initial questions can be seen merely as a starting point, with subsequent specific questions and the direction of conversation being guided by my interpretation of responses.

Study one: Human capital and practical constraints

The first study is principally designed to investigate the extent to which people in the Bournemouth and Poole area become long term unemployed because their characteristics do not match those demanded by employers, as suggested by the mismatch literature discussed. Equally, it asks whether jobseekers remain unemployed because they are inflexible about the work they are prepared to do, as suggested by the search literature. These questions are to some extent two sides of the same coin, in that the latter infers that vacancies do not match jobseekers' requirements and that a mismatch exists between supply (vacancies) and demand (labour). This part of the chapter is concerned with the methods used in collecting and analysing the data designed to reveal the extent of mismatches between the characteristics of jobseekers and vacancies, and the impact of any mismatches on the number of vacancies for which a jobseeker could apply. It is organised along the following lines. Firstly I explain why I felt Bournemouth and Poole was a suitable location for the study; why I chose to

concentrate on Jobcentre vacancies; and why I selected registered jobseekers in order to address my research question. I then explain how the data were actually collected and analysed.

Location

Opportunities for decision making by jobseekers exist only if objectively suitable vacancies are available to them. In some areas lack of demand for labour altogether no doubt removes the opportunity for jobseekers to consider whether or not to make an application, and in these locations the concept of an application 'decision' is irrelevant. In order to be able to study the reasons why jobseekers may reject vacancies, they must exist in the first place. Bournemouth and Poole Employment Service District in Dorset was chosen as an area in which to locate the study, partly for this reason.

The South West Region had the lowest claimant unemployment rate in Great Britain, with the exception of the South East, standing at 2.2% (seasonally adjusted) at the beginning of 2001 (NOMIS). Dorset (excluding Bournemouth and Poole Unitary Authorities (UAs)) had a rate of 1.7%, Bournemouth UA of 3.6% and Poole UA, 1.7%, at that time. Of these 20.6% were long-term unemployed (6 months plus) in Dorset, 33.7% in Bournemouth and 24.1% in Poole. According to Green and Owen's (2002) typology of Learning and Skills Council areas, Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset fall into a category characterised by,

> 'greater than average values on vacancy measures and lower than average values on unemployment / non-employment measures'.

Dorset, of which Bournemouth and Poole Employment Service District forms part, is an affluent county overall. The Local Authorities that most closely approximate Bournemouth and Poole District are East Dorset, Christchurch, together with Bournemouth and Poole UAs. They rank at 317, 203, 84 and 229 (out of 354, with 1 being the most deprived) respectively, on the index of multiple deprivation, and 314, 341, 82 and 167 on the employment variable (again out of 354, with 1 being the most deprived).

These figures show and conceal considerable variation. The wards of Boscombe West and Wallisdown (both in Bournemouth UA area), for example, are at 415 and 441 (of 8414 wards) on the index of multiple deprivation and 241 and 520 respectively, on the employment measure (NES, 2000). For the purpose of this study, however, these variations are not particularly relevant. Data relating to average work travel patterns in the South West, suggest that negative labour market conditions pertaining to a ward do not necessarily act as a barrier to employment, given the close proximity of most of the wards in the District. Additionally ranks, which are derived from unemployment rates, obviously reflect lack of employment amongst people living in the ward, but not necessarily a lack of vacancies.

Within the broad location chosen, four Jobcentres were selected: Ringwood, Christchurch, Winton and Boscombe, from which to draw a sample of jobseekers. The difference between the catchment areas of each reflects the diversity of the District. Data relating to vacancies were collected from all Jobcentres in the Employment Service district, given expected travelling patterns.

There are clearly problems associated with attempting to provide a picture of an Employment Service District along a variety of dimensions. The boundaries for which data are available on different variables are not congruent and in many cases data are unreliable or confidential due to small numbers at a local level. However, the limited data available, together with local knowledge suggest an area that is able to support the aims of the study.

Sample selection - vacancies

Jobcentres, local press and agencies are three of the most common formal methods used by employers advertising vacancies that are intended to attract applicants from outside the firm. Jobcentre[28] vacancies were chosen because of their standardised nature; access; coverage and general skill levels. There are, nevertheless, a number of problems associated with using these data, which are discussed in due course.

Standardisation

Records of Jobcentre vacancies are generally of a common standard, which is more comprehensive than for most of those advertised through the local press. Certain data were necessary to allow the first research question to be addressed and vacancies advertised in the press frequently do not provide them - details of pay and conditions are often neglected, as are those of hours and days of work.

Access

Access to details of agency vacancies is problematic due to commercial considerations and agencies tend, in any case, to concentrate either on vacancies of a temporary nature or those that make high demands in terms of skill or qualifications. Some agency vacancies are, nevertheless, advertised through Jobcentres and have to conform to the standards set by the ES in terms of the details provided. These are included in the sample.

Coverage

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[28] Access to Jobcentre vacancies and registered unemployed jobseekers was provided by the Employment Service (ES). As a member of staff on a job break I am bound by the Official Secrets Act and as such the ES did not consider a problem with confidentiality existed. Being an insider researcher, presented few practical problems for the first study, although my experiences provided me with perhaps a different standpoint to others with a different background.

Jobcentres are reputed to attract about 44% of all vacancies (Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001). Over the ten years to January 2001, the number of vacancies handled by Jobcentres in Great Britain has grown by 20%. In the South West the number has increased by 41% over the same period to 21,700 vacancies notified in the month of January 2001 (Labour Market Review, Spring 2001).

Typical vacancies

Despite increases in numbers of vacancies handled, Jobcentres are still far more successful at attracting unskilled and low paid than more demanding jobs. They form an appropriate sample, nevertheless, because they are amongst the least demanding of vacancies. They provide opportunities for a wide range of people to identify work they are able to do, thus giving them the potential to engage in 'application behaviour'. In this situation there is real scope for actual application decisions to be explored in the second study. Additionally, whether the long term unemployed find them attractive or not these are the types of vacancies that are likely to be the easiest for them to secure, particularly with the assistance of Job Centre staff.

Timing

Jobcentres in the area are used for a large number of temporary and casual vacancies in preparation for the tourist and Christmas seasons. The data were collected in early October 2002 in an attempt to avoid both periods and to ensure that numbers and types of vacancies are about the average for a year.

Potential problems

Inconsistencies

When employers place vacancies they generally have decided upon a job title that represents the tasks involved in undertaking the work on offer. There may be inconsistencies in the way employers make this sort of decision and in the Standard Occupational Classification codes allocated to vacancies by Employment Service staff. An alternative approach that would have removed this problem may have been to ask employers directly about the vacancies they advertise. However, in view of the aims of the study the benefits of doing so would have been limited. I am interested in the characteristics vacancies tell jobseekers they need in order to make an application and in what vacancies offer jobseekers, as it is on this basis that the latter make decisions as to whether or not to apply. The actual intentions of recruiters or greater details about vacancies than would have been accessible to jobseekers are therefore irrelevant. Additionally, mismatch findings needed to be generalisable, at least to the whole locality and over time, since they are to be used to provide the relevant labour market context for the second phase of the study. Direct contact with employers would have necessitated a

reduction in sample size that would have prevented this. On balance, therefore, I felt the approach taken to be the most promising.

Classification systems

Officers have to make vacancies conform to the functional limitations of the database on which they are stored (known as LMS), as well as having to allocate the appropriate standard occupational classification to them from the job description or title provided by the employer. Even if consistently allocated, standard occupational classification codes are fairly blunt instruments, despite their revision in 2000. Not all shop assistants vacancies, for example, are equally attractive, everything else being equal, to all jobseekers looking for this type of work. Depending on many factors, an individual may find the idea of working as a shop assistant in a high class department store more or less attractive than working in a low cost supermarket. The gendered nature of different sorts of shop work means that for some a shop assistants' job in a DIY store may appeal, whilst a similar job in a shoe shop is considered unacceptable. Understanding this type of preference as part of the motivation for different application behaviours is important but coding and classification limitations make it impossible to pick up these subtle differences. Preference of this sort can only be discovered through interaction with jobseekers because it requires an understanding of their subjective deconstruction of occupations. The second phase of the study takes up and attempts to clarify this issue.

Sample selection – Jobseekers

A random sample of long-term unemployed (12 months plus), white males, aged between 25 and 60[29], registered unemployed in the Bournemouth and Poole District's Jobcentres was selected for the reasons detailed below.

Gender

Only males were included for practical, as well as theoretical reasons. The number of females that met the selection criteria was too small to be of use to this first phase of the study. Women could have been included in the qualitative phase, but were not because the intention was that the findings derived from the first phase should be used as a context for the second.

Had it been practically possible to include women, however, there would have been grounds not to do so. Women's attitudes, beliefs and experiences of the labour market are qualitatively different from those of men (Hakim, 2000, p. 254), not only due to different circumstances but to different effects of similar circumstances (Pugliesi, 1995). Many women arguably find it possible to develop self-esteem and identity, for example,

[29] For details of age duration and other characteristic please see appendix 1.

outside the labour market, whilst for men the labour market is often central. As labour market participation becomes the norm for women as family formations change, and the current cohort moves to retirement, the situation may, of course, alter.

More importantly, the circumstances of the majority of registered unemployed women are vastly different from those of unemployed men and their experiences of unemployment are therefore dissimilar (Bielby, 1992). A large proportion of long-term unemployed women reach this stage via Income Support, having spent time looking after their children alone. Once children reach sixteen, parents, either male or female, are required to be available for full-time work and register as 'jobseekers' if they wish to continue to receive benefits. There are many more women in this position than men.

There are also some women who have never been in paid work, or have not been for many years, irrespective of child-care, having spent their time as housewives. They have to register as jobseekers if they require financial support upon divorce or separation. These women are likely to be older or from different conjugal backgrounds where either cultural norms have prevented them from working, or there has been no financial necessity for them to do so. In each of these circumstances women have often not worked for many years more than the date from which their claim to Jobseekers Allowance indicates. The effect of prior labour market participation, which is one of the factors that I suggest influences application behaviour, on women in these circumstances is likely to be insignificant after many years of alternative activity.

Age

New Labour has made a priority of reducing youth (18-24) unemployment (Towards Full Employment, 2001). Concern about the longer term effects of youth unemployment were central to the creation of New Deal for Young People (NDYP). The NDYP has made available four options that are intended to assist young people to find employment. As a result very few remain registered unemployed for more than one year. This is not necessarily because they have been successful in achieving employment but also because they are engaged in other activities that remove them from the unemployment register. New Deals have also been introduced for older jobseekers, but they are more limited in their options and coverage. They take effect after 18 months of unemployment, instead of the at the six month stage, as is the case for young people and many older jobseekers remain on the register after 12 months registered unemployment.

In addition to these constraints on the inclusion of jobseekers aged under 25, similar factors as mentioned in relation to women come to the fore in young people. Many will have had little experience of the labour market. What experiences they have had may be different to those of older people. It is recognised, for example, that young people frequently engage in many different jobs upon leaving school, prior to settling for a 'usual'

occupation (Meadows, 2001a). As a result their occupational identities may be assumed to be weaker than those of more established labour market participants and their reasons for rejecting vacancies different.

Duration[30]

Decisions in relation to duration were the most difficult to make. In the first part of the study only jobseekers unemployed for over 12 months were included. This is because it was felt conclusions could be more strongly drawn if they related to particularly disadvantaged jobseekers who, by virtue of their long term unemployment may be expected to lack what employers' require to a greater degree than those of shorter durations - if a lack of human capital did little to explain their unemployment, it is unlikely to explain that of people with shorter durations. Placing this criterion on jobseeker selection also reduced the population size to more manageable levels and meant that, rather than investing resources achieving suitable samples, the whole population of jobseekers could be included.

Ethnicity

In the Bournemouth and Poole area, less than 2% of the total population are from ethnic minority backgrounds. The majority of these fail to meet the other criteria for inclusion and people from ethnic minority backgrounds were therefore excluded from the study.

Registered unemployed

The decision to concentrate solely on registered unemployed jobseekers also needs justification. I felt that if their behaviour involved the rejection of vacancies, one could be sure that individuals with a greater degree of choice were also likely to do so. If they, despite the constraints of the benefit system, the social stigma associated with claiming benefits, financial hardship and without the social and psychological benefits of employment, demonstrate application behaviours that reduce their prospects of employment, it is likely that such behaviours may also influence jobseekers who are not registered. They, in a sense, provide a negative case which I hope legitimises the extension of findings beyond the registered unemployed.

Importantly too, from a practical point of view, registered jobseekers are identifiable. In contrast, there are no obvious sources through which to identify non-registered jobseekers. There is also no reason to assume that non-registered jobseekers would be aware of Jobcentre vacancies, whereas registered jobseekers should be, given the emphasis placed on access ability under the Job Seekers' Allowance system.

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[30] Duration is discussed more fully in chapter five since it is an ambiguous term that is used inconsistently and yet, from many perspectives, has a substantial bearing on application behaviour.

Source of data about jobseekers

Jobseekers' data were collected from forms JSAg (Jobseekers' Agreement) and ES2[31]. When a jobseeker registers for Job Seekers' Allowance, they take part in an interview with an Employment Service advisor and a Jobseekers Agreement is constructed, based on information previously recorded by the jobseeker on form ES2. There are no guarantees that all the necessary information is accurate or recorded in either document, but they are nonetheless the official records used by Jobcentres. The JSAg details the type of work a jobseeker is hoping to obtain by Standard Occupational Classification (SOC)[32]. It also contains any restrictions the jobseeker wishes to place on the pay, location and hours of work they would accept. Both type of employment and restrictions have to be accepted by a Job Centre advisor and have to conform to various regulations, which aim to stop jobseekers placing unnecessary restriction that will negatively affect their chances of finding work. If restrictions are not accepted, the claim is referred to Decision Making and Appeals Officers and payment can be delayed or refused. Since this is usually not in the interest of the jobseeker or the advisor, what is recorded on the JSAg is often a compromise and may not accurately reflect the intentions or wishes of the jobseeker. The unequal power relationship between jobseeker and officials throughout their interactions makes the accuracy of all forms of documentation open to question. It also made it very important to build trust between myself and respondents in the second piece of research.

Means of analysing data

A spreadsheet consisting of 199 jobseeker records was created using SPSS. The data included in jobseekers' record were as follows: age; home location; duration of unemployment; health problems; details of the three occupations they were recorded as seeking and length of experience they had, if any, in each of these; skills and experience in addition to those directly related to the 3 sought occupations; driving licenses; transport availability; access to a phone; travel-to-work area; days on which jobseekers stated they were available for work and the earliest times at which they were prepared to start work and the latest times they were prepared to finish; whether full-time or part-time work was the only sort acceptable or whether the jobseeker was prepared to accept either; and academic and vocational qualifications. Reservation wages were also included where possible but details were available only for about half the sample of jobseekers.

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[31]ES2s was referred to when data was missing from JSAgs due to administrative omission.

[32]There is a significant constraint in the data in that only three of the jobseeker's most favoured occupations could be included and some of the evidence presented in chapter one suggests that jobseekers may be far more flexible than this. If this is the case forthcoming figures underestimate the number of vacancies available to jobseekers, strengthening the argument that accessible vacancies exist for which long term unemployed jobseekers decide not to apply.

A similar spreadsheet was created for the 355 vacancies carried by the Jobcentre at the time of the study. Details included in this case were: occupational classification code; whether the vacancy was full-time, part-time or either; hours of work including start and finish times; minimum pay levels; whether the nature of the work demanded particular levels of health; age restrictions; requirement for driving licenses, transport, phone, qualifications or particular experience and the length of experience required; whether it was an agency vacancy and if it was of a temporary, casual, short or fixed nature; and its location.

One hundred randomly selected jobseekers' records (from the sample of 199) were then compared with all 355 vacancies in the vacancy sample, across 13 variables. These were combined in various ways to create additional variables (see table 4 in chapter three for a full list - more details and examples of the process are also included in appendix 3). Whilst assortments of rationale exist for the selection of variables, most represent factors that are commonly cited as barriers to employment. The findings presented in later chapters are the result of using SPSS syntax commands to select vacancies that meet jobseekers' search criteria and for which the jobseeker meets vacancy criteria.

Clearly the concept of a mismatch of human capital has been expanded here to encompass some of the practical demands made by jobseekers. The aim is to quantify the number of vacancies for which jobseekers in the area of the study would have the opportunity to apply, taking account both of their practical requirements and what they offer, together with the demands of employers - resulting in what I have called 'accessible' vacancies. The next section describes the approach adopted to affective concerns.

Study two: Jobseekers' accounts of their application behaviour

In this piece of work I have sought to explore some of the issues and barriers identified by long term unemployed people themselves. In a buoyant labour market, with vacancies for unskilled positions, the decisions and calculations of the jobseeker determine whether or not they have even the slightest prospect of securing work. For a jobseeker to find a job they must at the very least apply for one. Their perspectives are therefore of fundamental importance.

Studies of unemployment, its causes and the experiences of unemployed people, appear constrained to asking particular types of questions. To questions such as, 'do you want a job?' (see, for example, Noon and Blyton (1997) for a discussion) it is understandable that most people respond in the affirmative. If, however, the wording was changed to 'do you want a job as a toilet cleaner?' as my data will show, responses are different. The importance of the way in which questions are phrased is, perhaps, clear, but the caution

that should consequently accompany assessments or actions based on findings that result from this type of question appears lacking.

'Welfare to Work: Tackling the Barriers to the Employment of Older People', (National Audit Office, 2004, p.p. 57-61) shows that, not only is the wording of questions vital, but so is the audience to which they are directed. The report provides a clear example of the difference between the perception of jobseekers and employment professionals and demonstrates the need to hear jobseekers' voices. It is their perception that needs to be appreciated and understood since it is this which influences their application behaviour, and, although their perception may be influenced by the guidance of professionals, this report shows that this is not always the case. Jobseekers were asked to identify their main barriers to work and these were contrasted with the views of front line service providers. Jobseekers' responses included the fact that their skills were 'not relevant' or that they were 'over qualified'; the professionals, on the other hand, concluded that jobseekers skills were 'poor and out of date'. Similarly, whilst in all three areas jobseekers responded that one of the reasons they were unable to find work was that they were 'selective in what they are willing to do', none of the employment professionals recognised this position[33]. They instead concluded that jobseekers 'lacked confidence' (which suggests an entirely different, potentially opposing, frame of mind) or were 'comfortable on benefits'. Professionals may be in a better position to identify factors that make individuals unattractive to employers, but resolving these issues without addressing those that make employment unattractive to individuals deals only with half the problem.

I have also used methods that allowed the exploitation of theories which appear rarely to have been applied to or tested amongst the long term unemployed, perhaps partly to avoid negative stereotyping. Jobseekers can be cast as victims or villains and, in order to avoid the latter, unemployment must be understood to be involuntary or unavoidable for some reason beyond the jobseekers control. Additionally, since involuntary unemployment goes hand in hand with negative economic conditions it is a more pressing political and social issue - hence the concentration of research in this area. Where concentration focuses on involuntary unemployment, regardless of the rationale, it is reasonable to demote theories of job satisfaction or occupational choice and to concentrate on the valid but partial negative effects of unemployment on self esteem and identity instead. Where voluntary unemployment exists, as I expect to show that it does

[33] I am assuming here, because the report did not clarify, that respondents were selective in favour of more highly paid or objectively attractive jobs and sought to avoid 'poor work'. I should also point out that employers' attitudes (real or perceived) were the most important barrier identified by both jobseekers and professional as and that there is, therefore, some common ground.

in the Bournemouth and Poole district, these theories are more relevant. The sort of data and the way in which it has been collected allow for the application of these theories.

Sample selection

In order to understand how jobseekers interpret and explain any reluctance they may have to applying for accessible vacancies and their application behaviour generally, different material was required. As interest lies in jobseekers' own accounts of their decisions, in context, I felt interviews were likely to produce the most useful information in the most effective and resource efficient way. The 'snap shot' nature of the data produced by this means is acknowledged and discussed in more detail later, as is the fact that they are not produced or observed in context; rather context is reported by the respondents.

The employability approaches discussed in chapter one propose that a lack of applications for vacancies may be attributed to limited access ability, or weak labour market attachment. The application behaviour of weakly attached individuals is not central here - the term 'application behaviour', as used in this study, may not be relevant to them. I sought participants who want to work and who face the sorts of problems that stem, in my view, from the workings of the labour market, rather than from sources beyond it, such as substance misuse or homelessness. This is not to deny the impact of external sources on the perception and behaviour of jobseekers, but to concentrate on those whose chief problem is joblessness, rather than any other of the issues with which it may be associated. My intention was to focus on people who, at least at the start of their current claims, would not have been particularly disadvantaged in terms of re-entering the labour market.

Initially invitations were issued, via advisors at the Jobcentre, to male jobseekers who had been unemployed for more than six months and who conformed to the above criteria. Reply slips were attached to the bottom of a letter introducing the study, explaining the voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality aspects. Jobseekers were asked to provide their names and phone numbers or addresses if they agreed to being contacted to discuss the study in more detail. Reply envelopes were also issued to allow the jobseeker to respond without sharing their responses with Jobcentre staff. Once a positive response was received, I contacted potential participants and discussed the purpose of the study with them. Approximately half the jobseekers issued with the introductory letter responded positively. About three-quarters of the people who initially responded positively agreed to take part in tape recorded interviews of between 60 and 90 minutes in length. I have no knowledge of any response bias.

This method of achieving a sample proved unsatisfactory, however, generating responses that did not meet the selection criteria and in a way that made me doubt that

the ethical position I wanted to maintain was being adhered to. Firstly, a woman was selected when the sample was to be entirely of men and secondly, an interviewee arrived who had clearly agreed to be contacted because he felt he had been instructed to. In these instances I apologised to the individuals and explained that they had been incorrectly selected. The method also took a long time to produce leads.

I approached the Programme Centres and Job Clubs in the area to ask if they would distribute the letters but, having discussed my aims with various programme leaders, decided the better approach was to ask attendees at the centre if they would mind my talking to them about the study and then seeing if they would take part. I approached those that the leaders suggested had some work history and none of the problems mentioned above. I would estimate that about three quarters of those approached agreed to take part and to be recorded. In most cases I organised an appointment for the following week in order to give them time to reconsider the proposition and the opportunity to cancel if they so wished. Three did not turn up at the agreed time and on two occasions individuals asked if they could talk to me immediately following our initial introduction to which I agreed.

I had no way of measuring response bias. Those who took part could have been amongst the least satisfied with their situations and valued the opportunity to speak candidly. Equally, they may have considered talking to me a diversion in what they perceived to be a boring and negative programme which they had been instructed to attend.

I set out with the aim of interviewing about forty men. I transcribed and made myself familiar with the data as the interviews progressed and had reached 20 interviews when repetitions became common. Between them interviewees raised all the issues I had expected and more. I conducted another four interviews, but discussions raised no new topics, only variations on familiar themes. I therefore stopped short of the target number of interviews and invested my resources in thoroughly analysing the data that I had. Details of respondents are to be found in appendix 2.

From my point of view talking even to a small number of jobseekers in this capacity was so much more rewarding and enlightening than speaking to them as clients had been during my time working as an advisor. It also revealed vastly different accounts of their positions. I was surprised by some of the information that was shared with me and feel confident that most respondents spoke candidly, although there were a couple of instances about which I have reservations which are discussed later. Several commented afterwards how pleasant they had found the opportunity to discuss their problems with an outsider who nevertheless understood their predicaments but who had 'no axe to grind' about what they said.

Interview schedule

I started the interview process with a very loosely structured schedule. Data from a couple of pilot interviews supported my initial sense that work histories and unemployment experience both impact on future expectations and flexibility. I restructured the interview schedule creating three sections each focussing on one of these aspects. Biographical data was also collected and details of the contexts of respondents' lives which included reference to family, friends and relationships, for example. The final interview schedule is at figure 4 below. The structure of the schedule was followed reasonably closely although many responses warranted further questions, which were not planned at the outset. Respondents were asked to comment on the past,

Figure 4 Interview schedule

Past

Main question: Respondents were asked to talk about the work they had undertaken in the past, in terms of what jobs they had done and for approximately how long?
Sub questions: What sorts of rewards did their past work provide them with? What had they enjoyed / disliked about their past work? Why had they moved from one job to another? How did they become unemployed?

Present

Main question: How did they feel about being unemployed and how did unemployment impact on their lives?
Sub questions: Did their families and friends make a difference to how they felt? How did they feel their job search was progressing?

Future

Main question: What sort of jobs were they looking for?
Sub questions: What aspects of jobs or occupations make them attractive or unattractive? Were there any jobs they would not consider, what were they and why were they unacceptable? How did they feel about shop, care or driving work specifically?[34] How did they anticipate their circumstances would change in the near future?

[34] Shop and driving work were used as heuristics. I expected, based on my Job Centre experience, that some jobseekers would initially suggest that they just wanted 'a job', or 'anything' as opposed to being unemployed, but that this would not be reflected in their application behaviour. To help clarify the accuracy of such statements these examples were included. They were used because both, but particularly shop vacancies, are difficult to fill in the Jobcentres in the area, indicating that they are generally considered relatively unattractive. One of the sources of resistance to shop work may be its feminised character. Driving work was included as an equivalent type of occupation, with a masculine character, to indicate whether gender was an issue for respondents.

present and future in order to explore the sense in which prior labour market experience impacts on future expectations, but may be influenced by unemployment experiences. Throughout the interviews I did not question respondents regarding the accuracy of their claims or comments, only about the frankness with which they expressed them. For example, if a respondent said they had enjoyed a high salary, I did not attempt to establish whether, in relation to average pay, the salary was in fact high. There are clearly limitations as well as benefits with this sort of approach. Jobseekers' subjective interpretations do not require justification. I do, however, feel there is a need to consider their claims and accounts in the light of a more objective assessment in order to contest some of the negative attitudes long term unemployed face. This was one of my intentions in under-taking the research and, I feel, one of the roles of social science. To do so it is essential to address issues within the paradigm in which those criticisms arise. This requires reference to a social reality, at least in the sense of commonly held views and values. As well as giving my respondents voice therefore I will seek to explain their actions in ways they themselves may not have chosen and with which they would not necessarily identify.

Chapter 3 Results and analysis - study one

This chapter presents the main findings of the first study which are intended to be illustrative of the extent to which mismatches reduce the number of vacancies for which jobseekers in the sample can apply. The first section discusses the characteristics employers require in applicants and the possession of these characteristics amongst the jobseekers in the sample; the second, vacancies that do not make any demands of jobseekers; and the third concentrates on the demands jobseekers make in terms of what constitutes acceptable vacancies. By the end of the chapter we should have an idea of the number of vacancies members of the sample could have applied for in the period of the study, had they decided to do so.

Employers' demands and jobseekers' assets

Qualifications and experience

In general vacancies make demands that jobseekers can meet, or otherwise, depending on their experience and qualifications. Only 10% of Job Centre vacancies in the sample demand qualifications, however, in line with the findings of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, (2001). Very few employers who advertised vacancies through Jobcentres sought qualifications because employers with vacancies for highly skilled or qualified staff rarely use Jobcentres. When the requirement for academic qualifications on vacancies and the availability of them amongst jobseekers is analysed, their minimal impact on the number of vacancies available to jobseekers can be seen. Those who did not possess qualifications (i.e. 57% of the sample) were affected by the mismatch only to the extent that potentially suitable vacancies were reduced by 3%. For the remainder who had qualifications, 99% of vacancies were accessible.

Vocational qualifications were required on 6% of vacancies and were found to be in shorter supply amongst jobseekers than academic qualifications. In all, 80% of jobseekers did not satisfy the requirements of any vacancy that demanded a vocational qualification. They were thus restricted to applying for the 94% of vacancies without demands of this type. Some jobseekers had vocational qualifications but they were not of the type sought by employers. No jobseekers had sufficient relevant vocational qualifications to allow them to apply for all vacancies, which is unsurprising given the broad range of vocational qualifications required on even this limited number of vacancies.

Taken together, the mismatch between the possession of and demand for academic and vocational qualifications goes some way to explaining a reduction in the number of vacancies for which jobseekers could apply. As vacancies that demanded vocational or academic qualifications were mutually exclusive, the cumulative effect on jobseekers with

neither was that about 10% of vacancies were beyond their reach on grounds of qualifications alone. In terms of the simple approach adopted in this study, therefore, 90% of vacancies were available even to jobseekers that lacked any form of qualification.

Where people lack qualifications, they may still be able to demonstrate their ability to perform job tasks through the experience they have accumulated. Overall 33% of 173 respondents had qualifications and experience in their first choice occupation; 47% had no qualifications but were experienced; 9.5% had qualifications but no experience and only 7.5% had neither.

Experience was demanded by a much higher proportion of employers than were qualifications (see table 2) and has a substantial impact on numbers of potentially accessible vacancies for many jobseekers. On just over half of the vacancies some degree of experience, either in the actual occupation they were advertising, or some element of it, was sought. In over two thirds of these cases, the length of experience the employer was seeking was left unspecified. However, for about 10% of vacancies, 2 years or more experience was necessary. For just over one half of jobseekers, 60% of vacancies were out of reach due to the mismatch between their experience and that demanded. Even the most experienced of jobseekers had access to only 50%.

On the 30 vacancies where qualifications were stipulated, 80% also required experience; of the 325 that did not demand qualifications, 47% did not demand experience either. Demand for qualifications and experience is positively correlated (spearman's .186, .01, .000) and this relationship remains when controlling for occupation (.153, .004). Table 2 shows variety however. In 92% of vacancies for senior managers and proprietors experience was required, whereas only 8% of these vacancies demanded qualifications. In contrast, in the craft category, 87% of vacancies demanded experience and over one quarter qualifications. All vacancies for professionals and technicians required applicants to have some experience and, three quarters, qualifications.

Health

Just over one third of jobseekers stated that they had some sort of health problem, the most common being those relating to mobility and lifting. 28% of people with a health problem had no experience in their first choice occupation, compared to 11% of those without health problems.

Employer's demands for good health were, however, difficult to ascertain. Only where vacancies stated that the job involved heavy lifting or working at heights was it possible to record an employer as demanding 'healthy' applicants. In response, only jobseekers who had bad backs, heart or mobility problems were recorded as being affected by vacancy health restrictions. There are, therefore, unresolved issues around the question of health

and how to measure its impact on the availability of vacancies. One jobseeker, for example, was recorded as having psychological problems, but of course, no employer stated that they only wanted applicants in good psychological health. Additionally, it is difficult to know how limiting jobseekers find their health problems – what counts as too heavy, for example. The figures produced by the comparison provide a limited indication of the effect of poor health. Slightly less than one quarter of the sample saw the numbers of vacancies available to them fall by 5% which, in view of the methodological problems, is an underestimation of the impact.

Table 2 Number of vacancies (SOC major) by experience and qualifications required

	Some experience necessary		Qualifications / certificates required	
SOC Major	**frequency**	**% (of vacancies in SOC)**	**frequency**	**% (of vacancies in SOC)**
1. Snr. Mgrs. and proprietors	12	92	1	8
2.Professionals and technicians	4	100	3	75
3. Assoc. prof. and tech.	9	56	0	0
4. Clerical and secretarial	38	85	5	11
5. Craft	34	87	11	28
6. Personal and protective services	8	46	1	4
7. Sales	31	44	1	1
8. Plant and machine ops.	25	61	5	12
9. Elementary occupations	31	31	3	3
Total	196		30	

Even if jobseekers are able to match qualification and experience demands, and are in good health, they may still be unsuitable as far as employers are concerned due to lack of transport, driving licenses, telephone or to age.

Transport and driving licenses

23 vacancies stated a requirement for applicants to have their own transport to use at work and an additional 3, in areas not served by public transport, insisted that applicants should have their own transport to use to get to work. The effect of these two restrictions was such that just over half of jobseekers experienced a reduction of 7% in the number of jobs available to them.

The possession or otherwise of driving licenses and motorised transport has a substantial impact. The opportunity to apply for almost 60 vacancies was denied to nearly one third of the sample because they did not possess a driving license or have access to private

transport, regardless of willingness to travel. This was clearly much more of a barrier to work than was a lack of qualifications in the Bournemouth and Poole District.

Phone

Only 5 vacancies demanded that applicants had telephones. One quarter of the sample did not have a telephone and their access to vacancies was, therefore, marginally reduced.

Age

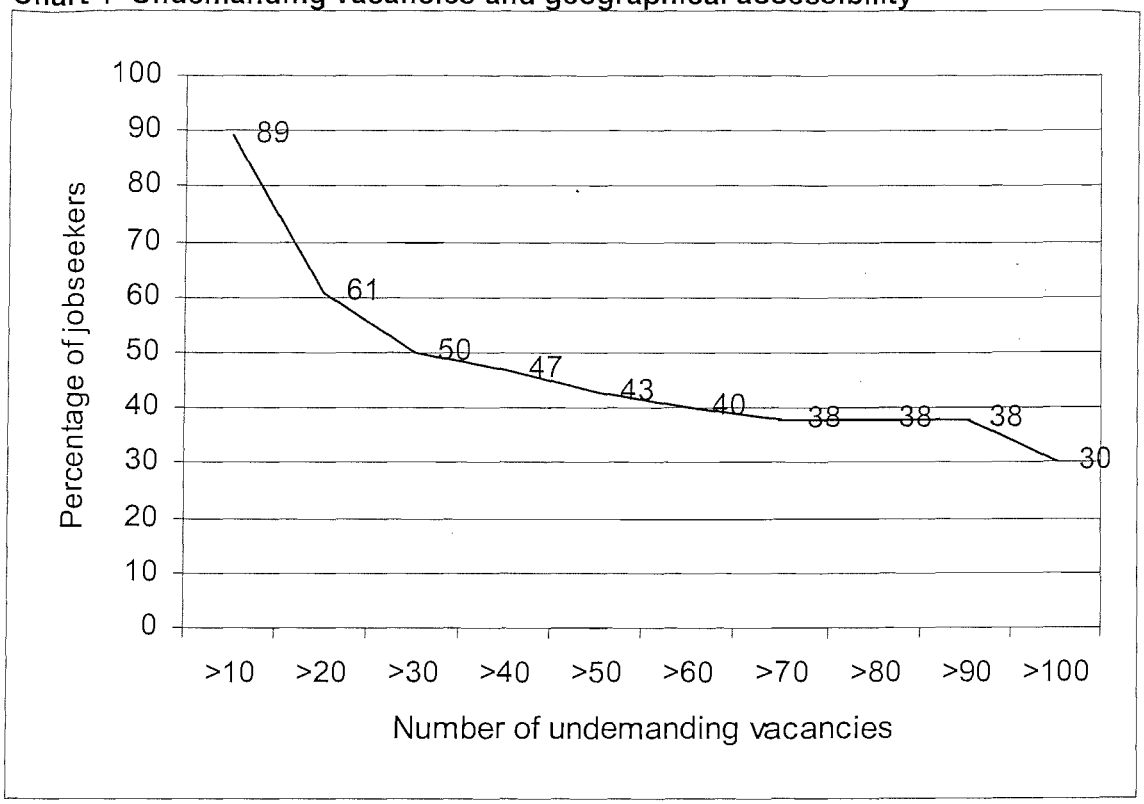
Age restrictions are discouraged on Jobcentre vacancies, but still appear occasionally. As all the jobseekers in the sample were aged over 25, posts for juniors were unavailable to them. Some of the younger jobseekers were disbarred from a few vacancies which set minimum age limits as high as 40 years old. Minimum age limits were found mainly on care work vacancies. At most, 6% of vacancies were inaccessible on the grounds of age, for 10% of the sample.

Undemanding vacancies

Some vacancies are ostensibly open to any jobseeker. Unskilled vacancies, which require neither experience nor qualifications and on which no restrictions regarding age or health or transport etcetera, are placed, are open to applications from any jobseeker, as far as employers are concerned. There are 105 of these in the sample. They are accessible providing the jobseeker is able to get to the area in which they are located. Chart 1 shows that for 89% of jobseekers more than 10 of these vacancies are reachable and for 30% access to more than 100 of these vacancies is geographically possible; 11% of the sample had access to 10 or fewer undemanding vacancies.

If applications are not received for these vacancies it is due either to ignorance of their existence or because jobseekers decide not to apply for them, either because they fail to meet their own practical limitations or because they do not appeal to them for some other reason. Although they are undemanding, they generally still stipulate particular hours (full-time or part-time), days and times of work, pay, etc. and jobseekers often have a view as to their acceptability. These vacancies also involve tasks that may or may not appeal to jobseekers and their location is obviously fixed. These restrictions are, however, different from those placed by the employer, in the sense that it depends on the jobseeker as to whether or not they are acceptable.

Chart 1 Undemanding vacancies and geographical accessibility



Summary

The preceding data suggest the extent to which different factors prevent jobseekers applying for vacancies. A lack of qualifications had little effect on the ability to apply for vacancies; a lack of experience, however, was the most important of the barriers considered thus far. The absence of a driving licence or transport also played a substantial role in making vacancies inaccessible to jobseekers. The impact of a lack of transport or licences takes on even greater significance when the way in which it limits a jobseeker's travel to work area is also considered, as we shall see shortly. Lack of access to a telephone did little to limit the number of jobs for which jobseekers could apply. It is likely to impact on numbers of applications made, however, simply by virtue of the difficulty jobseekers without access may have in contacting employers. The impact of health was difficult to quantify but it is likely to be more significant in explaining why jobseekers fail to secure work rather than why they are unable to apply in the first place. Even if a jobseeker has a limitation they may consider themselves capable of undertaking the activities described in a vacancy. An employer, on the other hand, when considering an application may well be deterred by a jobseeker's reference to limiting conditions. Similar may be said of age. From anecdotal evidence[35] and discussion with jobseekers in the second study, age is much more of a barrier to securing than identifying suitable

[35] Not only have jobseekers mentioned age as a substantial barrier to most sorts of employment, recruiters and employers have confirmed their ageist practices in 'off-the-record' conversations.

work. Few jobseekers who enjoy good health consider themselves unsuitable for work on grounds of their age and only a small number of vacancies display age restrictions. Age, therefore, can not be seen objectively as a barrier to making applications to vacancies, but consideration of it may certainly influence which applicants are selected to progress in the recruitment process and the confidence they enjoy when considering making an application.

None of the restrictions just discussed applied to 105 of the 355 vacancies in the sample. All jobseekers would have had the opportunity to apply for 105 vacancies had they been geographically mobile over an area that stretches, at its maximum limits about 15 by 12 miles. In fact only 30% of jobseekers could travel broadly enough for their travel to work areas to encompass all these vacancies. More than 10 undemanding vacancies, nevertheless, fell into the travel to work areas of nearly 90% of jobseekers. All but 10% of the most disadvantaged jobseekers could, therefore, have applied for 10 vacancies in the two week period of the study.

Jobseekers' demands

In this section comparisons are made between jobseekers' demands and the rewards or characteristics of vacancies. The first three demands reflect practical concerns[36]; the fourth and fifth, I will go on to argue, can also be seen as affective.

Travel-to-work area

The issue of transport and accessibility have recently received more attention in terms of the contribution they make to social inclusion / exclusion.[37] In Britain, on average, 61% of males in full-time employment spend less than 30 minutes getting to work, with the largest proportion spending between 11 and 20 minutes. The figures are similar for part-time workers, although the largest proportion of them spent 10 minutes or less travelling (Social Trends, table 4.19, 2001). The Omnibus Survey (2000) shows that 72% of people travel-to-work by car, 12% walk and 12% use public transport. Only 42% of the sub sample of jobseekers had access to motorised transport which clearly reduces their capacity to travel outside the main conurbation.

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[36]These practical restrictions are treated as not negotiable, so vacancies that do not meet them are objectively unavailable to the jobseeker. They include location, hours and days of work and whether work was full or part-time. These restrictions are treated as 'necessary' in the study because they have been deemed so by Client Advisors who, as discussed above, have to ensure they are unavoidable and conform to certain criteria: when making claims jobseekers have to show they are sufficiently flexible to maximise their chances of finding work quickly.

[37]See www.socialexclusionunit.gov.uk/publications/reports/html, 'Making the Connections between Transport and Social exclusion', for more details.

Jobseekers' travel-to-work patterns are greatly influenced by their access to private transport, coupled with their home locations[38]. About one quarter of the whole sample said they would travel anywhere in the district to get to work and of these 75% had access to motorised transport. All vacancies were therefore available to one quarter of jobseekers, on these grounds. The effect of travelling patterns on the accessibility of undemanding vacancies was seen in chart 1.

Hours and days

Respondents, some with restricted access to private transport, also find it necessary to limit the hours, or days on which they state they would be able to work. Others place restrictions that they know or perceive reflect common practice. Office workers, for example, often expect to work Monday to Friday, factory workers may expect an early finish on a Friday or work on Saturday morning only as over time. Other factors that limit the hours and days jobseekers make themselves available for work include health problems and domestic arrangements. Forty percent of jobseekers were prepared to work on any days of the week, and at any times, day or night, making all jobs accessible on this basis, and an additional 10% were almost as flexible, but were not prepared to work during the night. For those who did place restrictions, the most popular pattern of work were from eight in the morning, either Monday to Friday (18%) or Monday to Saturday (19%).

Full or part-time work

Whether jobseekers are prepared to consider part-time or full-time work or both is recorded on the Job Centre's database. However, the system defaults to full-time if no action is taken and it is possible that some of the jobseekers recorded as only seeking full-time work would in fact consider either, providing financial arrangements were satisfactory. Job Seekers' Allowance rules stipulate that claimants of benefit should be available for 40 hours work per week and the hours and days up on which they are available must be those usually associated with the occupation in which they are seeking work. Equally, there is no requirement under the Job Seekers' Allowance regulations for jobseekers to accept work of less than 24 hours per week.

The most common requirement on the part of jobseekers was for full-time work and this meant that only 247 vacancies (69%) were suitable for 80% of the sample of jobseekers. The most flexible jobseekers were those who said they would work either full-time or part-time, Monday to Sunday, any hours. There were only 13 individuals in this category and

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[38]It takes a maximum of about 40 minutes to travel by private transport across the district. Between the main town centres of the area, i.e. Christchurch, Bournemouth, Boscombe, Parkstone, Poole and Winton, the maximum time would be about 25 minutes.

only they had access to all vacancies, regardless of whether the work was full-time or part-time, the days work available and the hours of work. All others in the sample limited one or other aspect of the contracts[39] they would accept.

Occupation

I have treated occupation as a demand because it is something that has to be acceptable from the point of view only of the jobseeker[40]. Chart 2 shows the number of vacancies available to jobseekers, which satisfy all their requirements (other than that of occupation) and for which they are meet employers' demands. In contrast, chart 3 shows the number of vacancies available when occupational choices are taken into account along with all other considerations, both on the part of the jobseeker and the employer. Note the change of scale - for almost half of jobseekers no vacancies match their requirements. For remaining jobseekers between 1 and 17 vacancies are accessible. This is due, as charts 4 and 5 demonstrate, to the difference in the nature of vacancies advertised and those sought.

There is therefore, an important contrast between the number of vacancies which jobseekers *could* in theory access and which they are likely to *choose* to. These data have not yet been adjusted to take account of jobseekers' pay demands, which according to received wisdom are one of the main factors in accounting for non-applications.

Pay

Details of reservation wages were available only in 111 of the 199 cases[41] and are shown in chart 6. Findings were in line with the moderate levels of reservation wage generally found in unemployment research. However, because pay levels on vacancies are low, even in these circumstances there is a mismatch between respondent expectation and what employers offer as starting wages.

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[39] I have used the term 'contract' throughout to describe collectively the actual times of work, the number of hours, the days of work, and whether it is permanent, short term, casual, temporary etcetera.

[40] The occupations a jobseeker is recorded as seeking are irrelevant to the employer due to the way the data has been handled. Each vacancy demand has been treated separately as discussed in the preceding chapter and jobseekers are able to match all vacancy requirements regardless of the occupation they are registered as seeking. Employers will therefore be unconcerned about jobseekers' sought occupations, allowing them to be treated as jobseeker demands and arguably choices. Jobseekers are likely to be able, although not necessarily willing, to do many more jobs than conform to their three preferred occupations.

[41] Pay was not included as a variable for the sub sample of 100 cases because of the high number with missing data. Findings relating to pay are based on 111 cases in the whole sample for whom the data was available and can not be combined with other factors, such as hours or occupation, to provide an overall number of accessible vacancies for this reason.

Chart 2 All vacancies accessible to jobseekers when chosen occupations are excluded

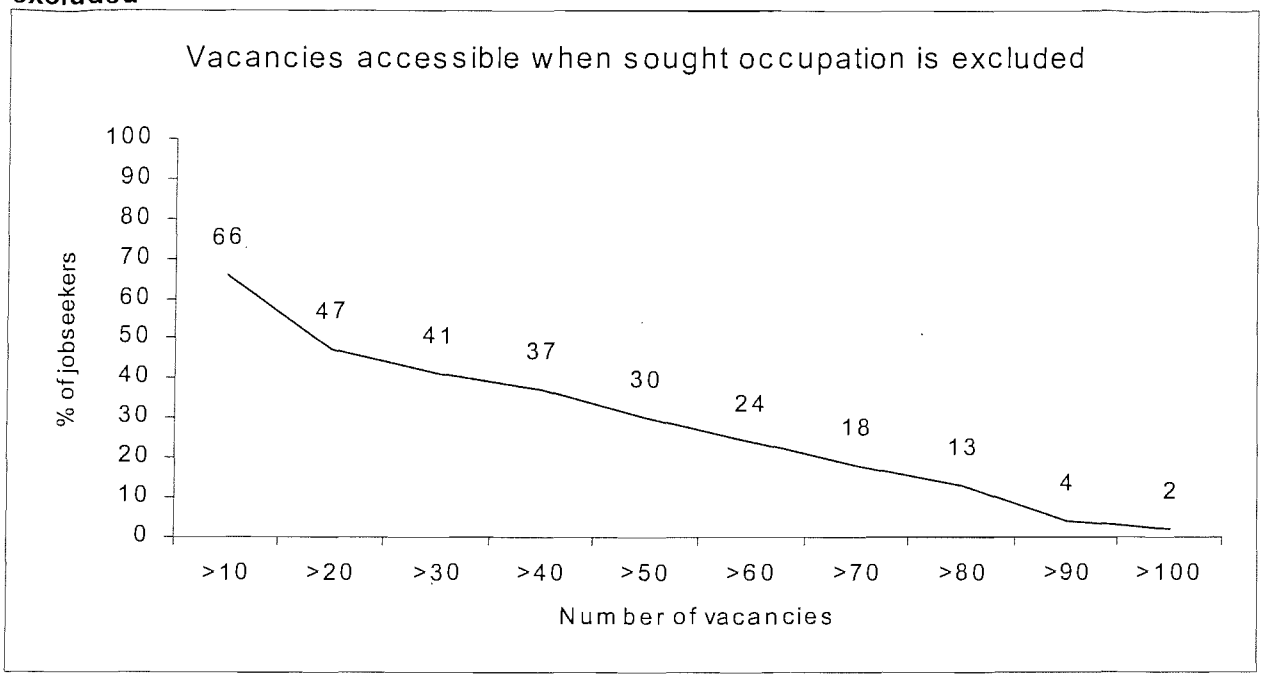

Chart 3 Vacancies accessible when chosen occupations are included

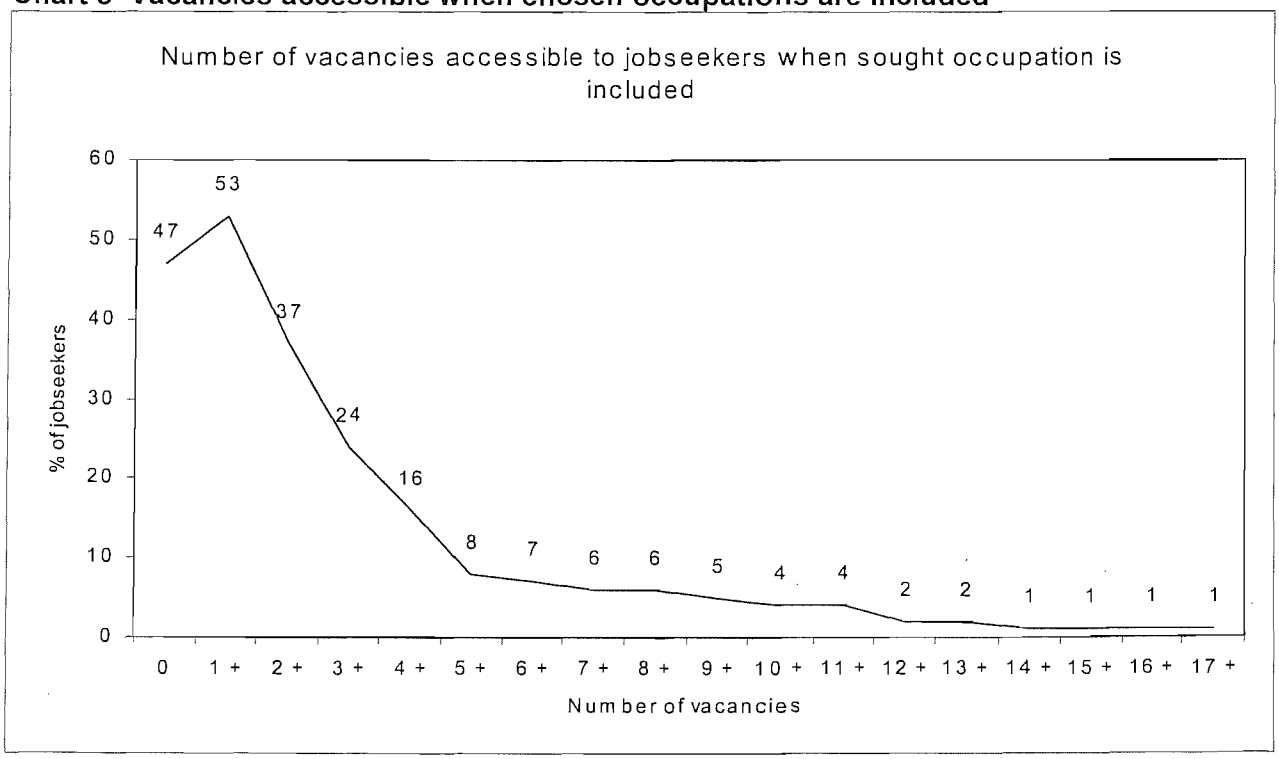

Chart 4 Types of vacancies most frequently sought by the sample of jobseekers

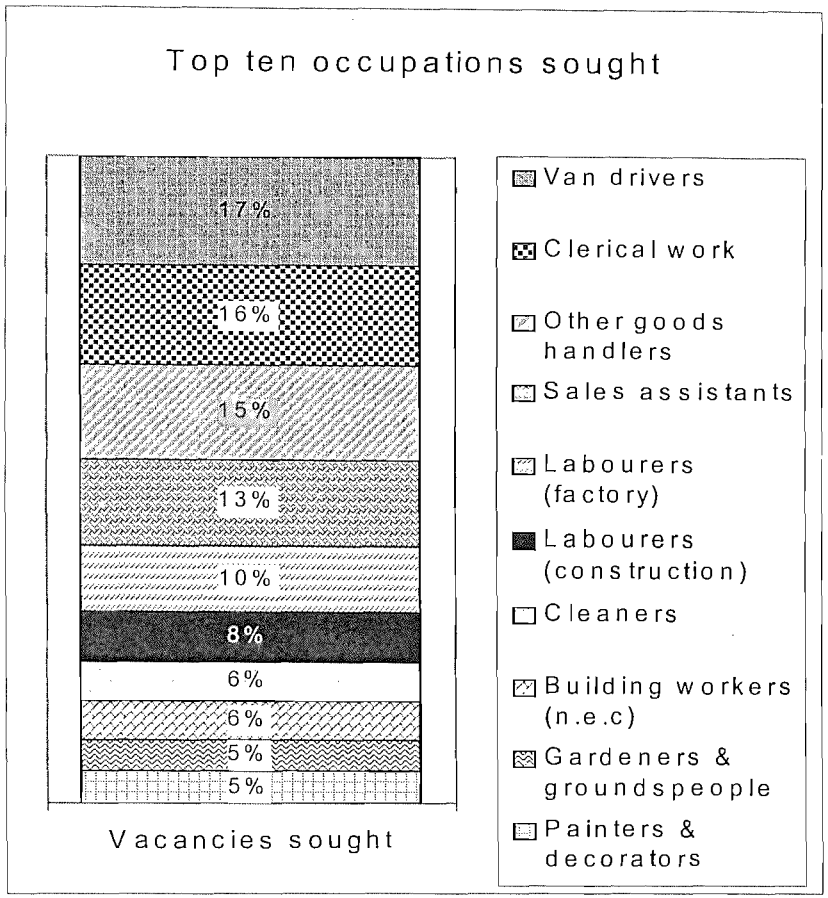

Chart 5 Types of occupations most commonly advertised in Job Centres in the Bournemouth and Poole District

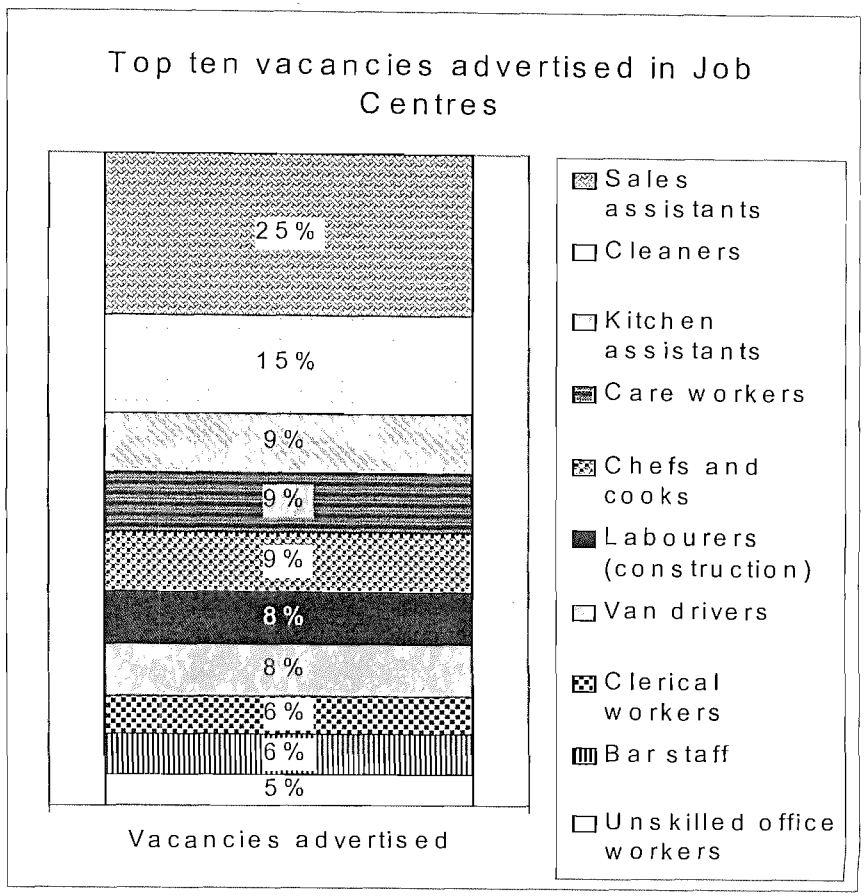

Chart 6 Distribution of reservation wages

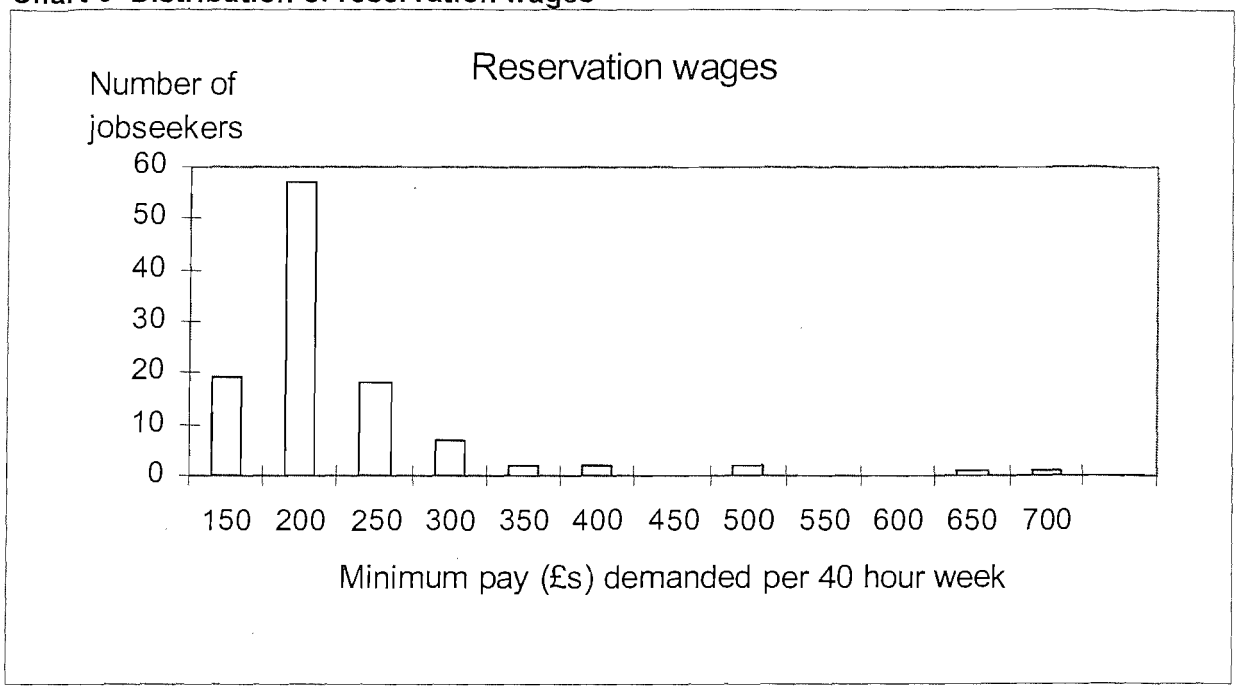

Table 3 suggests that only 9% of respondents would be happy to consider vacancies that pay at the level of the minimum wage, whilst 19% of vacancies actually do so. Seventy five percent of vacancies pay less than £5.00 per hour, and this figure is considered unacceptable by 26% of jobseekers. Forty percent of vacancies pay £4.00 or less whereas on 30% of jobseekers would accept wages at this level. Two percent of jobseekers consider the pay available on all vacancies unacceptable. There is clearly therefore a mismatch between wages offered and those demanded. There are differences in the level of dissatisfaction with wages across occupations, however. Fourteen clients stated they were looking for work as 'other goods handlers, including warehouse operatives', for example and one third expected to earn more than £5.00 per hour: two thirds of vacancies were inaccessible to them as a result. For general clerical work, which was sought by 18 jobseekers, the pay on all vacancies satisfied three, but the seven who expected to earn over £5.00 per hour, had access to only half the vacancies. The situation was similar for those seeking work as shop assistants. There were 42 vacancies of this type and 19 people seeking this sort of work. Over half the vacancies paid less than £4.00 per hour, whilst two thirds of jobseekers sought more than £4.00 per hour. 10 of 13 van driving vacancies offered up to £5.00 per hour, but only one quarter of jobseekers would accept pay at that level.

Table 3 Pay offered and demanded

£s per hour	Jobseekers' reservation wages (%)	Pay offered on vacancies (%)
< or = 3.70[1]	9	19
3.71 to 4.00	21	20
4.01 to 4.50	14	20
4.51 to 5.00	27	16
5.01 to 5.50	3	9
5.51 to 6.00	5	6
6.01 to 6.50	9	6
6.51 to 7.00	2	1
7.01 to 7.50	4	2
7.51 to 8.00	1	1
8.01 to 8.50	0	0
8.51 to 9.00	2	0

[1] At the time the data were collected the minimum wage was £3.70 per hour for most adults

Summary

Table 4 summarises the effect of the variables discussed in this chapter when dealt with individually and in combination - full details of how these figures were achieved are in appendix one. We can see, for example, that taking account both of the age and health (variable 7) demands of employers and the ages and health conditions of the sample reduces accessible vacancies by 9 from 355 to 346. Demand for transport and driving licences (variable 12), and the availability of these amongst the sample reduces accessible vacancies from 355 to 328. Demand for and availability of vocational qualifications (variable 17) is such that accessible vacancies are reduced to 336 from 355. Similar principles apply to the remainder of the variables included in the table.

Table 4 The impact of variables on the numbers of accessible vacancies

Variable	Notes	Average number of vacancies on which matches occurred
1. Full-time / part-time	Vacancies were selected that conformed to whether jobseekers were looking for full or part-time work or did not have a preference.	266
2. Days	If the jobseeker wished to work Monday to Friday and the vacancy offered work on these days a match occurred	312
3. Start and finish	A match occurred here when the hours of work	297

times	demanded by the employer fell between the hours jobseekers said they would be prepared to work.	
4. Combination of variables 1-3		209
5. Age		348
6. Health		351
7. Combination of age and health		346
8. Location / TTWA	When the area in which jobseekers were able to travel was taken into account the number of vacancies to which they had access reduced quite considerably.	179
9. License		336
10. Transport		338
11. Phone		354
12. Combination of license and transport		328
13. Combination of license, transport and phone		328
14. Combination of transport and phone	This is the number of vacancies that were accessible taking account of jobseekers possession or otherwise of these items.	341
15. Combination of location, license, transport and phone	When location is added in, the previous average reduces.	174
16. Academic qualifications	This is a comparison between qualifications demanded and held.	348
17. Vocational qualifications		336
18. Combination of academic and vocational qualifications		329
19. Experience		148
20. A combination of academic and vocational qualifications and experience	This is the number of vacancies available when demands and supply of human capital are compared on vacancies throughout the area.	146
21. Matches for occupational choice	Again this figure is the number of vacancies accessible throughout the whole district.	17
22. Matches for occupational choice in travel-to-work area	When jobseekers' travel-to-work areas are taken into account this reduces the average still further.	6
23. Vacancies without demands within travel-to-work area	53 vacancies, which make no demands should be available on average to jobseekers within their travel-to-work areas. These vacancies may not meet the jobseeker's demands,	53

	however, only their limitations.	
24. All factors taken into account excluding sought occupations	All job seeker demands except their chosen occupations and all employer demands are taken into account here, including location.	34
25. All factors into account including sought occupations	This is the number of vacancies that are available on average when three sought occupations are included.	2
26. Pay	This is the number of vacancies that meet or exceed the average pay demands of the sample (mean = £5.30 per hour).	75

Discussion

This part of the study was conducted to test the relevance of mismatch theories in explaining long term unemployment in a buoyant labour market. It will be recalled that mismatch approaches suggest that vacancies remain unfilled because jobseekers do not have the human capital necessary to fill them. The employability aspect of mismatch approaches concentrates on what the individual needs to do in order to make themselves more attractive to employers and not *vice versa.*

'Towards Full Employment' (2001, para. 4.36, p. 46) makes clear that the New Labour government perceive the problem in these terms,

> 'The New Deal has begun to adopt a demand-led strategy in some industries and occupations. We intend to expand this approach throughout the workforce development system. This will include training in such high growth sectors as construction, retail, hospitality, transport, call centres, health and carer occupations.'

Yet, in the main, the problems we have identified are caused by these sorts of vacancies failing to meet jobseekers' demands, rather than jobseekers failing to meet employers' demands. The data suggest that, in the Bournemouth and Poole District, mismatch approaches' one sided focus is incomplete as an explanation for unemployment, because the vast majority of mismatches stemmed from *jobseekers'* rather than employers' requirements[42]. It also leads to the conclusion that more Job Centre vacancies are likely to

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[42] The reader may recall that in the introduction I acknowledged the position which suggests that if jobseekers possessed higher level of skills, qualifications and experience they would not be limited to applying for vacancies that are amongst the least attractive and would, therefore, identify fewer barriers to them. My argument - that jobseekers' demands play a vital role in understanding long term unemployment and need a more pronounced position - appears superficially to lend support this perspective. Everything else being equal it would, but jobseekers are a product of more that the education and training system. Their chances in the labour market are not a precise reflection of the human capital they bring to it, as the literature discussed in my evaluation of macro mismatch approaches suggested. The idiosyncratic nature of employers' decisions, amongst other things, ensures this. High levels of underemployment and over-education and sticky levels of occupational

remain unfilled if work of this type continues to account for still larger proportions of business.

We found that some vacancies did make demands that jobseekers could not meet, yet their presence continues to challenge to the government's approach to life long learning and employability. Most of the vocational qualifications, for example, that were sought, were unavailable amongst the sample of jobseekers. This was not because jobseekers did not possess vocational qualifications, however - in fact they held fifty between them (30 of which were city and guilds). The co-existence of demand for and availability of vocational qualifications and the concurrent mismatch between them point to a paradox. There is a tension between the notion of increasing vocational training at the same time as creating a flexible work force which moves, not only between employers but between occupations and industries during the course of a working life (Finn, 1999). Great commitment and confidence is required in order to invest in vocational training due to the opportunity, as much as actual, costs involved. In an era identified by Sennett (1998) as one in which employers lack commitment to employees, and in an ever changing technological environment, the risks involved in doing so are increased.

Similarly, even experienced people have access to only 50% of Job Centre vacancies which, as noted, are traditionally amongst the least demanding in the labour market. Three quarters of jobseekers have experience in the work they are seeking but this was not necessarily the same work as employers are offering. Although qualifications may be available within an expanded system of education and training, the opportunity to gain experience often is not. The data here suggest that lack of experience is vastly more important than qualifications in influencing the number of vacancies from which jobseekers have the opportunity to choose. Not only is it frequently difficult to gain but it is arguably most easily gained at the expense of variety and flexibility – by pursuing one occupation, a practice that is anticipated to become increasingly uncommon.

Transport and associated factors are also an issue. 23 vacancies insisted that applicants should have their own transport to use at work and 3 to get to work; surprisingly, nearly 60 vacancies stipulated the need for a driving license - far more than I expected given that only

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mobility (which are not considered in this piece of work) both lend support to the view that increased human capital does not necessarily improve the prospects of jobseekers, at least not to the point where they are able to secure the job they want. The possession of human capital will, as my qualitative work shows, effect application behaviour initially, allowing jobseekers to apply for attractive vacancies but the inability to secure work that matches ones human capital ultimately has a negative effect on numbers of applications made. A lack of congruence between the way in which a jobseekers sees themselves and the character of the slots available to them in the labour market affects application behaviour and the way in which vacancies are perceived potentially delaying re-entry to the labour market.

15 vacancies were for driving jobs. Others that needed licenses included various sales, craft and labouring jobs. The impact of these, like all employers' demands, depends on the extent to which they are met by jobseekers: 60 (over 1/4 of the full sample) did not have a driving license[43].

The other employer demands I considered had a fairly insignificant impact on the number of accessible vacancies, firstly because they were made on so few vacancies and secondly, because most jobseekers met these criteria in any case. The vast majority of employers should experience few problems finding applicants for their vacancies. Equally, for the vast majority of the long term unemployed in this sample finding vacancies for which to apply would not present problems, were it not for the fact that they too, make demands.

I have termed some jobseekers' demands 'chosen' and some 'necessary'. The hours, days and times individuals were prepared to work, and where they would go to do so are their 'necessary' restrictions or demands (which are treated as synonymous). Also considered were the occupations jobseekers will consider and how much they expect to be paid for undertaking them - these are their 'chosen' restrictions or demands. The net effect of the interaction between necessary demands and employers' requirements is suggestive of why a small percentage of men in the area may find it impossible to identify suitable vacancies for which to apply; chosen restrictions account for why many more men experience this type of difficulty. Occupation and pay demands constitute major challenges to the achievement of matches between what employers offer and jobseekers demand.

When occupation was discounted jobseekers could apply for all undemanding vacancies in their travel to work area plus any that matched their necessary demands and for which they met the demands of employers. Almost two thirds of the sample could have applied for in excess of 11 vacancies, and nearly half had access to in excess of 21, during the two weeks in which the data were collected. On average 34 vacancies were accessible. When occupation was added as a consideration the average figure dropped to 2.

Jobseekers' pay requirements were difficult to establish. I was only able to provide an illustration of pay sought rather than take it into account along with the other 13 factors that had a bearing on the number of vacancies to which jobseekers had access. However, if the data is considered capable of representing jobseekers' views in relation to reservation wages pay presents another problem in terms of matches. Fifty six percent of jobseekers sought pay of more than £4.50 per hour whilst only 41% of vacancies offered more than

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[43] It should be noted that in some areas programmes have been established to address this barrier but eligibility for driving lessons extends only to those aged between 18 and 24 at 6 months and people aged 25 plus at 18 months, who are registered with New Deals.

£4.50. Fifty nine percent of vacancies were therefore unacceptable to more than half the sample on grounds of pay alone.

In addition to testing the applicability of mismatch approaches in the Bournemouth and Poole District, the quantitative study was designed to establish some context for the qualitative. I noted earlier that for a jobseeker to be able to engage in meaningful application behaviour objectively suitable vacancies must be available within their travel to work area. If they are not the jobseeker does not have an opportunity to decide whether or not to apply. The quantitative data suggest, at several levels, that numerous vacancies are available to most jobseekers. However, the more jobseeker demands one takes into account the smaller the number available becomes. Once sought occupation and pay restrictions are added a large number of jobseekers are unlikely to find any vacancies that meet their demands.

Whether Bournemouth and Poole District can therefore be seen as capable of providing an environment in which jobseekers can engage in application decisions depends on how chosen restrictions are treated and the legitimacy attributable to claims to a level of pay or to particular occupations. Arguably jobseekers' decisions with respect to reservation wages that are not based on financial need can be seen as choices; preference for particular occupations, over and above those a jobseeker is capable of performing, can also. Decisions regarding occupation and pay can, in these circumstances, be seen as forming part of the application behaviour I want to explore further, since they stem from jobseekers' inflexibility, rather than employers' demands.

The justification for treating pay as a choice for the purposes of the study relies on a number of claims. Theory and evidence suggest that reservation wages are inversely related to unemployment duration. The reservation wage data used in this research are those provided by jobseekers at the outset of their claim, on form ES2. The form does not allow for adjustments that may have been made when employment begins to be perceived as difficult to secure. Charlot and Decreuse (2001) suggest that the passage of time reduces reservation wages as jobseekers recognise that their prospects of finding well paid work diminish. If this is the case, the figures produced by the comparisons will be underestimates of the number of jobs that meet jobseekers' pay requirements, as jobseekers will accept lower wages than their records show.

Additionally, there is an incentive in the benefit system for the jobseeker to record a higher level of reservation wage on the ES2 than they would ultimately accept. A higher recorded reservation wage gives jobseekers room to manoeuvre in response to vacancies suggested by Jobcentre staff, in the early stages of a claim. For the first six months of registered

unemployment, pay on vacancies has to equal the reservation wage for a jobseeker to be compelled to apply. Against this has to be weighed the possible pressure exerted in the opposite direction by advisors to ensure that reservation wages conform to the 'going rate'. There remains a possibility however, that stated reservation wages may be higher than the jobseekers genuinely feel they need to be and they may be satisfied with sub-reservation wages. Blau (1992, p. 751) found that over two thirds of the jobseekers that formed part of his US study accepted offers of work paying below the level of their reservation wages.

It seems likely therefore that the information used may over-estimate the reservation wages of the sample. Practically this means that the number of vacancies that fail to meet requirements may be less than it appears. More importantly in terms of identifying scope for choice, these points tend to confirm that such scope exists before the absolute minimum is reached.

Another reason for treating pay levels as deriving from an element of choice is the availability of in-work-benefits. Even when jobseekers have reduced their reservation wages to subsistence level they may be prepared to go lower if they have an entitlement to in work benefits. On the other hand they may have an idea of their value and be unprepared to accept less than that, even if they could receive in-work-benefits and be 'better off in work'. For some people income is more of a concern than is pay, whereas for others the source of income is of importance. The literature on reservation wages does not generally recognise this distinction and arguably fails to recognise the reality of jobseeker's decision making. It is important to understand under what circumstances jobseekers think in terms of income, as opposed to thinking in terms of pay. The fact that both options exist suggests an element of choice that makes the subject worth exploring in terms of application behaviour.

Finally, reservation wages are defined as the minimum acceptable for any work. However, in some circumstances acceptable wages for a job will depend on a number of factors such as how desirable it is considered to be, travelling time or expense, or how it fits with family arrangements for child-care, for example. Unfortunately form ES2 and reservation wage research generally does not allow for this sort of qualifying comment, but again it is possible that jobseekers would accept a lower wage if some or all of these factors were as they hoped they would be.

In the gap between recorded and what transpire to be acceptable wages, there arguably exists scope for choices (albeit limited and unpleasant ones) to be made. The next part of the study will attempt to identify the factors that impact on the setting of reservation wages and how fluid they are.

Inclusion of sought occupation in the calculations of numbers of accessible vacancies resulted in almost half of jobseekers in the sample not having access to a single vacancy that matched all their restrictions and on which they matched employers' requirements. I suggested that sought occupation could be seen as a jobseeker's chosen demand - as a choice. Justification for this stems from the fact that any work jobseekers are incapable of performing has already been taken into account in the study – lack of experience, qualifications, transport, health problems, availability for certain hours etcetera - have all been accommodated earlier in the process of estimating numbers of accessible vacancies. All that remains is a preference for certain tasks, for example, or other dimensions into which occupations can be deconstructed and to which varying attitudes are likely to be held. I feel it is reasonable to see decisions such as these as choices and to conclude that the Bournemouth and Poole Job Centre District contains sufficient accessible vacancies to make 'application behaviour' a relevant concept. If, in the light of these comments regarding pay and occupations they are discounted, five percent of registered jobseekers could not access any vacancies in the fortnight of the study; 11% could access between 1 and 4 vacancies; 15% could access between 5 and 9 and the majority could access over 10.

Although the quantitative data are suggestive of the extent and type of restrictions jobseekers place, they are not indicative of how the sample decided what restrictions they would place, nor how flexible they would be in the face of vacancies that do not match their requirements. They do show, however, that the human capital possessed by most of the sample was such that they met most of the requirements employers stated. It is likely also to be the case that if jobseekers had been equipped with greater levels of human capital they may have been able to apply for more of the vacancies, and they may also, importantly, have had a better chance of meeting the requirements of vacancies that met their demands. High levels of human capital (of the right sort) should, in theory, equip jobseekers with the ability to apply for objectively more attractive vacancies. This in turn should increase their search motivation. This would not change the fact that most members of the sample who were flexible about pay and occupation could have made many more applications for work that is usual, and to jobs for which competition is relatively less intense. Potential explanations for their decisions not to do so are the subject of the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 Aspects of future work respondents consider important

We established in the previous chapter that the paucity of vacancies for which jobseekers can apply stems mainly from the demands, and in particular to 'chosen' ones relating to occupation and pay, that they make. We compared the occupations in which jobseekers were hoping to find work and the pay they required with the occupations and pay advertised in vacancies and found that these were the main areas in which mismatches between supply and demand existed. Important questions remain from that study, however. We do not know why jobseekers prefer certain occupations; how rigidly they would insist on securing work with similar characteristics; or why and whether jobseekers would sacrifice one aspect of work to achieve another. Additionally, we do not know what factors make some respondents much more flexible than others. This last point is discussed in the following chapter which considers the sources of influences that contribute to the different positions identified amongst respondents. This one aims to identify and categorise the sorts of restrictions and criteria respondents feel must be met by a vacancy in order for an application to be made. It then looks in more detail at each important aspect of work, analysing responses in order to explore the ways in which they are valued. As a starting point respondents were asked to talk in general terms about the sort of jobs for which they would consider applying, and then about those they would not.

Identification of six important aspects of work

Responses suggested that vacancies and occupations can be deconstructed into many different aspects, six of which were particularly important both in terms of the intensity with which the views were held and because they were mentioned frequently by jobseekers in the sample. They are tasks, industry, status, pay, environment and contract. After a short explanation of how these categories were formed, we will look at the ways in which these aspects are important and why they are so. Clearly the categories are my own creation - respondents did not necessarily mention the word 'tasks' or 'environment', for example, during their interviews but I interpreted their comments as relating to an aspect of work. Data were classified, judged and recorded in the following way. These classifications giving rise to the two charts (7 and 8) located towards the end of this section.

Tasks

Tasks can be seen as what work consists of when it is removed from a social setting. They consist of activities that vary in the extent to which they offer two important things: variety and challenges, two elements of tasks that respondents generally value. They also involve physical or mental effort or both. We approach tasks from two angles, exploring both the

processes through which respondents go to decide what they find attractive about tasks and secondly, what it actually is that they like or dislike.

Tasks are an aspect of work that is very important to respondents and one regarding which few are fully flexible. This is perhaps unsurprising when one considers the constant exposure of job incumbents to job tasks. Whilst some of the job satisfaction literature (e.g. Rose, 2003) concentrates on the quality of work defined with reference primarily to contractual issues and reward schemes, the occupational choice approach discussed in chapter one stresses the importance of tasks in job satisfaction. The desire to secure work which involves subjectively attractive tasks, as we shall see, can be crucially important.

- Respondent who said they would be prepared to work on any sort of task were allocated a score of 0 whilst an interviewee who wanted to undertake one particular set of tasks were given 4. Each response tended more towards one or another of these positions and scores in between were allocated on this basis.[44]

Industry

The industry into which a job falls was also considered important for two reasons. Some respondents hoped to avoid certain industries due to their unfavourable reputations. Others hoped to remain within an industry because it held an attraction for them that stemmed either from or from beyond the labour market.

- If respondents were prepared to consider vacancies in any industry they scored a zero. Those who insisted on working in a particular industry scored 4. Scores in between indicate where the respondent lay on this continuum.

Status

Two aspects of the status of a job were also felt to be important. The first was social status - i.e. the perceived standing of the occupation in society generally. The second, recognition, was the regard in which the position was likely to be held within the organisation or amongst other practitioners and was linked with notions of seniority and responsibility. Such details would not necessarily be known beyond the organisation itself and could be kept private if it was felt necessary, or shared selectively.

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[44] Higher scores indicate less flexibility but do not necessarily indicate that the high scoring respondents are likely to find fewer vacancies for which to apply than a lower scoring respondent. High scores do, however, mean that respondents are capable of applying for a much wider range of jobs than they are willing to. A low score, in contrast, suggests that a respondent will apply for virtually any vacancies they are capable of performing but does necessarily indicate that this includes a large range.

Social status and recognition are related in the sense that they involve the perception or judgement of 'others', in a way that task, for example, does not. Social status, within a hierarchical system reflects society's view of the relative prestige associated with an occupation. Individuals may be concerned with social status when evaluating vacancies. The term recognition, in contrast, is used here to identify positive regard which is limited to an organisation, a department or to a particular trade, which most respondents differentiate from and consider more important than social status. It is valued because it affects self-esteem which, it will be recalled, can be derived from the positive assessments and responses of others in relation to competence (Lopez, 1982, p. 336; Owens, Mortimer and Finch, 1996, p. 1377). Recognition transmits the perceptions of others based on the individual in the job, rather than the more generalised social status, which is based on the job itself.

I was alerted to the potential relevance of recognition through numerous references to it in discussions of what respondents had enjoyed about their past work and by the literature, and examined the data for an indication of its importance in respect of future work. References to the seniority of future posts; a requirement for challenges (from which to derive recognition); and desire for autonomy and responsibility, generally indicated a concern with recognition, which for some was essential.

- Status and recognition: if perceived social status or recognition are of concern to the respondent and they would reject vacancies that did not meet either or both of these criteria they have been allocated between 1 and 4. 0 indicates that neither of these factors is relevant to a respondent's decision in relation to vacancies.

Pay

Wages were predictably an area about which respondents expressed concern. They were important not only for the standard of living to which they contributed, or the extent to which they covered the individuals basic needs, but for what they indicated about the position and, by association, the qualities of its incumbent.

As was demonstrated in chapter 3, pay requirements in relation to Jobcentre vacancies present a huge problem, with many vacancies offering the minimum wage and many jobseekers refusing to accept it. In some circumstances, the problem is amenable to the provision of in work benefits. The extent to which in work benefits are viewed as a solution depends partly on the financial position of the respondent and partly on their attitude towards entitlement, perceived worth and benefit dependency. In-work-benefits are only even potentially helpful if respondents would consider accepting low paid work in principle.

- Pay (and the minimum wage): if pay was not an issue on any level respondents scored 0. In these circumstances the minimum wage would be viewed as adequate and would not reflect on work or contravene any sense of justice or worth. 1 was scored if the minimum wage was considered acceptable in principle, providing in work benefits improved a respondents' financial position compared with their out of work income. If the minimum wage was seen as exploitative, but would be accepted if it allowed the respondent to be better off in work they scored 2. Three was scored if the minimum wage is rejected in principle *and* could not be accepted in practice because even with in work benefits incomes would be too low to make such work worthwhile (psychologically or financially) although respondents in this category could potentially be persuaded to apply for low paid work if in work benefits were significantly higher. If respondents rejected the minimum wage and in work benefits regardless of a financial imperative to do so they scored 4.

Environment

The physical environment in which jobs are located was an issue for some respondents. Their preferences included being inside or outside, in a factory, office, work shop, or shop, for example. Concern was also expressed about the social environment - the milieu in which jobs would locate workers - some respondents did not want to work in female dominated environments, or with others from different social backgrounds. Some respondents also wanted to work in varied locations.

- Environment: some jobseekers ruled out jobs regardless of the tasks involved, social status considerations or any others of the aspects discussed above because of the physical or social environment in which they typically take place. Those who would work anywhere were allocated a 0; those who would only work in one type of environment were assigned 4. Others fell somewhere on the continuum.

Contract

Several issues are incorporated under this heading including: attitudes to a) numbers of hours of work; b) times and days of work; and c) the duration of contracts. Contracts affect jobseekers' attitudes towards vacancies primarily through the way they influence income, although a number of other issues arise in certain circumstances.

Flexibility regarding each aspect of contracts is important. In chapter three a fairly substantial mismatch was noted between the proportion of jobseekers (20%) that are prepared to work part-time and the proportion of jobs that require part-time workers (31%). The range of hours and days during which the sample of jobseekers are prepared to work also limited the number of vacancies that were available to them. Although it was not

possible to ascertain the impact of temporary or casual contracts on accessible vacancies given inadequacies in the data, it is clear from discussing the issue with these respondents that this aspect of contracts also presents barriers to matches. In most cases, however, objections are not insoluble because they are based on practical issues. These are easier by far to tackle than those identified in other parts of the study and related to affective concerns.

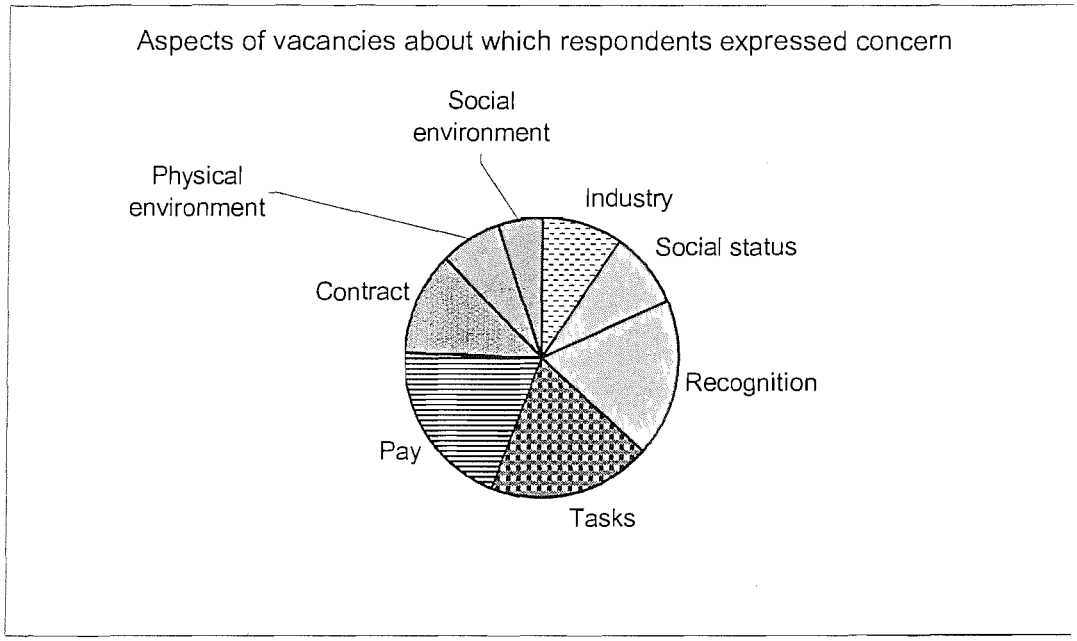
- Contract: the value allocated under this heading depended on the extent to which it mattered to the jobseeker whether work was full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary or what hours and days were required. 4 was allocated where jobseekers would only accept one sort of work contract, which was usually full-time and permanent and were available only for restricted hours and days. 0 was allotted where jobseekers said they would be prepared to work under any sort of contract.

The six aspects of work discussed form the basis of the criteria that must or should be met for a vacancy to be deemed sufficiently attractive to warrant an application. Respondents' overall assessment of vacancies is the result of considering the extent to which vacancies promise to measure up in relation to one or more of these aspects. By looking at the separate aspects that make up 'a job' it is possible to see where respondents feel the greatest barriers to making applications for work lay.

Chart 7 suggests that overall status considerations, tasks and pay are the most important aspects as far as respondents are concerned. Individuals, however, varied greatly in the importance they attached to different aspects and, whilst some were unprepared to compromise, others would, as chart 8 shows. In this chart a respondent who displayed no flexibility whatsoever would have scored 32; a fully flexible respondent would have scored zero. Several points stand out.

- All respondents articulated some degree of flexibility but a job *per se* is never enough - *all* respondents want something (in addition to pay) from working. This may make common sense but it is a point that can be overlooked in the drive for more jobs, regardless of their characteristics, or in the demand led approaches discussed earlier. It is not the case that respondents who feel strongly about one aspect of work necessarily offer more flexibility regarding others to compensate and maximise the number of vacancies for which they could apply, although some do.

Chart 7 The relative importance of different aspects of vacancies

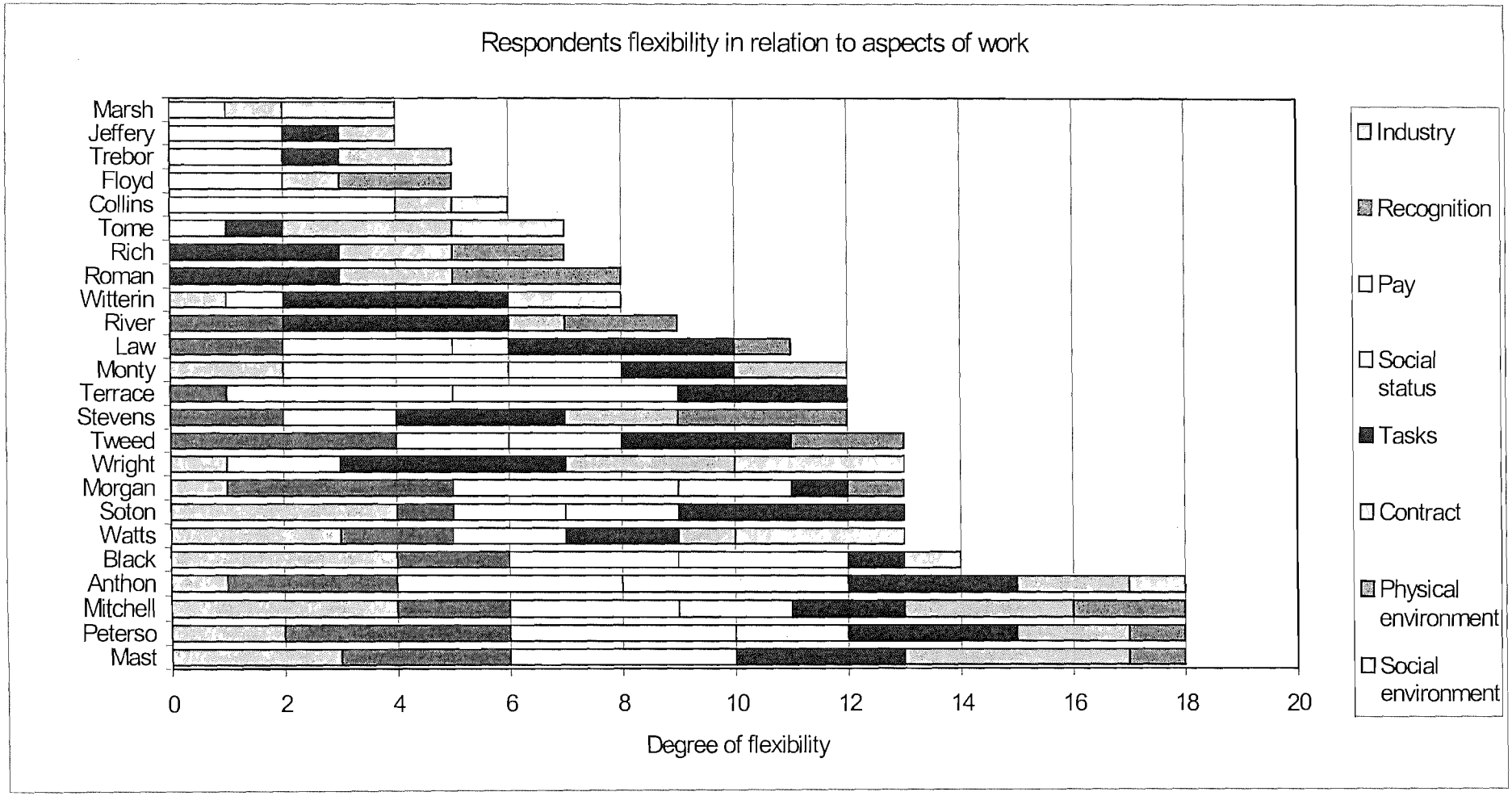


This chart was created by adding together the scores obtained for each aspect of work as described at the beginning of the chapter. The figures could have been reached because the aspect was very important to a few people, or of limited importance to all. If this chart is read in conjunction with the next which of these possibilities is the case becomes clearer. There is no suggestion that respondents in similar situations to those of my respondents would necessarily feel the same way. I have included these quasi-quantitative charts to provide a background for the remaining qualitative data analysis.

- Most respondents are 'choosy', as suggested in chapter one (Layard, 1986), but if as claimed all jobs offer benefits, many vacancies should nonetheless be able to satisfy them. Where social environment is relevant, for example, as it is to some degree for eight of the respondents, the effect on the number of jobs that are potentially suitable is small.
- There is limited flexibility in relation to tasks and this is likely to present much more of a barrier to work. If one treats tasks as the defining characteristic of occupations, it appears that the mismatches noted in the last chapter on grounds of sought occupation are a genuine barrier.

Thus far we have identified and defined some aspects of work that are important to respondents and the relative extent to which they are so. We can conclude at this stage that respondents in the main do prioritise their demands and are prepared in all cases to compromise regarding at least some aspects of work; others, nevertheless, appear too

Chart 8 Respondents' flexibility in relation to each aspect of work



important to treat entirely flexibly. All respondents bar one, for example, are concerned with pay, although as we shall see shortly, there are many and diverse reasons for this. The data also indicate that there is a correspondence between attitudes towards different aspects of work, suggesting a single orientation to work exists at a time, but not necessarily that it remains constant. A desire for status and for recognition tends to go together, for example, and concern with social environment is disproportionate amongst the most flexible respondents.

In the next section we will explore ways in which different aspects of work are important and how respondents feel applying for what they deem unsuitable vacancies would adversely affect them. Before dealing with substantive issues, however, a couple of general points need to be made about the apparent contradictions in what follows.

Responses contained internal tensions and lacked clarity. The following quote demonstrates the sort of tensions typically found,

> Interviewer: 'Do you face any pressures in terms of their expectations of you?'
>
> Mr. Rich: 'Not us, no way. I'd do any job. I was delivering leaflets yesterday.'

And later,

> Interviewer: 'Are there any you wouldn't do for anything other than practical reasons [respondent's poor health], any about which you think 'that's not for me'?'
>
> Mr. Rich: 'Oh, yes, lots, um admin work...wouldn't do a call centre job.....'

And,

> Interviewer: 'Would you consider a job like that one [washing up] now?'
>
> Mr. Rich: 'No, I don't need to because I've got things I like doing under my belt.'

There are several ways of understanding this sort of inconsistency. As in this example, responses must be seen as contingent. Mr. Rich is unconcerned about what people think about the type of work he does – he has no interest in status, and does not rely on feedback or the appraisal of others to confirm his self-image. On these grounds, any job would be acceptable. He is, however, concerned that he should enjoy the tasks he undertakes and therefore has preferences for different sorts of work and an idea of the types of job that would or would not satisfy him. To understand Mr. Rich's application behaviour and thereby some of the factors that contribute to his unemployment (given Bournemouth and Poole's buoyant labour market) we must recognise these contradictions.

Jobseekers have to prioritise their most important requirements when deciding whether it is in their self-interest to apply for a vacancy, as described in the decision making models discussed in chapter one. For a good wage, they may sacrifice task enjoyment; for task

enjoyment, they may sacrifice a good wage. They make cost / benefit decisions. An entirely rational approach would appear difficult to sustain, however, in light of the multitude of combinations of possibilities about which the jobseeker has to judge. Not only are vacancies judged in relation to others known about previously or simultaneously, or expected in the future, but the criteria they have to meet depend on the role the individual has in mind when undertaking the evaluation. Comments and evaluations appear inconsistent because they are.

Additionally, as vacancies can be judged attractive and unattractive at the same time, an inherent contradiction exists. As each aspect of a vacancy is considered, the jobseeker may change between being more or less attracted to the vacancy overall, depending on the attraction or otherwise of the aspect they are actually considering. For example, respondents reported reading advertisements for vacancies by starting with one aspect, such as wages, and moving on to others such as contract details, and that their impression of the vacancy changed throughout.

As well as stemming from internal tensions, inconsistency is caused by conflicting exogenous pressures. The relevance of these pressures changed throughout the interviews, based on the point being discussed at the time. When discussing his family's attitude towards his unemployment Mr. Black revealed that his wife, who is financially dependent upon him and has a young baby, sees him in breadwinner role. With regards to the labour market, this is the only role about which his wife is concerned. She encourages him to make applications to any vacancies that would provide a sufficient income. Mr. Black is aware of her views and when discussing the pay he would require from future work concern to satisfy his breadwinner role is paramount. As far as Mr. Black is concerned however, he occupies more than a breadwinner role in the labour market. He is also a successful colleague, friend and competitor. When asked to talk about how he felt about his usual occupation he spoke in broad terms about camaraderie, image, enthusiasm, and adrenaline. In the context of his family, he valued his high earnings. In the context of his friends, he did too, but for different reasons. In the first scenario, they helped him fulfil his breadwinner role; in the second, they were symbolic of his success. Different aspects of work are important depending on the role the respondent is thinking of satisfying, or a single aspect may be important for different reasons, and as a result responses can appear contradictory.

Attitudes to the six aspects of work

Tasks

When evaluating vacancies respondents judge whether or not they are capable of performing tasks before they estimate, on a range between intolerable and enjoyable - based either on experience or supposition - where tasks fall. This is as predicted in the

expectancy value model of decision making discussed in chapter one. In response to a question about what he looked for first when studying vacancies Mr. Anthony was ambivalent, but settled on whether or not he was capable of performing the tasks involved,

> Mr. Anthony: 'No, it used to be salary, but....no I tell a lie, because I look at the title and think no I can't do that job, can't do that job, salary is probably last, but if I saw the salary and it was 15K I'd probably skip it anyway. Actually, the role, can I do the role?'

Or, as Mr. Monty put it,

> Mr. Monty: 'Basically I've got to some sales skills and I'm quite handyand I don't want to go into a job I don't enjoy, so I look at jobs working with my hands which I enjoy and selling, which I enjoy and combine them.'

Or,

> Mr. Marsh, 'I would say I look at what the job is, if I think I could do it, handle it. Pay is not the priority.'

As far as value is concerned, it is noteworthy that, as the job characteristics approach detailed in the literature review suggested, respondents expressed numerous commonalities regarding the lack of value attached to what they considered intolerable tasks. Mr. Collins, for example, was alone in performing toilet cleaning tasks, but one of twenty four in suggesting that they were unattractive. Repetitive tasks are generally thought to be uninteresting and undemanding. Repetitive factory jobs in particular, are unpopular for the lack of variety and challenge they provide. However, the perception of an association between repetitive work and being stuck in one place under constant supervision adds another possible source of aversion, and makes it difficult to be sure which of the two factors is the source of discontent.

Care work was dismissed by virtually all respondents including Mr. Jeffery, who had demonstrated his ability having spent ten years looking after his parents.

> Interviewer: 'You say you don't mind what you do – is that true?'
>
> Mr. Jeffery: 'Well, I wouldn't go into care work, not matter what the money was, but by and large, yes, anything with decent money'.

The tasks involved apparently warrant particular characteristics - aside from being a woman - which the men in the sample did not consider they had. Care work jobs in the Bournemouth and Poole district are relatively plentiful, and community based vacancies offer many of the characteristics respondents seek. They are comparatively well paid, offer freedom from surveillance and a degree of autonomy and responsibility. They can also be extremely challenging. The tasks involved (both physically and emotionally) in care work are nevertheless seen by respondents as the preserve of women. A sense of embarrassment accompanied this unwillingness to perform care tasks and all respondents who discussed it stressed they would be judged unsuitable by employers or incapable, rather then suggesting that the tasks would not suit them simply because they found them unattractive. Caring

tasks were not thought to support the identities respondents hold for themselves, and their vision of the people undertaking the tasks involved was not one in which they felt they could share (as in 'self-to-prototype matching' (Moss and Frieze, 1993, p. 284)).

Sales work gave rise to similar sentiments - 'I'm not that sort of person' (Mr. Rich), but to less embarrassment at the admission, as if in recognition of the special moral position of caring work. Tasks involving the public as customers were abhorrent to some respondents, not necessarily because of the feminised nature of many occupations involving such tasks or the perception of the public as difficult to deal with, but due more to unwillingness to provide service (which arguably was nevertheless based on a gendered outlook) on grounds of status and identity.

Mr. Tweed put forward the following to explain his unwillingness to provide a basic service in a public and obvious way,

> Mr. Tweed: 'Let's take for example. If I was working in a shop 9-5, that would be unacceptable - why? - It would depend...I don't mind working in a shop but I don't want my friends coming in and being served by me. Having said that I wouldn't mind doing a job in B*** Travel because you're considered to be a consultant, helping them.

Mr. Tweed's comment acknowledges that a travel agent's tasks would not be something other people could reasonably be expected to be capable of performing themselves in the normal course of events. This is in stark contrast to performing functions and undertaking tasks of which people generally would be capable, but deliberately choose not to perform. One of the problems with the images of care and shop work is the perception that anybody is capable of doing it because it is unskilled but most people do not want to. Respondents seek to avoid the jobs involving tasks they perceive others want to avoid. Taking them would indicate that they could achieve nothing better than that which, in their view, most people like them would not accept.

Unskilled manual work, even in male dominated occupations, was also generally considered unappealing by respondents with white collar backgrounds and most of those with a history of skilled manual jobs. Routine manual tasks were seen as "mind-numbingly boring" (Mr. Stevens). Mr. Jeffery who had worked in this environment for most of his life, on the other hand, expected nothing else from work - providing it was well paid.

What constitutes agreeable tasks is much harder to determine. Examples were put forward by respondents when I pushed them to detail tasks they would consider undertaking. Driving (Messrs. Stevens, River and Wright); making and repairing (Messrs. Monty and Peterson); IT related tasks (Messrs. Anthony, River, Terrace and Trebor); drawing - as a draughtsperson (Mr. Wittering); gardening (Messrs. Stevens, Roman and Morgan); a mixture of IT usage and organising - as in stores work (Mr. River); legal work (Mr. Law); scientific research (Mr. Soton); people management tasks (Mr. Anthony); painting and decorating and

furniture removals (Mr. Roman), general handypersons' tasks (Messrs. Monty, Peterson and Watts) and marketing (Mr. Tweed) were all mentioned. Respondents did not think in terms of *all* jobs when they considered what they found agreeable, referring instead to a limited menu consisting of those of which they, or others in their social group, had first hand experience; occupations that shared characteristics with interests or hobbies; or occupations they are exposed to on a regular basis. There was also generally some consistency between respondents' usual tasks and those they are prepared to consider for the future. If one organises tasks on the basis of their broadest occupational classifications - such as craft or clerical, for example - at this level most respondents will not contemplate serious change. There are some notable exceptions, however. Mr. Law, for example, was forced to change direction by ill health, and having undertaking training during his unemployment is leaving behind driving instruction and moving into a legal career. Mr. Monty is considering a craft job in place of his previous sales role because he likes working with his hands and is disillusioned with sales and Mr. Peterson intends to replace his sound recordist job with something to do with 'mending things', because he feels he has a creative manual talent. In general, however, white collar workers will not consider manual work and *vice versa*. This is primarily due to the tasks involved (but also status), which are not seen as matching individual's aptitudes or personalities. One of the approaches to job satisfaction discussed in chapter one predicted that respondents would be interested in tasks that match their personal traits, which may be a partial explanation for respondents' propensity to mention tasks previously undertaken, since these traits are considered reasonably stable and most had enjoyed satisfactory work histories. Respondents also clearly limit what they suggest to that they feel able to do, which favours work similar to that previously undertaken. Another possibility is that respondents limit what they suggest on the basis of what they believe is available.

On a methodological note it is interesting that the scope respondents demonstrate when asked to take the initiative and talk about the sort of tasks they seek is much more limited than that which they demonstrate when offered choices. They therefore appear less/more flexible depending on whether they have to think about the range of tasks they find attractive or whether a range of tasks are put to them. This suggests that the barriers to matches caused by sought occupation in chapter three are overstated, which equally begs the question of why then so few applications are made.

Regardless of the impact of methodology, the attraction of tasks depends not only on a match between the self concept and image of the vacancy and the physical or mental processes involved in undertaking them but, at least in part, on respondents' judgement of how challenging they are. As table 5 shows, amongst those who expressed concern regarding tasks five types are identifiable. Messrs. Roman and River were concerned about tasks, but not about how challenging they were; Mr. Trebor would prefer challenging work

but is resigned to probably not being able to secure it; Mr. Wright lacks the confidence to face challenging tasks seeking work that will leave his mind free from the stresses his previous labour market experiences caused him. Mr. Watts either avoided challenges or approached them with caution. Health problems, crises of confidence and personal stresses tended to push respondents to seek less challenging positions. Mr. Wittering, for example, had been working as a draughtsperson, engaged in challenging tasks, when his life beyond work began to impose too heavily for him to continue to meet challenges in both spheres. Following his recovery from breakdown, when he gladly took a job as a kitchen porter, he was once again seeking challenging tasks at the time of our meeting. Mr. Rich feels his health problems demand challenges.

Messrs. Law and Peterson have actually increased the importance they attach to challenges during their unemployment to over and above that which they experienced in their previous occupations. Being at the point of starting off in new directions and, having tolerated work that they found unchallenging in the past, they seek to avoid the boredom and lack of motivation they associated with it. The former seeks specific challenges, however, whilst the latter is prepared, along with most others who have valued challenges in the past, to consider a fairly wide range.

There are two readily identifiable reasons for the importance attached to challenging tasks: firstly, respondents feel that being entrusted with challenging tasks is recognition of their abilities; and challenging work is considered more interesting than subjectively simple work. Being restricted to simple tasks is found to be personally frustrating and menial tasks do not present sufficient challenges to provide job satisfaction for most respondents. The opportunity to become involved in different aspects of a business and undertake a range of tasks in a number of roles is sought by some because it increases challenges and therefore interest.

Table 5 Respondents' attitudes to challenging tasks

Tasks unimportant	**Tasks matter**				
	Challenges irrelevant	Resigned to undertake non challenging tasks	Avoids challenges	Challenges cautiously sought	Challenges demanded
Collins	River	Trebor	Wright	Watts	Anthony
Jeffery	Roman				Black
Marsh					Law
Floyd					Mitchell
Tome					Monty
					Morgan
					Peterson
					Rich
					Soton
					Stevens
					Terrace
					Tweed
					Wittering

Both a demand for and a denial of challenges lead to inflexibility and, depending on the nature of the labour market in which they occur and the other characteristics of respondents can have equally restrictive effects on application behaviour. In the Bournemouth and Poole District, as the evidence in chapter three suggested, Jobcentre vacancies with tasks that are objectively challenging (as indicated by requirements for qualifications and / or experience) make up a minority.

Finally, it is probable, and important to note, that respondents who positively seek challenges feel psychologically healthy. They hope to be pushed to the limits of their capacity and are unlikely to be subject to the discouraged worker or similar effect. After at least six months unemployment the confidence expressed by respondents in their ability to perform in the face of challenges is surprising given the predicted affects of the experience of unemployment and is a point to which we shall return in the next chapter.

Industry

Industry was mentioned by only a few people, but to them it was an important aspect of vacancies. For some it is relevant because it resonates with the core / periphery or dual labour market debates which suggest that two qualities of employment opportunity run through the labour market. One ideal type is comprised of career structures, pensions, training and advancement and long term jobs; the other is made up of temporary, casual jobs or short term, insecure, poorly paid, dead end jobs where commitment from employers is even less evident than it is generally. Not only does the proportion of vacancies in each of the two groups vary with industry, industry is likely to be the site of this type of distinction for individuals who do not have knowledge of specific companies. Banking and finance or public administration perhaps give the impression of career progression, seniority and pensions, for example; in contrast the hotel and catering sector suffers from an image problem (Keep and Mayhew, 1999). The validity of perceptions is not relevant – what is important is how they act to limit what are considered suitable vacancies.

The hotel and catering sector was almost unanimously rejected as an industry in which suitable vacancies are likely to exist, which is unfortunate since in the area of the study many openings were likely to be in this sector. The unsuitability of the industry lies in a perception of unpredictable working patterns, which makes it unattractive for respondents with caring responsibilities and those who have a restricted view of working hours and days. Hotel and catering work is also thought to lack structures and promotion prospects which, for respondents considering a change and seeking a career, is not thought satisfactory.

Personal experiences also influence how industries are viewed. Memories of careers spent in the 'golden age' and a rejection of the 'progress' made in an industry over recent years changed the regard in which they were held. Telesales, call centres and the sales of energy

door to door does not conform to Mr. Monty's notion of an industry populated by skilled sales people where selling takes place face to face and requires talent, for example. Changes in the way the sales industry conducts itself have detracted from its professionalism, as far as he is concerned, and it has become deskilled. There may be an element of nostalgia in such recollections (see Parry, 2003, p. 240, for example) but the effect of such recall is that vacancies in the respondents' usual industry are considered unsuitable.

The extent to which inflexibility with regard to the acceptability of certain industries affects the opportunity to apply for vacancies again depends on which sectors deter jobseekers and the prevalence of vacancies from those sectors in the jobseekers travel-to-work areas. Equally, disillusionment with one or two industries has less of an effect than where a single industry was viewed as attractive, as it was by a few respondents.

Mr. Black had spent the preceding seven months seeking work in his industry. He acknowledged that this had probably extended his unemployment. He had held out for so long, even though his wife had encouraged him to broaden his search, because of an affective attachment.

> Mr. Black: 'It's the aeroplane industry. My father was a pilot in the air force, I've been a pilot since I was 15 and grew up with aeroplanes and, if you look around the house, you'll see it's full of pictures of planes. It's really this thing; it's the subject I like best of all, all about aeroplanes, more than anything else. It's not vocational though; there's lots of money to be made. Having said that, even if there wasn't I'd do the same given the opportunity'.

Childhood interest and preferences had been augmented by a more social conception of the industry as Mr. Black's career progressed and he perceived what he considered to be its special social status. He was attracted by the image of his industry. For others industries' attractive image was supplemented by the safely and familiarity offered. Mr. Watts, for example, had always worked in engineering following an apprenticeship. He recalled entering the sector in the first place because it was traditional for 'able boys' to do so in the area in which he lived.

> Mr. Watts: 'Maybe I think only women are shop assistants. You would never have heard of a man from a mining village like I came from working in a shop, or doing secretarial work. Most of my family and friends in the early years were miners but I think I was rather ahead of my friends in my younger days - I was probably a bit more high flying, but they were still my friends.'

Mr. Mitchell's attitude epitomised was similar to Mr. Black's, but without the concerns about image. In particular he finds the task in which he had been involved interesting,

> Mr. Mitchell: 'I'd like to go back into a similar thing because it has my interest. I couldn't sit all day with a computer for example.'
>
> Interviewer: 'OK so you'd go in at a lower level than you left on ...'

Mr. Mitchell: 'Let's put it this way. I've tried for an assembly job and that's the lowest level you can get. That wouldn't bother me'.

Interviewer: 'You'd do that willingly?'

Mr. Mitchell: 'Yes, because it's still in the same field.'

Interviewer: 'Is it interest?'

Mr. Mitchell: 'Yes. I mean would you want to sit all day doing a boring job you didn't like? No. I've done it and I can't do it – perhaps because of the way I was brought up. '

Interviewer: 'I'm surprised you said you'd do assembly work. Would it have to be in a particular type of company, would you have to have the prospect of doing something else?'

Mr. Mitchell: 'Yes, yes'.

Interviewer: 'Now that makes sense'.

Although only relevant to a handful of the respondents, the issues raised are interesting. Conformity to family expectations and community norms influenced industrial decisions at the outset. After a period within an industry familiarity meant that it retained a strong pull and that starting again in a different field was viewed in contrast as risky and perhaps too challenging. In some cases respondents retained pride in the industries to which they had committed: in others there was a sense of deskilling and downgrading and rejection. Interest in the main subject area of the industry was also important and encouraged respondents to consider a range of occupations that in other industries they would consider unacceptable. The reputation of particular industries as comprising of a high proportion of peripheral jobs was sufficient for them to be discounted as a potential field in which to train and work.

Pay

Under this heading the way in which reservation wages were set by respondents in the initial stages of their claims is considered, as is the way they changed over time to reach the point shown in table 6. Subsequently we explore barriers to pay flexibility which include attitudes to injustice and exploitation, the economic and finally, the social-psychological.

Changes to reservation wages

Reservation wages at the outset of unemployment

Respondents reported having sought pay that matched that which they were used to earning when they had first become unemployed. There are four sets of circumstances where this is not the case, however. 1) Those who found it necessary to look for less demanding work than that to which they were used, such as Messrs. Marsh, Trebor, or Wittering for example, calculated their reservation wages at the outset on the basis of their basic financial needs only. 2) Respondents who lacked recent labour market experience, such as Messrs. Roman, Tome, and Wright, were without an indication of their labour market value and could not make any temporal comparisons between what they had earned in the past and the level

of wages on vacancies to which they had access. 3) Previously well paid respondents, such as Mr. Rich, altered their understanding of what was important to them - due to religious conversion in his case - and this led them to recast their view of wages entirely. 4) For Mr. River pay levels are always irrelevant because he has eleven children and could never hope to support them without the help of in-work-benefits. Since pay has only a practical dimension for Mr. River he is satisfied with it at any level and does not consider previous earnings when calculating his reservation wages at any stage of his claims.

The most substantial differences between those who set their initial wages with reference to their previous earnings and those who did not were in the main, located beyond the labour market. Those who did not had all experienced some sort of significant event (other than being made unemployed), whether related to health, personal relations, immigration, or religion, for example, that had affected all aspects of their lives. In some circumstances changes due to some personally cataclysmic event made it no longer necessary to equal previous earnings because all that their wages had previously serviced or meant had already been lost or changed. Respondents who felt they had lost everything - and particularly family, health and homes - no longer needed to maintain their usual pay levels, and nor, in some cases, did they feel motivated to do so.

Where the only thing that changed between respondents' circumstances in their last job and the commencement of their unemployment was their job status they initially demanded similar wages, for three reasons. Firstly, if respondents were seeking work of a similar type to that they had undertaken before they simply saw no reason to reduce their demands. Secondly, financial commitments, as Messrs. Black, Floyd and Terrace found, were proportionate to previous salaries and unalterable, at least in the medium term. Thirdly, since they had been earning x they assumed that it was the 'going rate' for the job and their own experiences were the best indication they had of what was a reasonable wage.

Reservation wages at the time of the study

All respondents who had set their reservation wages in relation to previous earnings had reduced them by the time they were interviewed. Those who had started out demanding the minimum clearly were not in a position to do so. Therefore, whilst table 6 describes respondents' attitudes towards the minimum wage and in work benefits at the time of the study, for some it represents change and for others a continuation.

Pay is only entirely irrelevant in very unusual circumstances - where neither physical nor emotional needs make demands in this respect. Mr. Rich was in this position because his wife was the main breadwinner, he did not receive out of work benefits and because neither social status nor recognition was important to him.

Financial incentives and in work benefits are designed to allow jobseekers to accept wages that are lower than they otherwise could, thereby increasing the number of jobs for which

they could are able to apply and consequently their chances of securing employment. Mr. Tweed's quote provides an example of how it should work,

> Mr. Tweed: 'I'd like to live like a human being. I can't afford to eat properly, get laundry done, tooth paste, shaving foam...the normal things of life....which are expensive and take the majority of the £53. The point is that I get more money getting a full time job at £2.00 per hour than I get with my job seekers allowance, because it's £53.90, but if I get a full time job below 15K I get £60.00 per week tax free from the government, extra. It's got to be better.

In work benefits and the minimum wage however, only attend to the practical financial concerns and only barriers such as expressed by the respondents who fell into groups 1 and 2 in table 6 are addressed. Membership of group 1 or 2 is a necessary but insufficient condition for full flexibility, however. Mr. Tweed, for example, could not accept the sort of wage he describes above because the type of job that would offer such a wage would fail to meet his other criteria.

Table 6 Attitudes towards the minimum wage and in work benefits at the time of the study

Group	Definition	Respondents
0	Pay is not an issue because income is not. The minimum wage would be viewed as adequate and would not reflect on work or contravene any sense of justice or worth	Only Mr. Rich appears in this category - it is only open to respondents with alternative means of support
1	The wage is accepted in principle and providing in work benefits were available that improved respondents' financial positions compared to out of work incomes, they would consider work at this rate	Messrs. Marsh, River, Roman, Tome, and Wittering
2	The wage is seen as exploitative but would be accepted if it would allow them to be better off in work	Messrs. Jeffery, Soton, Stevens, Trebor, Tweed, Watts, Wright
3	The minimum wage is rejected in principle and could not be accepted in practice because even with in work benefits incomes would be too low to make such work worthwhile (psychologically or financially) although respondents in this category could be 'bought' by sufficiently high levels of in work benefits	Messrs. Black, Collins, Floyd, Law, Mitchell
4	Even if the minimum wage and in work benefits lead to a significant financial improvement in respondents' positions minimum wages would be unacceptable	Messrs. Anthony, Mast, Monty, Morgan, Peterson, Terrace

Respondents in groups 3 and 4 calculated their minimum pay rates bearing in mind previous earnings and a sense of value they bring to the company or worth. In view of the investments they have made in accumulating human capital, they do not regard the minimum wage and in work benefits as sufficient incentives to warrant pay flexibility. Pay to them is much more than a means of satisfying physical or material needs or wants.

Barriers to pay flexibility

Injustice and exploitation

Mr. Mast faced dilemmas related to a sense of injustice,

> Mr. Mast: 'I look at it [a vacancy] and think why would I do all this work and they're going to pay £4.50 for doing it, when 18 months ago I was earning £10-12 per hour for doing exactly the same thing? That's what I'm comparing and how I'm seeing it.'

He is no less productive now than in the past and resents having to consider accepting rates of pay that are lower than those earned previously for similar work. He is not reliant on earnings as a major source of income and his views are not related in any way to a sense of need. Having to reduce reservation wages from their previous level nevertheless symbolises a lack of power and control.

The package offered by respondents to employers may include characteristics, skills and abilities beyond those required to perform the central tasks involved in many of the most accessible vacancies. In Mr. Trebor's experience, employers have exploited this situation. As a shop assistant, he felt he was used as a book keeper and stock controller – both positions which would usually attract higher levels of pay. The avoidance of such situations in the future is an issue, particularly for respondents who choose not to sell all their skills.

Economic elements

The principal aim of all respondents' reservation wage reductions is to gain access to more jobs that are acceptable in other respects. However, because pay and the other aspects of work that respondents value are generally associated, the opportunity to secure a job that is attractive on other fronts, excluding pay, becomes more remote as pay requirements drop. This recognition leads respondents to reject vacancies paying x amount but does not necessarily indicate that they would be unprepared to work for that amount if they could find vacancies they considered met their other criteria. Many would, if they had sufficient funds, work unpaid at something that meets their other needs, and several currently undertake voluntary work. The perceived association between pay and other job characteristics can therefore be seen as barrier to reducing pay requirements, but for non-financial reasons.

Economic factors prevent reductions in wage requirements due to the correspondence between previous incomes and current commitments. In these circumstances respondents do not feel they can afford to reduce their salary requirements substantially. Whilst there

may be some elasticity in spending, some commitments - such as accommodation - can not easily be reduced. The cost of housing has a major influence upon wage flexibility in this study. For some the impact can not be overstated, particularly since the area is characterised by low wages and expensive accommodation. Mortgage and rental payments are the main expense and financial concern of many respondents.

The cost of private rented accommodation makes many vacancies unacceptable. Even whilst in receipt of housing benefits several respondents have had to subsidize their rental payments from their Job Seekers' Allowance living allowances, because the amount of benefit payable is inadequate to cover their costs of even the most basic accommodation available in the area. Respondents realise that 'in-work' housing benefits, being hardly more generous overall, would not improve their situations in respect of accommodation, which leads to a dismissal of vacancies paying low wages. Mr. Black's wife who offered some comments at the end of our interview acknowledged,

> Mrs. Black: 'My attitude is 'go out there and do 8 hours a day and find something'. But with the benefit system you earn a certain amount and you're worse off and when you take into account housing benefit, especially in this area where the rents are high, so it's not even an option for Alex to earn less than say 200 or more a week. Also when you've had an income of a certain level your expenditure matches that level, your life style. So although you can cut back in certain areas there are some you just can do nothing about so you're limited to a minimum income and that's the situation we're in.'

There are nevertheless factors with the potential to moderate the impact of accommodation costs on wage flexibility - some even increase it. Mr. Trebor had, in the past, taken work (and worked very long hours) that would have been unacceptable on all aspects except for pay, in order to save sufficient funds for a deposit. However, because he was unable or disinclined to sustain such effort in unsatisfying work over the longer term, and because he had difficulty, in any case, meeting rental payments, the cost of accommodation ultimately led to unemployment and then extended duration. He could not afford to take available work. In some senses flexibility is enhanced by a lack of commitment to rented accommodation and the speed with which it can be handed back. Several respondents did not consider their accommodation 'home' and relocation, emotionally at least, was an unproblematic option.

Not only respondents in private rented accommodation are concerned about costs. Several respondents felt their mortgage commitments priced them out of jobs they would otherwise have been happy to accept. Mr. Terrace, as noted above, is very concerned not to sacrifice his mortgage insurance for any posts that would not allow him to comfortably cover his housing costs. Mr. Floyd, whilst uninsured and only receiving Job Seekers' Allowance

payments towards his mortgage, admitted that the majority of local vacancies of which he was aware would not pay him enough to meet the cost of it. However, there is potentially a substantial difference between respondents in private rented and owner-occupied accommodation, mortgaged or otherwise, which is due to the state of the housing market and the equity some of the owner occupiers in the study enjoyed. Mr. Terrace, Mr. Watts and Mr. Floyd suggested that they were in a position to totally change their lives by selling their houses, down-sizing or relocating and realising their capital. For Mr. Terrace and Mr. Watts jobs which in other circumstances would have been considered inadequate due to social status or remuneration, for example, could be interpreted as acceptable - as 'little jobs to keep [them] active' if they sold up and recast their lives. For Mr. Floyd many more jobs would be realistically available, or he could start his own business. The effect of housing tenure is, therefore, varied and in combination with other circumstances any given tenure can act to increase or decrease wage flexibility.

Other factors that may arise in relation to economic restrictions on pay include the position the respondent occupies in their life course. Some recalled prioritising pay and sacrificing other aspects of work in the past, in response to the needs or demands of their families. As families had become independent they were no longer subjected to these pressures. When the interviews took place only three respondents had young families and most of the others who had been guided by these concerns in the past were divorced or separated and facing altogether different financial pressures.

I noted earlier that some respondents who appear inflexible do so because previously earnings were as low as possible in the presence of a minimum wage, or because previously pay only just served to meet subsistence requirements. Mr. Stevens expressed the view succinctly,

> Mr. Stevens: 'I don't know really, I think everyone who's working should have enough to pay for their place and have a bit over. Sometimes it looks like they just expect you to work, eat and sleep'.

Respondents who expect to earn at this level do not have the opportunity to increase accessible vacancies or show their flexibility by accepting lower wages.

Finally, as Mr. Mast makes clear, there are strategic reasons for putting off reductions. He recognises that lower pay may be acceptable, where it can be afforded, were it not for the long term damage it is perceived to do to chances of ever returning to the type of job previously enjoyed and still aimed for,

> Mr. Mast: 'If I accept a job, if I give in and accept a job at that sort of pay, when I go for another, and they ask what you've been earning, they think OK, we need only pay him that. Then you've reached the bottom, so the longer you can hold off from the bottom the better.'

Or, as Mr. Anthony put it,

Mr. Anthony: 'If I take a job that is paying 15K, and then find a job that is suitable for my experience and knowledge that pays 40K, a lot of people will look at current salary, and ask how, on 15K can you be good enough to earn 40K now?

Social-psychological concerns

All respondents had reduced their reservation wages but some found doing so more difficult than others. Reduction was described as painful and perceived negatively because of the way it reflects on abilities, competences and, indirectly, on social status and recognition. Respondents who were unperturbed psychologically about the need to do so either interpreted the necessity in such a way as to ease their discomfort or appeared genuinely unconcerned about the compromises they had to make.

Four ways in which reservation wage reductions were perceived are identifiable. As noted above, respondents who sought less demanding occupations had reduced their wage requirements at the outset and were able to adjust them over time in the light of available work without any psychological distress, although practical barriers remained. These respondents recognise that if they accept work that is less demanding or productive than their previous work they will be paid less well - this is one of the reasons that jobseekers hold out for work that matches their abilities and prevents them from being under-employed, as the economic literature suggests. Respondents such as Mr. Wright, for example, are comfortable discounting previous pay from calculations of future demands, because they have chosen not to work at the level they previously occupied. Pay reductions from this point of view do not reflect negatively upon individuals - pay is seen as reflecting the value of the tasks they are prepared to undertake, not their own value.

Relatedly some respondents recognised that their capacity had been reduced and they, too, were able to make changes to their wage requirements without much anguish. They recognised that they are less productive, even in their usual occupations, and certainly beyond them, than they were previously. Poor health and a lack of recent practice generally accounted for their perceived reduction in capacity.

The exogenous attribution of downward pressure on pay - such as the economic climate, or a scarcity of relevant posts within a travel to work area - also made reductions less painful. Additionally, whether or not evidence supports the position, older respondents identified age discrimination as a barrier to obtaining work and particularly at the sorts of salaries they have been used to earning. This has both a negative and a positive effect. Their sense of injustice at having to be more able for the same pay than younger applicants; being just as able but having to demand less; or having to restrict themselves to work for which they are over experienced or qualified, was palpable. However, they do not feel personally responsible for their victimisation and clearly can not see their age as a sign of failure. The perception of age discrimination is primarily frustrating but, in a paradoxical way, also

uplifting. It prevents the need for self-examination in the search for causes of continuing failure. A similar strategy was noted in relation to Mr. Roman and his claim that 'there's nothing out there', which has a comparable effect on the extent to which respondents have to look to themselves for the source of their lack of success. Equally, when respondents feel pushed by Jobcentre staff to reduce their wage requirements to what they consider to be too low a level, they are able to view demands as unreasonable and consider that they would be selling themselves short were they to accept such wages. Despite a good deal of resistance on occasions some have felt forced to apply for low paid work, but they have done so in the knowledge that they were being used in an attempt to meet targets, rather than because the pay reflected their value. In these circumstances pay requirements were lowered without the respondent suffering psychologically.

Two additional factors moderate the impact of pay reductions. Firstly, they are at their least psychologically painful the shorter the distance the respondent had progressed from entry level pay. Individuals who have not moved far up the career ladder (or fill occupations without career opportunities) have less to lose by starting again. Secondly, in occupations and industries with a narrow dispersion of salaries pay is a less obvious signifier of success than where the range is large: reductions can, in these circumstances, be less painful. In both cases however, the practical scope to accept a wage reduction (by the lowest earners) may be reduced by the very circumstances that make it psychologically acceptable to do so.

Distress occurred, in the main, where the respondent could not understand the reasons for their failure to secure work at the pay levels they expected and could not identify any external cause. They tended then to look inwards for a reason. Mr. Morgan admitted that during a previous unemployment spell he had actually wondered whether his weight was to blame for his failure to succeed. Mr. Mast is unsure of the extent of his culpability,

> Mr. Mast: 'I don't know why I haven't got a job. I don't think I've done anything wrong. I went for an interview last week and I'd like some feed back as to why I didn't get it.'

This lack of knowledge makes it impossible for respondents to feel they can do anything to improve their chances, other than reduce their salary requirements. Doing so is uncomfortable because they understandably interpret pay as reflecting their worth or value, which has apparently reduced for reasons they do not understand and which are beyond their control.

So attitudes towards pay consist of a number of dimensions which are of varying importance to respondents (with the exception of Mr. Rich). A sense of justice, economic and social-psychological position all play a part in respondents' flexibility regarding pay. Only economic concerns, and far from all of them, are addressed by in work benefits and the minimum wage.

Social status and recognition

The social status and recognition provided by a job is relevant only to respondents whose identities have been and continue to be formed in relation to the labour market. Table 7 shows three groups into which responses can be sorted. Respondents in groups 1 and 2 do not evaluate themselves with reference to their labour market position, for reasons we will consider in the next chapter. Some had done in the past but circumstances have led them to alter their positions either as self-defence mechanisms, or, in the case of Mr. Rich, with a sense of freedom at no longer being thus constrained. The labour market provides respondents in group 3 a) with a sense of identity based on a self perception fed by their technical ability, independence and the fulfilment of breadwinning roles. This is distinct from the way the labour market contributes to the self-evaluation of respondents in 3 b) for whom the perception of others and of society as a whole is crucial.

Social status

Four reasons to reject vacancies on social grounds can be identified amongst respondents in group 3 b) i). Firstly, some are anxious not to appear as if they possess similar characteristics to those they perceived typically occupy inferior jobs. Secondly, respondents felt taking an inferior job would undermine their self-esteem directly due to the incongruence between their self-concept and the social status of the post. Thirdly, there were those who felt that in comparison with the social status of the posts held by significant others they would appear to fail in such jobs. Messrs. Morgan, Peterson, Watts and Tweed were particularly burdened with this view. Fourthly, some felt that the social status of jobs were unsatisfactory in comparison with those they had previously occupied. This was not only because they were incongruent with the self-concept developed in earlier work, but also in the light of concerns about what downward mobility indicated to others about performance and capability. Messrs. Anthony and Black shared this perception.

In all cases where social status was relevant respondents were more concerned to avoid demeaning low status work, than to secure a particularly high status job. Since one of the reasons for wanting work is to boost self-esteem - which in the case of these respondents stems from social approval - and to remove any stigma of unemployment, it is considered self-defeating to compromise on this aspect of work. For some for whom social status was important concerns affected their application behaviour to a substantial degree. Mr. Morgan, for example, was anxious about issues involving both social comparison and the perception of others.

Table 7 Sources of identity

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3		
Labour market participation has never been relevant to self-evaluation	Labour market participation has been but is no longer relevant to self-evaluation	Labour market participation is relevant to self-evaluation		
		a) Personal aspects	b) Social aspects	
		Duty Being useful Independence Technical ability	i) Status	ii) Recognition
Jeffery Roman Tome Trebor	Collins[45] Marsh Rich Wittering Wright	Floyd Mast Stevens	Anthony Black Law Mitchell Morgan Peterson Soton Terrace Tweed Watts	Anthony Black Law Mast Mitchell Monty Morgan Peterson River Soton Stevens Terrace Tweed

> Mr. Morgan: 'I've seen suppliers and reps I've worked with years ago and if I was on a till in a gift shop, no disrespect, you know, they'd say "what the hell's happened to him". I think that's what I fear.....'

His concerns have little to do with friendship or social relationships. The people he is concerned will judge him are acquaintances at best; sales reps with whom he had come into contact with through work, for example - others with whom he no longer has contact at all. He had not made close friends since moving to the area twelve years ago and had not stayed in touch with friends from his previous home. He compares his achievements with what those of the people with whom he shared his adolescence and time at university. He looks at the expectations he, his family and friends had and compares them with his achievements. Visiting web sites and finding details of the successes of his friends from school was an unwise pastime,

> Mr. Morgan: 'I've been looking on Friends Reunited lately, looking back. "I'm the MD of such and such".... I'm not telling them anything. I feel ashamed'.

And,

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[45] Groups are not mutually exclusive in practice but are treated as such for clarity here by taking dominant sources of identity. Mr. Collins, for example, has consciously tried to move from group 3 and base self-evaluations on other grounds, as suggested in the psychology literature (see Leidner, 1991; or Eichar, Norland, Brady and Fortinsky, 1991, for example), but the transition is as yet incomplete and his well being suffers as a result of the dissonance he experiences.

Interviewer: 'It's presumably not the task content of jobs that you object to – you've got mucky doing your mum's garden'.

Mr. Morgan: 'Oh no, I'd be happy doing anything if I was self-employed doing it. You know, if some one saw me I've got my own business. It's a perception, a hang up I've got'.

This 'hang up' makes it possible for Mr. Morgan to consider working a night shift stacking shelves in a supermarket, but not a day shift, when he could be seen by people he knows. He fears downward mobility; a failure to meet the expectations he has for himself, based on his social background and early achievements; and social comparison.

Mr. Tweed expressed similar sentiments but they are clearly based on his relationships with his current friends, which he hopes to maintain. To work in a shop would break the tacit understandings of equality that underpin his friendships. Working in a travel agent, which, as noted in relation to tasks, he would be prepared to do, implies some exclusive knowledge on the incumbent's part, which is of some value in balancing relationships.[46] The issue of social status is highlighted for Mr. Tweed because his friendship group is tightly knit and homogeneous in terms of labour market experiences, having been formed during past successes and revolving around an exclusive local club. Mr. Tweed's attitudes, and the behaviour resulting from them, are shared by members of his group, as suggested by Hayakawa (2000), for example. Mr. Watts' experiences in a bar showed how a small diversion from typical circumstances can alter perceptions with regard to how the status of work is viewed. He was satisfied with the job he obtained helping his friend run his pub because he was taken on because he was a friend and was helping out. Most importantly, since Mr. Watts was normally one of their number on the other side of the bar, customers / friends were aware of the situation.

Mr. Peterson is not as direct in his acknowledgement of the relevance of social status. His main friendship group revolves around a team sport, and is comprised of people from diverse backgrounds and occupations. Status has never been an issue with these friends and any influence they have does not push Mr. Peterson in one occupational direction more than any other. Family however, do influence his attitude,

Mr. Peterson: 'I would shudder to think what my in-laws would say if I suddenly started working at KS [a supermarket]'.

Mr. Peterson's perception is such that he feels that the way in which the social status of an occupation reflects his capacities and capabilities would form part of his relatives' overall impression of him. His non-work identity would be undermined by the lowly status of such a

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[46] Such small distinctions are unfortunately lost in the process of categorising vacancies with Standard Occupational Classification codes, creating a misleading picture of the sort of work that is in demand. This matters on a local level because Jobcentres market their services to employers in the light of jobs sought by their unemployed clientele. At a national level such data are used to describe the occupational characteristics of the unemployed.

labour market position, as far as they are concerned. The status of work is also important to Mr. Peterson personally, regardless of his family's impressions.

> Mr. Peterson: 'I have a perception as to who I am, where I am and I'd hate to destroy ....even though it would probably do me good to. I'd hate to lose my own level, whatever that may be.'

Mr. Peterson's comments are understandable in terms of the need for congruence between self-concept and the social status of vacancies. To take a job that does not match respondents' self-concepts can be more damaging than remaining unemployed and able to continue to consider options. If unemployment can be viewed as a transitory state it does not necessarily have to reflect failure, but can be seen instead as a period of contemplation and consideration. If hope of a positive future can be maintained, it can provide the opportunity to thoroughly investigate alternative careers, at least for a time. Several respondents had successfully interpreted their unemployment in this way. Taking a job, on the other hand, infers that a decision has been made and if too many compromises, in terms of status in this case, have been necessary it may feel like a failure which is even harder to live with than unemployment. Additionally, if the disutility of unemployment is limited because it allows redress of a perceived work / life imbalance, for example, or financial pressures are not too great, a transitory state is a much more attractive alternative.

Mr. Anthony presents the fourth type of concern expressed regarding status - how the status of future work compares with work he has previously enjoyed. This position is not motivated by any worry about exploitation and is distinct from the apparently similar concerns voiced by Mr. Trebor and Mr. Mast. Instead Mr. Anthony is concerned to avoid downward social mobility. Downward mobility would not only be incongruent with his self-concept but it would contravene his expectation, based on the past performance, of a positive career trajectory, and work that continues in that direction, an important point to which we will return in chapter five.

The data presented above provide details of some of the motivation respondents have for placing restrictions on the social status of work they would be prepared to accept. Accounts make clear that for some respondents status is so important as to outweigh, theoretically at least, the value of task enjoyment. Public image, as well as self evaluation, is more important than the substance and content of a job.

It should be noted that most respondents for whom labour market participation is relevant to identity but who claim status is not and has never been an issue, cite other reasons for not wanting to undertake this or that low status job. There may be an element of social desirability in this sort of response. It is difficult to admit to turning down work on the grounds of the status without simultaneously denigrating those who accept it, and this may be an uncomfortable position for an unemployed individual, as Mr. Soton's language suggests with reference to the tasks and environment involved in factory work,

Mr. Soton: 'Well, it's.....I believe that there are obviously people who are quite happy doing it, sitting there all day every day and they've obviously got something else going on in their heads, you know. I think there are certain people who can do that and be happy with it, but I couldn't.'

Whilst accepting work of low social status is undesirable, admitting that one refuses to do so can be also.

Recognition

Table 7 suggested that for virtually all respondents for whom identity is a function of labour market participation, recognition is important. The confidence placed in an individual - when they are appointed to a new position, for example - is felt to be based on recognition of their talent and capability, providing the position meets certain criteria. Salary is considered an overt signal of recognition, which is one of the reasons that respondents demonstrate pay inflexibility, regardless of the financial consequences of doing so.

Mr. Anthony: 'I believe I'm worth around the 50K mark. Taking a job at 30K would be quite painful.'

Interviewer: 'Painful how?..... In terms of self-esteem / concept, or lack of purchasing power?'

Mr. Anthony: 'Both, but more in terms of self-esteem. I've worked so hard to get to the position I have reached. I wouldn't like to go backwards, who would?'

Seniority or the level in an organisational or occupational hierarchy to which a jobseeker is recruited is another sign of recognition. Incumbency of posts offering autonomy and freedom from supervision also demonstrates recognition of certain positive characteristics, skills or abilities.

Messrs. Black and Mast demanded jobs involving subjectively complex tasks not only because they found them more interesting to perform than simple ones. Appointment to posts of this type indicates recognition of skills and abilities.

Mr. Black: 'I like to feel involved. If I feel I'm being under-utilised then I get disillusioned very quickly.'

Interviewer: 'Is that the same as saying you fear that people won't want as much from you as you know you're capable of offering, rather than being under valued in the sense of money?'

Mr. Black: 'Yeh. It's that they don't ask anything of me. That's the most horrifying thing. In fact that's what made me leave the last company. The guy who came in decided just to do things his way.'

Or,

Mr. Mast: 'I enjoyed working on my own and being given a remit of what has to be done and being left alone to do it. I don't like a line manager that

stands there and cracks a whip over your back, "have you done this yet, have you done that yet". No, give me a challenge and a deadline and let me get on with it.'

A responsible post, as Mr Trebor suggests, indicates that one possesses positive characteristics,

Interviewer: 'Why did you want more responsibility?'

Mr. Trebor: 'It demonstrates they trust you....you're trusted to do a job.'

Interestingly, the failure to secure employment does not appear to have led to individuals abandoning the importance of labour market participation to their self-concept or to adopting defensive positions. On the other hand, taking work that is experienced negatively, in order to limit duration does seem to have had this effect. In principle, respondents in group two can now take jobs they do not value and do not feel are valued generally, (although for other reasons, such as contract, pay or environment they will not do so) without feeling devalued themselves. Messrs. Law and River, in contrast, both consider recognition an important aspect of future work, even though it was not something that they felt had been important in the past. This, as we will see later, is related to the fact that they have recently invested in acquiring new skills.

Overall there is then a general lack of compromise regarding recognition. Respondents admit the value of recognition both in the past and with respect to the future more easily that they do social status. This is arguably because they feel justified in seeking it. They sense they have something tangible that should be recognised, whether it is a qualification, experience or some other quality. Additionally, claiming such does not infer any particular position in relation to others.

Environment

Physical environment

Inflexibility regarding physical and social environment was limited to less than half the sample. The strength with which it was felt, the effect it is likely to have on the number of vacancies accessible to respondents and my own anecdotal evidence led me to include them as aspects of work that require consideration.

There is a danger in accepting comments on face value and confusing respondents' motivation with a desire to avoid certain tasks. This quote from Mr. Roman demonstrates the problem,

Mr. Roman: 'I'd rather be working than unemployed though'.

Interviewer: 'But not if you had to work indoors?'

Mr. Roman: 'No. I couldn't do that. It's too claustrophobic. I can't be indoors'.

Mr. Roman lives in a small flat without suffering from claustrophobia. Arguably, Mr. Roman's reluctance to consider indoor work stems from the fact that he finds all the indoor jobs that occur to him (and they are very limited in range)[47] unattractive - for reasons other than environment. If his aspirations were more diverse and a wider range of vacancies occurred to him when he considered indoor work, his application behaviour may be more flexible in terms of environment. This example demonstrates the importance of deconstructing vacancies and occupations when investigating unemployment. In my experience jobseekers frequently say they want to work out doors for this type of reason.

I felt there was a difference between the forgoing position and that of Mr. Stevens.

> Interviewer: 'Is it [his reluctance to work in a supermarket] anything to do with the fact that those sorts of organisations are typically populated by women?'
>
> Mr. Stevens: 'No, I'm thinking of a bloke and him standing under a strip light all day. I'm just not into inside you know...you know the sort of guy who does it, with a pale face that never sees the sun....It would be, "someone's gone mad in Sainsbury's and killed 5 people", you know. People know what they would be prepared to do, no matter what and how bad their situation...you just know – they can't force somebody. If someone said I had to do that job I'd leave the country or do something illegal.'

Mr. Stevens perceives a difference between working in the hanger type environment of a supermarket or in a studio or workshop which he would be happy to do. Distinctions such as these are not reflected in occupational codes and classifications. His and Mr. River's preference for driving work stems from a wish to be out and about,

> Mr. River: 'I don't want to go back in doors like I was at the printing company. That was fine because I knew everybody and we had a laugh and lunch times we'd kick a ball around, but I just want to be out on the road, basically.'

Stated desire for particular environments perhaps says more about a need for freedom from surveillance and a change of scene on a regular basis than it does about a love of driving or the desire to actually be outside travelling around.

Social environment

Comments about being most uncomfortable working in a factory environment, equally, may have had little to do with the physical aspects of the environment - it was not because of the

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[47] If jobseekers were equipped with greater levels of human capital they may have been able to apply for more of the vacancies, and these may, importantly, be more suited to their demands. High levels of human capital (of the right sort) should, in theory, equip jobseekers with the ability to apply for objectively more attractive vacancies. However, if one accepts that recruitment processes are far from standardised, unbiased, meritocratic or transparent this would not necessarily be the case and the result of enhancing human capital could potentially be greater levels of underemployment as discussed.

noise of the machines or the indoor nature of the work that Mr. Morgan had decided that factory work did not suit him. The relationships he observed were the source of his concern. The relationships developed in employment are one of the latent benefits of working and were mentioned by some when they spoke of what they had enjoyed in their previous occupations and sought in future ones,

> Mr. Peterson: 'In my previous job there wasn't much of a social thing...but I enjoyed the interaction...you enjoy seeing someone you know, one of the lads might come in with a hang-over and you have a go about that – you just, all the interaction that happens on a daily basis being with other people.'

Or,

> Mr. River: 'In the end there's just you two and the children, no outside input. At work people will come in and say 'hey did you see the football?' or whatever and there's something new to talk about.'

Respondents who expected to be able to secure only jobs that failed to satisfy any other aspects of work (except pay) preferred work that was not isolating. Mr. Tome had worked for a couple of days in a job as part of a scheme and his main complaint was that he had had to work alone. Mr. Collins had found the only benefit of working (again other than pay) was the social interaction. For Mr. Marsh, one of the attractions of securing work *per se* was to end the isolation he experienced during his unemployment. These respondents did not demand to mix with certain types of people and their inflexibility in this respect is unlikely to reduce the number of vacancies that would otherwise be suitable greatly. Even the most unattractive jobs usually take place in a social environment, and this was all that the most flexible respondents asked.

Mr. Black and Mr. Anthony, on the other hand, continue to want to work with particular like minded people because they enjoyed the recognition and adrenalin rush derived from doing so in the past and associate positive experiences with such surroundings. Mr. Wright insists on avoiding working in a social environment in which he feels he will not be mixing with people with whom he has common interests. His lightly veiled comments perhaps reflect his gendered view of the nature of some occupations and his preference for working in a male dominated environment - in his case because he prefers working with males for the camaraderie and 'buddyism' doing so allows. His account of past experiences is littered with references to 'guys' and 'blokes'. The preferences of other respondents whose attitude to female dominated work are similar, are based on the generally low social status of feminised occupations and how they perceive it reflects on male incumbents to be participating in 'women's work'.

Contract

There are three aspects of contracts about which respondents expressed concern: whether they were full time or part time; the hours and days of work i.e. 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, for example; and whether they were temporary or permanent.

Part-time work is seen as very awkward by respondents because of complex benefit rules, doubts about in work benefits and a lack of faith in the system as a safety net. The general attitude towards incomes in and out of work is not so much related to concern with being better off (in work that is otherwise desirable) but to avoid being worse off. In most cases being worse off is something respondents can not countenance. Two respondents (Mr. Trebor and Mr. Watts) had worked whilst signing on and declared money they had earned on a part-time basis. Neither would have done so, however, had they not gained a great deal of enjoyment from the work because they found the system difficult to understand and that they were no better off financially working than they had been not doing so.

In a couple of unusual cases part-time work (over 16 hours which alters applicable benefits, but less than 30) with set hours and in work benefits, was actually sought in order to avoid full time work. Mr. Wright, for example, had enlisted the aid of his Jobcentre counsellor and a plan had been developed to allow him to work the minimum hours feasible in combination with in work benefits, permitting him sufficient spare time to undertake his hobbies which have gained in significance to him as his disillusionment with the labour market has grown. Mr. Rich sought two part-time jobs to provide the variety he craved, to maximise a sense of freedom, and obtain a satisfactory life / work balance. Especially in the face of priorities that stem from beyond the labour market, non-standard work can appear attractive and, as Mr. Rich's case shows, membership of 'Generation X' is not a prerequisite of a post-modern work ethic (Cannon, 1997, p.41-42), which recasts the 'nine to five - jobs for life' ideal. In the absence of financial need others, too, would have been happy with part-time work, which would not necessarily have had to meet all the usual criteria. Part-time work is seen as less defining than full-time work, with non-work roles becoming more central to the self-concept. I previously noted Messrs. Watts and Terrace's possible plans to re-order their lives and take 'little' (Mr. Watts) part time jobs. The association between part time and 'little', however, (which was not confined to Mr. Watts) is one of the reasons respondents with career plans were loathe to consider part time work, regardless of the financial consequences of doing so.

As we saw in chapter three, contracts frequently stipulate working beyond what some jobseekers consider usual hours and days - outside those to which they have become accustomed over the course of their working lives. Others make it impossible for employees to plan care or meet personal commitments given changing patterns or unsociable working hours, creating imbalance in the life / work relationship. Concern with hours and days of work was split amongst the sample. One group are inflexible in respect of the hours and

days they are prepared to work because they do not intend to 'live to work', rather than 'work to live' (Mr. Mitchell).

> Mr. Mast: 'I don't want to travel to Poole, thank you very much, not to have to leave home at 7.30 and have to work a 40 hour week. I'm looking for about 35/36 hours per week. Everybody's looking for less hours these days not more and jobs down here seem to work more hours.'

Mr. Mitchell would not consider vacancies in the retail sector because of the weekend working involved. He felt, however, that he would have considered such work in the days of Sunday closure, suggesting that it is the nature of contracts rather than other aspects of retail work that puts him off. Neither Messrs. Mast nor Mitchell is prepared to increase their flexibility regarding hours to secure an otherwise desirable job at the level and of the sort they want. This is surprising because both respondents are seeking relatively high powered jobs. In relation to these jobs respondents at the other end of the scale presumed, as a matter of course, that it would be necessary to be fully flexible: they would work any hours, 24/7. Mr Terrace, for example, would 'work all hours', but not in the way that Mr. Jeffery had had to in order to supplement his wages with overtime. Instead Mr. Terrace, like Mr. Tweed, feels that at the level at which he hopes to work he would be expected to show commitment to the organisation and is prepared to make sacrifices in respect of his work / life balance in order to achieve his labour market aims. Respondents sharing this perspective took a certain amount of pride in the fact, perceiving that non-standard hours indicated their indispensability and value to companies. Mr. Morgan told me with pleasure that he had worked on the company's IT systems at home over the weekend for exactly this reason.

There are three sets of circumstances in which a limited number of respondents will consider applying for temporary work, when most would not on grounds of financial risk. One set of circumstances in which temporary work was viewed favourably was when it conformed to precisely the sort of work the respondent was seeking and was seen as a potential stepping stone to permanent work in a sought after occupation. The second is indicative of a very different labour market position. Temporary or casual work had been taken in the past, and would be considered acceptable in the future, where respondents lack confidence in securing permanent work. They are aware that this sort of work is not a route to anywhere other than back to the Jobcentre, but as an alternative to unemployment, providing it is reasonably well paid and not isolating, it is considered appealing. The third reason temporary work is seen as acceptable concerns the nature of the industry or occupation in which work is sought. Mr. Watts and Mr. Soton are both prepared to take temporary work because it is usual practice in their normal jobs.

Respondents also gave a couple of reasons for not wanting to accept temporary work. The first and most common was an unwillingness to sign off benefits in the knowledge that in a

short space of time a new claim would have to be made with all the aggravation and delays that entailed. According to Mr. Stevens,

> Mr. Stevens: 'Housing benefit is the worst, they take ages. I've got to be sure about the business. I haven't got a buffer if it goes wrong. I can't afford to take a risk – I'd be out on the street.'

The second reason for not accepting it is particularly relevant to the older members of the sample. They sense that as they grow older jobs will become harder to secure and that taking temporary work guarantees they will have to start searching again as time passes.

> Interviewer: 'What makes you apply for some jobs but not others?'
>
> Mr. Trebor: 'Transport availability; whether it's likely to be a short term contract...'
>
> Interviewer: 'You don't want that?'
>
> Mr. Trebor: 'No I don't. I'm too old. I haven't got enough time left to go through this every six months.'

Discussion

In this chapter respondents' main concerns regarding future work have been identified and explored. Some of the employers' demands and jobseekers' characteristics and *vice versa* which appeared to be incongruent and prevented matches in the quantitative study have been considered in more depth. Responses show that concepts such as occupation or pay consist of several component parts each of which needs to be recognised in order for the attractiveness of vacancies to be understood and improved. They also suggest that some respondents are much more flexible than others and in respect of different aspects of work.

Amongst other things, we have seen that a reservation wage reflects more than the level of income a respondent requires in order to be financially better off in work, and it is consequently questionable whether pay is susceptible to engineering via in work benefits. For some respondents, who view pay as an entirely practical aspect of work, they are. For others pay holds more symbolic significance and evokes social and psychological sentiments.

Equally an assumption that occupations involving repetitive tasks are considered unattractive because they are not seen to be capable of providing interest is well founded but an over simplification. Respondents question the capacity of this sort of work to restore, or allow them to maintain, a positive self concept and ask how they can achieve recognition undertaking tasks that anybody is able to perform and at which there is no opportunity to shine.

The care, retail and hotel and catering industries produce a large proportion of the vacancies advertised in the Bournemouth and Poole district. Some respondents were concerned with practical problems associated with the sorts of 'non-standard' contract that is seen to be prevalent, particularly in the hotel and catering industry. The reputation of these sectors can

also be of concern to respondents who fear that any move into them would damage their future prospects, given the perceived lack of career structure and poor rates of pay by which they are characterised. Discussion of hypothetical situations in which respondents sold up and moved abroad or retired and looked for jobs as a diversion showed a different interpretation. Fear of irreversibly falling off a career path clearly only played a part in respondents' resistance to vacancies where they continued to see themselves as employees. Once they viewed themselves as beyond the labour market there was little that separated them in terms of flexibility from students, for example, who take poorly paid, unskilled and temporary jobs because they do not yet define themselves as workers or because they know that their actions now will have little bearing on their future prospects. Whilst the social status of vacancies in these industries was generally thought to be a concern by those for whom status was an issue, even they would have been prepared to consider such work if they could have believed that it would lead them back onto a career path and not permanently mark them as losers in the labour market. Vacancies from these sectors are also ill regarded because they generally involve providing service. The provision of service in itself is not necessarily a concern for respondents, as long as it is of a type that demonstrates the workers possession of superior or professional knowledge. Despite efforts to professionalise the sectors with the introduction of NVQs etcetera, respondents perceive that the services provided could be performed by anybody who chooses to undertake them but that members of the social groups with whom they identified chose not to.

The way in which I have defined environment means that it includes the social and physical. Respondents who were the most flexible regarding the nature of future work were amongst the least flexible in respect of the environments in which they would work. That is not to say that their inflexibility was necessarily based on complex preferences about colleagues, but merely that they demanded to work with other people *per se*. Social interaction was the only reward, over and above subsistence, demanded by some respondents. Others had strong views about physical environment, partly based on what may be seen as an ecological position and partly due to the sorts of jobs they realised would be open to them, given their characteristics, in particular physical environments. Although restrictions regarding environment appear to lack the complex basis of restrictions associated with other aspects of work, they have a potentially large impact on the numbers of vacancies considered suitable by jobseekers: an insistence on performing 'any outdoor work' clearly preludes 'any indoor work' from consideration, and *vice versa*. Equally a desire to work with others, regardless of who they are, also reduces the number of vacancies a jobseeker would consider suitable.

Contract was treated as a necessary restriction in the preceding chapter, where we found that most of the sample sought full time work and hours and days of work which we assumed were permitted by advisors because they were essential to meet child care,

financial commitments or the availability of transport, for example. This study shows, however, that contract is also important to respondents for reasons that are other than strictly practical. Casual or part time may be viewed as tarnished since contract reflects the importance and demands of a job and a part time or temporary contract does not imply sought after gravitas; concern about where the stepping stones to which part time or temporary work potentially provide may lead deters respondents from considering it on affective, as well as practical grounds.

Responses have shown that being better off financially in work is not in itself satisfactory. Without this awareness of what is important to respondents it is possible to believe that they can be 'bought off' with in work benefits; coerced from the welfare system by the implementation of stricter benefit regimes; or that their unemployment stems from idleness or alternative value systems. Responses have shown that this not the case. They have also demonstrated that respondents will consider a wider range of tasks than are inferred by the three occupational choices recorded in chapter three, which, in turn, suggests that more vacancies than were revealed there are likely to be acceptable, at least on this superficial basis. Whilst the quantitative study revealed three of the occupations respondents were seeking we have uncovered here what these occupations represented for them. We have found that to be considered worthy of applications vacancies have to meet many more criteria than those we tested for in the quantitative work where it was not possible to deconstruct subjective attitudes towards occupations as we now have. In some cases respondents as a result appear choosier than they did. Whether or not their restrictions are considered legitimate depends on how society views them. Any judgement of the legitimacy of inflexibility with regard to chosen restrictions necessarily involves an understanding of their source as does an appreciation of differences in levels of inflexibility observed, and perhaps the knowledge to minimise it also. Accordingly in the next chapter we are going to consider respondents' work histories, unemployment experiences and biographical data as these are the factors that appear to have the strongest influence on the flexibility reported.

Chapter 5 Past & present - factors that affect flexibility

'The past and the future co-mingling in the social construction of the present'

(Reitzes and Mutran, 1994, p. 313)

In preceding chapters aspects of work about which respondents found it difficult to be flexible, and difference in the extent to which they were prepared to be, were identified. Here we investigate some of the basis for the diversity observed and provide a fuller understanding of why people, who say they want to work and dislike being unemployed, are inflexible about the work they are prepared to undertake. To do this we explore elements of past work histories, unemployment experiences and biographical circumstances. Firstly, however, the basis for the selection of these elements and why they are considered to offer some insight into the (in)flexibility displayed, are discussed.

I have concentrated on work histories because they are respondents' proof of their abilities and labour market value. They also offer justification for and, in a sense, legitimise respondents' demands. It is one thing to want to enter an occupation on the grounds of possession of the relevant qualifications, or merely desire, but another to seek to remain in it once one has proven one's ability through tenure. Work histories show to respondents themselves, Job Centre staff, society and researchers alike what has been possible. They remove the need to understand employers' foibles or to make judgements about the reasonableness of an individuals' aim to fit into a particular occupation and the doubts involved in such a process. They are arguably the respondents' best evidence of what they can reasonably expect from the labour market.

Each respondent had not only been unemployed for different lengths of time but the spell of unemployment during which I spoke to them fell at diverse points in their varied work histories. In some cases this was the first spell an individual had experienced in what they considered otherwise a long and successful work history; in others our meetings took place during one of many spells that had littered their recent past, following what they recalled as a relatively successful period; and a third group of respondents had work histories that had been interspersed with periods of unemployment throughout. These differences, as we shall see, were reflected in responses and are discussed, together with work histories themselves, in the first section of the following.

Unemployment experiences are explored because some respondents revealed that their flexibility was driven by the desire to escape the experience and that virtually any work was felt to be attractive in comparison. Other respondents felt that it was in their interests to tolerate the situation rather than consider taking a wide range of jobs. I wanted to know how varied unemployment experiences contributed to this difference and to consider whether the impact would in fact be more usefully seen in terms of different expectations of work, rather than experiences of unemployment - in terms of the relative importance of unemployment

push and labour market pull. For some respondents a strong pull from the labour market was a condition necessary but insufficient to dislodge them from unemployment; for others the push of the unemployment experiences alone was almost adequate. In the second section we will look more closely at some of the circumstances which impact on the way in which unemployment is endured and the effect of that experience on flexibility.

The artificiality of isolating responses about work histories and unemployment is acknowledged. The 'snap-shot' nature of the study means that recollections of work histories are filtered through the experience of unemployment and recall is likely to be tainted by that experience. The division is nonetheless necessary, since both work history and unemployment potentially have an effect on levels of (in)flexibility, but can pull in different directions and involve different responses. Equally, as discussed previously, it is the respondents' recall and interpretation of events, not the objective facts, such as they are, that shape attitudes towards future work. What is needed, therefore, is a picture of how respondents *now* feel (or at least express their feelings) about their work histories and unemployment experiences, feelings (or expressions) which are arguably accessible, despite the limitations of the methodology used.

The final section concentrates on the 'usual suspects' - on the impact of variables traditionally cited as causes of extended duration, such as duration itself, human capital, age and health and their effect on application behaviour and flexibility. Age, human capital and health can all disbar a jobseeker from vacancies on the basis of objective mismatches between what employers demand and the jobseeker offers as we saw in chapter three. They can also have an affective or psychological dimension, however, which can influence application behaviour, over and above the objective barriers they create and this will be the focus of the section.

Work Histories

Two related features of work histories in particular influence the level of flexibility individuals demonstrate. One is the timing of the unemployment spell, and the other the degree of control and success experienced in the past. That length of unemployment has an effect on the way individuals interact with the labour market is widely accepted and was documented in chapter one. In contrast, the subjective point in respondents' work histories at which unemployment strikes appears extremely important in term of flexibility demonstrated, but is largely neglected in explanations. The sense of control and success respondents enjoyed in the past also effects flexibility through the confidence and self efficacy they engender.

Timing

Charts 9, 10 and 11 are attempts to portray the way respondents looked back over their histories and where they placed themselves on a stylised work trajectory when the current spell of unemployment struck. The 'ideal' trajectory[48] begins with entry level employment followed by promotion and increasing seniority within one broad occupational type, ending with retirement at or shortly after the pinnacle of the trajectory. It would take the appearance of a diagonal line running from the bottom left of the chart towards the top right, as it does currently as far as Messrs. Black, Mitchell, Monty, Rich, Soton, Terrace and Tweedy are concerned.

Chart 9 details respondents who felt they had had mixed fortunes in the labour market. Some do not recall ever enjoying or feeling satisfaction with their experiences; others, although they recall being dissatisfied at the point at which they entered their current spell of unemployment, had had positive experiences previously; still others had suffered set backs and recovered a little; all had reached their labour market nadir before arriving at this spell of unemployment. Chart 10 reflects similar but less negative attitudes. In general respondents whose recall is portrayed here had become unemployed before their labour market experiences had become entirely unsatisfactory. Chart 11 represents the attitudes of those who would not have anticipated this spell of unemployment because it did not sit logically with the confidence they felt regarding their labour market positions and their general satisfaction with their experiences to date. The current spell struck at a point when these respondents were happy with their labour market positions. The timing of the current spell relative to the point the respondent feels they have reached on their work trajectories has an effect on their levels of flexibility, everything else being equal, with those in the third group being amongst the least flexible.

Success and control

The extent to which respondents recall their work history involving success and control also impacts on flexibility, as does, in a slightly different way, the self perception they derive from the positive feed-back of colleagues. Some responses suggest work histories over which control had been exerted and strategic decisions made[49]. Self-initiated moves were motivated by a desire to achieve or avoid work that was in some way better or less bad than that undertaken previously. Others, alternatively, give the impression that work histories

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[48] Whether or not respondents occupied jobs that may be thought typically to involve this type of trajectory is not the issue. If the respondent felt that they had made continual progress during their work history, moving, for example, to jobs that consistently paid more or offered better packages their plot may follow the 'ideal' trajectory.

[49] Here success and control relate to the respondents' organisation of their careers or work histories, not the success and control they enjoyed in particular posts. Previous occupation is therefore not an objective indicator of what it is that matters, rather what counts is progress, as defined by the respondent.

Chart 9 Route to the current spell for the least satisfied respondents

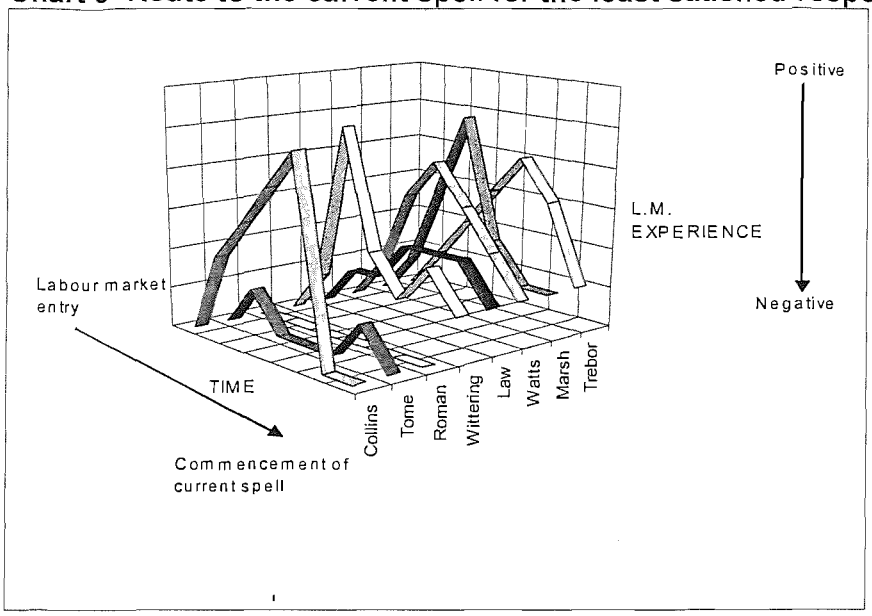


Chart 10 Route to the current spell for moderately satisfied respondents

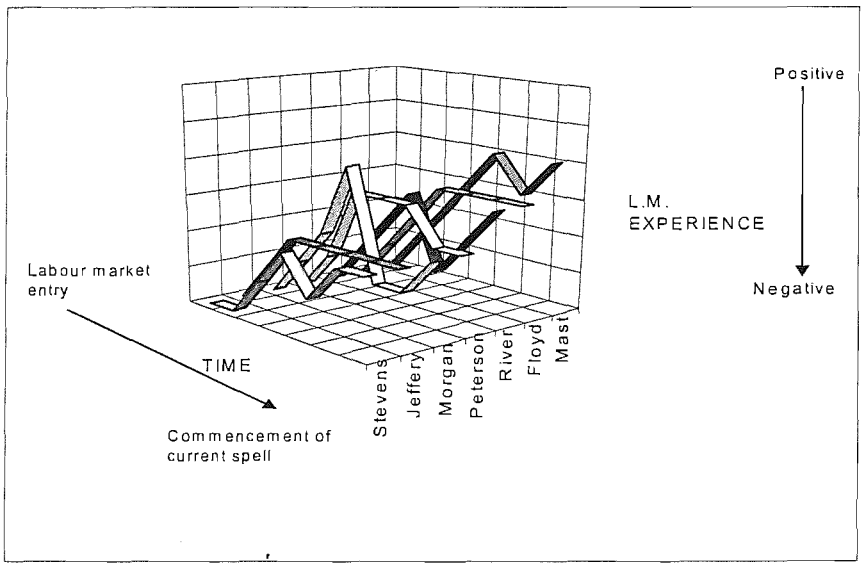
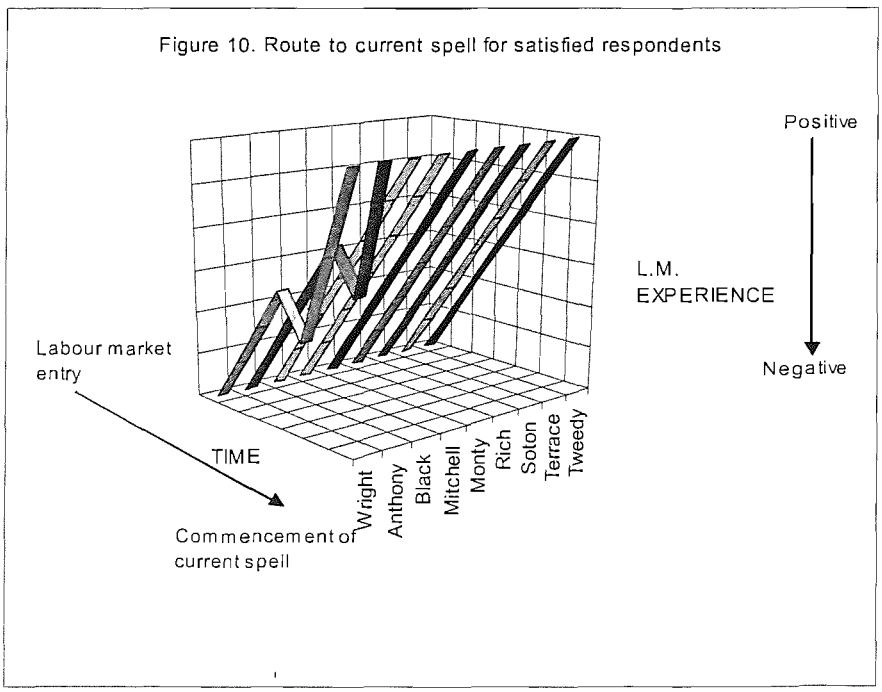


Chart 11 Route to the current spell for satisfied respondents

Figure 10. Route to current spell for satisfied respondents



happened, almost in spite of their own volition. They recall being subjected to a series of seemingly random events over which they exercised little or no control[50]. These recollections contribute to the different levels of confidence respondents demonstrate with regard to future employment, which in turn affects the perceived need to abandon expectations and to increasing levels of flexibility.

Some moves or changes, such as those caused by the ending of contracts or redundancy were initiated by others but still lead to positive outcomes for respondents. Mr. Anthony had moved from one of his jobs only because he had been forced to but taken his next through choice:

- Interviewer: 'So it wasn't back against the wall?'
- Mr. Anthony: 'Absolutely not. I'd only been unemployed for about 5 weeks. I wasn't particularly worried. I'd taken a reasonably good pay off from the other company, so I wasn't financially strained in any way. It was great. Six years ago when I was first made redundant I was on about 20K. When I joined the company six weeks later I was on 26K, so there was an immediate jump. I left there on 44K – a huge jump in 4 years.'

This sort of recall does not increase respondents' self-doubt and consequently their flexibility. Well compensated redundancies provided some respondents with the opportunity to take stock: Mr. Peterson's was timely and financially rewarding, allowing him to plan a career change, for example.

Alternatively, in the sorts of jobs Mr. River had lost, statutory redundancy pay was all that was available and then only after a minimum period of service. For him being made redundant had become a nuisance. He recounted this part of his story with a sense of resignation rather than trauma, having experienced and survived redundancy several times before and in the knowledge that in financial terms it made little difference to him whether or not he was employed. He was not confident of success in an active way - that through his own actions he would achieve what he wanted - but in a passive, fatalistic sense - something suitable, which he would enjoy, would turn up eventually because it always had.

Reaching the end of one's contract was a common reason for changing jobs. In some occupations short term contracts were a predictable occupational hazard which was compensated for in financial terms. However these jobs differed substantially from other temporary work typically associated with employment agencies. Accepting the latter signalled an acknowledgement of an irredeemable deterioration in labour market position for respondents. Most had not even contemplated doing so due to the perception that once

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[50] Clearly the way in which respondents judge success and control depends on the point they occupy in their work trajectory when asked, hence the link between timing and sense of control and success.

they did there was no way back, control was completely gone and the future choices would be between unemployment and poor work.

Overt recognition had been a signal of success for some respondents. It played a large role in job satisfaction and also confirmed their positive self concept. Part of the attraction of work in sales, for example, was the constant feedback that the job provided. Making sales was recognition in itself for some,

- Mr. Monty: 'You get on a roll, success breeds success,'

and when others overtly recognised qualities, the satisfaction was even greater,

> Mr. Monty: 'If you have ten trainees and two come back to you with what you've taught them – that's satisfying. Like with children, they come back and say the old B had a point'.

Or,

> Mr. Wright: 'I was always in demand. If they rang me and said could you go somewhere else I just jumped in my car and off I went. It was just on a roll. I've never got over it. If I won the lottery, it wouldn't replace it, 'cos it wasn't the money'.

Mr. Black loved attending monthly conferences where colleagues or competitors would be aware of and congratulate those with the best performance records, for the same reason.

> Interviewer: 'What was the satisfaction in doing that'?

- Mr. Black: 'Success. Success, particularly amongst your peers. I used to go to conference every month and you meet people at a similar level and they all know what's going on and if you're doing well it's nice to be amongst your peers who know you've engineered, for want of a better word, a good successful company.'

By and large recognition in past work confirmed respondents' positive image and built their confidence, leading them to make demands of future work. However, for some respondents events and circumstances had altered their self concept and undermined their confidence. Some respondents had generally lost any confidence they had had in the face of earlier misfortunes - particularly where they had not been able to control events that had led to changes in their work histories, or where they had made what transpired to be questionable decisions. The timing of the current spell itself is again very important. By the commencement of this spell and consequently by the time of the interviews, the views and feelings of these respondents were considerably different to those that would have been found had they been interviewed at some other stage in their work histories. Attitudes were reportedly different earlier - before 'things had gone pear shaped' (Mr. Tweedy) and presumably would have been later when labour market circumstances may have improved, or unemployment continued and prospects had become worse. Messrs. Collins and Marsh, for example, who had highly valued the earlier stages of their work histories, before descending into utterly different labour market positions (objectively as well as subjectively - Mr. Marsh had been a professional sportsman and Mr. Collins a career civil servant), had

both taken inferior jobs prior to this spell to avoid unemployment. In each case circumstances outside the labour market impacted upon them, preventing their return to their original positions, regardless of the availability of such work. They were, therefore, confronted with a choice they each acknowledged, between permanent unemployment or taking inferior work, and opted for the latter.

Attribution of the causes of unemployment or failure in the labour market also makes a difference to confidence felt and flexibility demonstrated and how comfortable respondents were with having to increase it, as we saw with reference to pay demands. Those who identify their problems as arising from the workings of the labour market, to economic down turn, or world events, for example, are less inclined to give up on trying to secure work that offers what they have valued in the past. Nevertheless, they adjusted their behaviour by considering a wider range of jobs as duration increased. They were inclined to search more broadly, in different industries for example, (other than those with a particular concern about industry) or occupations, or at a lower wage, but not for more junior or less demanding positions. They have not lost confidence in their *own* ability to undertake work at a certain level, but in *employers'* ability or willingness to reward them sufficiently. There is a stark contrast between the flexibility demonstrated by respondents who acknowledge that something about themselves explains their unemployment and those who feel nothing about them has altered since their last successful experiences.

Respondents, and particularly those who maintain a strategic approach to the labour market, anticipate how their episode of unemployment will affect them in the long run and its significance for their working and other lives in the future. Since respondents can not be sure of the long term implications of the current spell when they make decisions regarding the suitability of different vacancies, confidence plays a crucial part in their decision making. It influences how a spell is perceived - whether it is seen as:

- a temporary hiccup on an otherwise stable work trajectory
- potentially marking the end of employment in the most recent usual occupation and presenting either new opportunities in equally satisfactory occupation, or leaving a chance that a similar job of some value may still eventually be obtainable
- an end to jobs that provide some or all of the aspects of work that are valued and satisfying; or as a semi-permanent / permanent state
- or simply another event in a chain from which they can escape only by sacrificing their demands in relation to future work

Such perceptions are formed in relation to levels of control, success and recognition experienced up to the time of the current spell and have a substantial effect on flexibility because they motivate, on each extreme, either perseverance and consistency or change. In short, previous opportunities to enjoy control and success provide respondents with

evidence of capacity and breed self-efficacy and confidence which can be seen as having a large negative impact on flexibility.

Since all respondents were long term unemployed, they may be expected, despite their resilience, to have lost some of the confidence with which they started the current spell. The day to day experience of unemployment itself and continual rejection are two of the factors that affect the level of confidence enjoyed by respondents.

Unemployment experiences

Respondents' experiences occur against a backdrop of a welfare system, the overarching concern of which is to ensure that disincentives to claiming benefits exist and that claiming is a less attractive option than working, whilst providing a minimal safety net for labour market casualties. In theory negative unemployment experiences deter jobseekers from rejecting vacancies which, in comparison to unemployment, offer positive experiences. This position rests on the assumption that unemployment will be experienced negatively and that potential vacancies will be viewed as an alternative to, and in the light of, this negative experience.

Unemployment experiences did impact upon respondents' resolve to hold out for a job that satisfies their criteria, but to varying degrees. In order to give appropriate weight to the push of the unemployment experience in terms of the way it influences flexibility, we have to understand the diverse way in which it is experienced. We need to understand, for example, whether respondents who are virtually fully flexible: simply have a stronger work ethic; they endure an objectively worse unemployment experience; they subjectively perceive unemployment in a more negative way; or they feel their self interest is served by taking virtually any job, however poor objectively, because it offers them something more of what they seek than does unemployment.

Numerous factors, identified in chapter one, can influence the unemployment experience making it more or less negative. Those considered here are: comparators (to be explained shortly); activity and boredom; social interaction; financial position; shame and stigma; interaction with Job Centres; input from family and friends; failure to achieve versus the consequences of failing to achieve a job; and training or other formal activities that take place during unemployment.

Comparators

Notwithstanding the importance of the unemployment experience in the lives of unemployed people, it should also be noted that it is not clear from responses that it is in the light of these experiences that respondents evaluate potential vacancies. Rather, for some evaluation takes place with reference to previous work or a combination of previous work and unemployment experience. The comparison may not be between the cost of unemployment and the benefits of a particular vacancy, but between a particular vacancy, jobs previously enjoyed (to which a return is anticipated) and unemployment experience.

Whether or not respondents consider their interests would be served by taking a particular job depends on the comparisons they make. Where unemployment is seen as a semi-permanent or permanent state or where aspects of work that were previously valued have been abandoned due to a respondent's acknowledgment that there is no potential to return to a usual occupation, the calculations involve the disutility of unemployment experience and the value attached to whatever the job offers. Even objectively unattractive vacancies can appear appealing if the unemployment experience is negative and in these circumstances the more unpleasant the experience the more favourably vacancies will compare. Alternatively, some compare how the job measures up to those previously undertaken because they expect to be able to secure something similar in the future. Respondents with high levels of confidence view their unemployment as a temporary glitch and expect to return to their usual occupations or something equally desirable. They compare vacancies with positions they have occupied previously and decide whether or not it is worth holding out for them depending on the unpleasantness of the unemployment experience and the contrast between the work previously enjoyed and now offered. This does not mean that respondents who maintain their previously held work values and confidence in replicating them are unaffected by their unemployment experiences. Financial pressures, particularly, weaken respondents' resolve to hold out to meet their criteria, although other pressures usually associated with unemployment appeared to have only a limited effect on flexibility, as the evidence discussed below suggests.

Whether or not vacancies are compared with previous jobs the unemployment experience has some part to play in the calculations performed. Whilst all respondents found unemployment preferable to a number of jobs ranging from a few of the poorest, up the scale, they were all also dissatisfied with the experience in a variety of ways.

Activity and boredom

Surprisingly, most of the sample did not mention boredom as a negative aspect of unemployment but kept themselves active. Structured activities occupied some: others enjoyed more informal arrangements, but all respondents, with the exception of Mr. Tome, spoke with a degree of enthusiasm about at least some of the things with which they were involved. Some acknowledged their positive attitude towards plentiful free time was facilitated by the fact that they had ordered activities in which to engage during their unemployment – one was training to be a legal executive and the other was building an extension to his house, for example. Over time others had started various less well defined activities and interests that prevented boredom. Some walked dogs; gardening was enjoyed; reading, studying and crosswords occupied some of the time; recording music; bonsai tree cultivation; helping friends with various DIY projects and problems; computer repairs; fishing; and voluntary work were all activities that prevented boredom. Respondents'

conversation about these activities often conveyed a sense of pride, satisfaction or superiority.

Watching television or playing computer games attracted disapproval from nearly all with some at pains to point out that they watched or played no more than they had done whilst employed, or that when they watched they watched the history channel, for example, rather than soap operas. Their activities are considered sufficiently productive or worthy as temporary stand-ins for employment. Several respondents distanced themselves from other activities, which they feel are only undertaken by those who have let themselves slip during their unemployment, becoming 'couch potatoes'. Self-discipline rather than the search for pleasure motivated many past times. Perhaps the most novel idea belonged to Mr. Roman, who used resources to his advantage,

- Mr. Roman: 'Oh yeh, I'll do a scheme; I do schemes all the time. Everything that comes up [in the Jobcentre] I apply for. Decorating again, but if I've got to sit there, I'll sit there.'

Messrs. Watts and Marsh had had trouble filling their time adequately, but even Mr. Watts had managed ultimately,

- Mr. Watts: 'No, I've been bored out of my skin for the last couple of years. I find private projects and little things to do for myself. I wouldn't have the incentive to get up in the morning if I didn't because I like doing things, DIY, practical things.

With even very limited amounts of money, the vast majority of respondents felt they could fill at least some of their time with what they considered to be satisfactory activities.

- Interviewer: 'Is there any aspects of doing these [unpleasant] jobs that you like?'
- Mr. Collins: 'Yes, well, I think it helps in that it's easier to get a job when you're already in employment.'
- Interviewer: 'Is there anything else in it for you, like meeting people for example, or providing you with a structure?'
- Mr. Collins: 'Yes, it helps you to meet people, but I'm quite able to structure my day myself.'

They did not necessarily enjoy these activities but generally performed them to prevent unacceptable boredom and to provide themselves with purpose.

With larger amounts of money numerous ideas of how they would spend their time were put forward. When talking about what they would do with sufficient funds the moral position some had adopted in relation to what they currently do was replaced by a more hedonistic attitude: golf, holidays, travel were all acceptable, although a couple of respondents maintained they would still work - if only in their own businesses. Mr. Black did not even go that far,

- Interviewer: 'Is any aspect of your dissatisfaction related to the fact that you can't bear being unemployed in the sense of not having anything to do because you can't afford to do anything?'
- Mr. Black: 'No no, sitting in the garden has never been a great hardship to me. I could potter around in the garden all day and there's plenty going on in my life. I'm interested in far, far, too many things to ever get bored'.

Boredom during unemployment therefore did not drive respondents to increase the flexibility they displayed. Boredom in work is reduced or prevented through challenges and challenges are present in tasks performed. Tasks are one of the aspects of work about which respondents demonstrate the least flexibility and, partly as the result of a desire to avoid boring work, some vacancies were rejected. Boredom during unemployment is unlikely to drive respondents into what they consider boring work if they are motivated by even a modicum of self interest, unless something else about the work compensates, or something else about unemployment is intolerable.

Social interaction

A sense of isolation is much more of a problem for respondents generally than is boredom, which they can address alone if necessary - the interaction necessary to avoid isolation obviously requires others and may not be within their gift. Some respondents had managed to maintain friendships and networks that made social interaction possible; others admitted to having a very small number of people with whom to mix and socialise. Where social isolation is an issue all respondents had taken some sort of action to relieve it but few managed to overcome it. Messrs. Stevens and Tweed, for example, make sure that they leave their homes each day to go either to their local pubs and clubs, friends' houses or shopping. They do this both to keep themselves from changing as a result of being unemployed, whether they feel like doing it or not. They know the dangers of isolation and unemployment generally and refused to submit to them, although the financial situation in which they find themselves militates against doing anything other than staying at home alone.

Mr. River, who is certainly less alone than most people in his house full of children, feels that he lacks company and the opportunity for social interaction or the stimulation that comes from mixing with people beyond the family unit.

- Mr. River: 'The first 6 months were great, but in the end there's just you two and the children, no outside input. At work people will come in and say "hey, did you see the football?" or whatever and there's something new to talk about.'

Mr. Marsh lives at his mother's house in a village where his only contact is with a handful of elderly residents. His isolation is physical as well as social and his realisation of the difficulties he faces in even identifying geographically accessible vacancies is one of the factors in his flexibility. He would take virtually any job to relieve his social seclusion. Mr.

Wittering acted promptly when his last job in his usual occupation as a draughtsperson finished. He took a live-in job as a kitchen porter in a holiday camp, because he could not anticipate re-employment in his usual line of work and could not bear the isolation of unemployment. Now he is confident in resuming his normal work, given recovery from ill health he would not do so, however. Being with other people was one of very few potential benefits Mr. Tome could see in working and his most recent job did not even offer that. He had not felt isolated in unemployment, so to continue with a job that he found isolating was pointless from his perspective.

Being isolated is not necessarily a negative experience of course - the disposition of the individual respondents clearly plays a part in the extent to which it is an issue. Mr. Trebor for example, considers himself 'a loner' and claims not to suffer in the least from any sense of isolation.

On balance social isolation is perceived as a problem during unemployment which increases pressure to be flexible. Nonetheless, it can also be seen as a factor that reduces flexibility because respondents are disinclined to exchange an isolating experience for work that is equally isolating, unless it also provides other benefits.

Financial position

On some views, the lower the benefit levels the more flexible jobseekers will be in order to escape poverty and because they would be better off financially by comparison. Many respondents made clear, that the extent to which unemployment is a negative experience is heavily dependent on perception of financial circumstances. The variety of financial positions represented can initially be split into two groups: those in receipt of benefits (which implies minimal income and savings below the eight thousand pound limit), and those not in receipt (due either to partner's income or working hours or family wealth / savings). In the main, the latter group did not consider they had serious financial problems, although some had issues relating to aspects of finance, such as the fairness of benefit rules, for example.

Table 8 shows the subjective financial position of respondents in relation to day to day expenses. The respondents in the 'unacceptable' category faced severe problems: Mr. Tweed considers himself unable to afford to eat and wash, so tight is his budget; Mr. Mitchell and his wife go without adequate food to ensure that their adult but dependent offspring are well fed; and Mr. Collins takes jobs that utterly destroy his self respect in order to pay his bills. Their day to day problems were of a different order to those of the other respondents, such as Mr. Tome and Mr. Stevens, who had become accustomed to and, to an extent, accommodated their poverty.

The surprising number of respondents in receipt of benefits and in the acceptable category can be understood in terms of: assistance from kin or the householder in whose home the respondent lives; the availability of private insurances; frugal material expectations; or

additional benefits payable due to an unusual recognised need. Even respondents who have no way of supplementing their incomes manage them,

- Interviewer: 'What about the money?'
- Mr. Tome: 'Well I've learned to cope. You've just got to cut your cloth accordingly. I don't overspend. I know exactly how much I can buy. I've got used to not having the things other people take for granted, like shoes or a hair cut.'

Table 8 Subjective financial position

Financial position	Single	Married
Unacceptable (unable to meet basic needs for food and household goods)	Mr. Collins* Mr. Tweed*	Mr. Mitchell*
Manageable (have become accustomed and successful at living on severely limited funds and do not constantly worry about finances)	Mr. Law* Mr. Stevens* Mr. Tome* Mr. Wright*	Mr. Black*⌖ Mr. Monty* Mr. Rich Mr. River* Mr. Watts*
Acceptable (consider benefit levels to be adequate for their modest requirements or have some other source of income they consider adequate)	Mr. Anthony Mr. Floyd* Mr. Marsh* Mr. Mast Mr. Soton Mr. Trebor* Mr. Wittering*	Mr. Jeffery* Mr. Morgan Mr. Peterson Mr. Roman* Mr. Terrace

(Note: * indicates the respondent is a benefit recipient; ⌖ Mr. Black and his family receive income support but have been assisted financially by their wider kin over recent years. This arrangement is about to cease and he is unsure how they will manage from now on.)

Because Mr. Tome finds what the labour market has to offer him so unappealing he is prepared to make sacrifices. He is not driven into work by the experiences of unemployment but into unemployment by his experiences of work. For none of the respondents in the acceptable category is pay, at the level they consider themselves likely to earn, a motivating factor on a day to day basis.

Large, one-off expenses, such as rent deposits or car maintenance cause problems for all respondents who were dependent on means tested benefits, however. One of the barriers several respondents faced was the level of rent they had to pay, which reduced their wage flexibility. They could not afford to move, even if they found cheaper accommodation because they could not raise deposits. Mr. Mitchell's car was off the road because he could not afford to tax it and as a result his travel-to-work area was reduced.

Anxiety about changes to the source of even the inadequate incomes they receive causes stress amongst those respondents for whom no reserve resources or savings are available, reducing contract flexibility. Their risk aversion increases their unwillingness to consider anything other than standard full-time work. Each, one way or another, successfully

manages their day to day finances and perhaps considers, therefore, that they have something worth preserving.

The diverse effects of unemployment income are clear from responses. For some flexibility is encouraged. Even where respondents feel unable to manage, however, a combination of confidence in securing and inflexibility regarding aspects of desired work does not lead them to consider any work that improves their financial position preferable to unemployment. For others the security and regularity and even level of benefit payments, low as they are, may be seen as factors that discourage the acceptance of unappealing work that also pays at the lowest of levels.

Stigma and shame

I noticed several attitudes towards stigma and shame in responses. A handful of respondents found unemployment virtually unbearable because of the way they felt others viewed them, purely as a consequence of their joblessness. Mr. Watts' friends knew of his predicament but even years after his engineering employment had terminated he would divert conversation with new acquaintances back to the periods in his working life of which he was proud, speaking in general terms, leaving them to assume he was still employed. Mr. Law managed to 'fudge' the issue too,

- Mr. Law: 'It's part of my pride not to say I'm unemployed. To all intents and purposes my friends still think I'm doing the job and studying as well. They'll say "how's it going?" and I'll reply "a bit slack" and that's it'.

Mr. River was hurt by the way in which he felt his neighbours judged his situation - that he had a large family and that they, as tax payers, were having to support them. He spoke of actual confrontations and abuse. Mr. Soton, who lived with his family in a relatively privileged environment, perceived a sense of disapproval from those around him and, predictably, Mr. Morgan felt that his neighbours condemned his situation.

Less predictably, given his aforementioned denial of the relevance of other people's view, Mr Stevens experienced shame,

- Mr. Stevens: 'You're earning your keep and not ponsing off the government which is what I consider I'm doing now. It's not because I want to, it's because...'

A job, nevertheless, would not automatically have removed the stigma or shame even these respondents felt since some work is also seen as stigmatising and shameful. For Mr. Stevens the suffering of shame is less of a concern than the suffering he feels he would experience if he had to take an unsuitable job.

Others attempted to hide their unemployment because they did not want sympathy, either for practical reasons or because sympathy made them feel like victims. The importance of image in Mr. Black's industry made it necessary for him to hide the fact that he was unemployed - in an industry of winners, had his unemployment been known about,

companies would not touch him. He spent a good deal of time and money creating the impression that he was still a winner.

Several of the older respondents were incredulous that stigma could be an issue with respect to people, such as themselves, who were in their current position because they had been unlucky, and were without a job through no fault of their own. They pointed to the thirty or forty years during which they had worked; the young age at which they had left school; and to the national service in which they had been involved and suggested they had no reason to feel uncomfortable with their present involuntary unemployment. These respondents did not associate themselves with the types of unemployed people they themselves stigmatised nor did they feel they were the intended targets of stigma and derision. Their wish to avoid discussion of their current situations arose from personal pride and a strong desire not to appear as victims.

Respondents whose self perception did not stem from other people but from their own judgement of the effect of their actions did not experience any stigma so long as they were happy with the efforts they were making to secure employment. Mr. Marsh, for example, despite living in a village in which he was one of very few unemployed people knew that he was investing sufficient effort and flexibility in the work he was seeking to satisfy his own standards. His neighbours in his tight knit community were also satisfied, but that was incidental. In contrast, Mr. Roman did not suffer a sense of stigma or shame because he was isolated and mixed only with people with whom he shared similar circumstances. His friends did not judge him, and his interaction with others was very limited.

Respondents can share the general view that something is lacking about unemployed people even whilst they are unemployed themselves without necessarily experiencing shame and stigma. 'The unemployed' do not exist as one homogeneous group, even to unemployed respondents. It is the characteristics of *some* people who are unemployed that respondents seek to avoid:

- Mr. Tweed: 'I mean I'm not one of these people, and this has happened to a number of people I know...to degenerate and their social group reduces down to the bums that draw their giro on a Thursday and spend it all in the pub, with their dog and they socialise round that.'

Avoidance of this and of the sorts of unhealthy pastime discussed above under activity and boredom allowed some respondents to distance themselves from the stigma and shame that they know is often associated with the positions they currently occupy. Mr. Anthony was one of several respondents who admitted they had previously entertained negative stereotypes about unemployed people. His view changed when he realised that people with positive characteristics such as he possessed were not immune from the experience,

- Interviewer: 'Did you have an attitude about unemployed people?'

- Mr. Anthony: 'Probably, I think. Probably the same as I had about single persons, parents, claiming benefits, until I met one. She changed my attitude. When I saw what was involved and could analyse it properly, then I was aware that I had a misconception and I think people who are outside have a misconception of unemployed people, yes.'

Attitudes to stigma and shame therefore varied, effecting flexibility in different ways. Because a link can exist between the experience of shame and stigma and a concern with social status, however, respondents who are troubled by the former are not necessarily flexible and extend their duration of unemployment by discounting vacancies they find stigmatising. Those who are not driven from unemployment by shame and stigma do not make the same demands of work and are less influenced by the way in which particular vacancies are regarded by society or family and friends, making them more flexible in this respect, but not necessarily as proactive.

Perception of Jobcentre

Johnson and Klepinger (1994, p. 714-715) claim that tight and firm administration of a benefits system can result in reduced duration. Whether or not Job Centre staff were intentionally firm, several respondents found signing on to be the worst aspect of being unemployed. Criticism focused on: the attitude of and treatment by staff, both of which appeared to various respondents to be motivated by something other than a desire to help; the aims and objectives of the organization, which in some cases conflicted with those of the jobseeker; and its inefficiency as a job broking agency signalled by the lack of suitable vacancies held that matched respondents' expectations.

Several respondents felt disgusted by the attitudes of and treatment by staff, particularly when they considered they had fallen foul of rules they did not understand or felt were arbitrary. Staff's responses to misunderstanding about 'signing on' arrangements, for example, made them feel criminalised,

- Mr. Monty: 'You're cocooned when you're at work and ignorant and you come in here and you're still ignorant. There's nobody who knows the true story. It's the way they treat you as a criminal. I don't mind the rules as long as I know the rules. Read this leaflet, read this one. [Shows file] That's one folder on the DHS and I've got another at home like that. You dare not throw a piece of paper away. That's just one of 2 [files] in six months.'

For older workers with long work histories the impression is one of official suspicion of wrong doing rather than service on the basis of an insurance claim. Since some respondents had been well paid they were conscious of having contributed extensively to the national insurance fund and were disappointed with the way in which it provided for them.

Others mentioned examples of being 'messed around': being called in and made to wait for long periods only to be told that advisors were unavailable, for example. They had experienced a sense of powerlessness in the face of what they viewed as mistreatment.

- Interviewer: 'OK, and finally, how do you find the service you receive at the Job Centre?'
- Mr Stevens: 'They hassle me really a lot. They seem to make it really deliberately difficult sometimes. I had an interview booked and it was p****** with rain when I walked there and when I got there they said she's not here. I said why couldn't you have phoned me and he just shrugged. He really didn't care. It's not his fault I suppose but I called him a few names and said he was lucky it was me and not someone as big as me without the same temperament!'

Pressure to find work was felt by respondents and most recalled being encouraged or pushed to apply for jobs that they considered unsuitable and found the intervention unhelpful. Surprisingly further exploration revealed that in the main respondents were rarely instructed to apply for a particular job, this happening only when they came to the notice of advisors during interviews, or occasionally with other members of staff. In any case, when confronted with a particular vacancy which they considered unsatisfactory most took the line of least resistance and applied half heartedly because they felt threatened by benefit sanctions. Several, before becoming aware of the consequences, had failed to apply as instructed and had had their benefits stopped. The rest of the time respondents went about applying for jobs they would have been happy to do. They were aware that they had to put in sufficient effort to satisfy advisors and that this would reduce the pressure the latter put them under to apply for jobs chosen for them. The most tangible impact of Jobcentre pressure as far as these respondents are concerned is the encouragement of jobsearch effort, to keep staff from suggesting vacancies which they know they may find unsuitable, rather than flexibility. So long as they demonstrated that they have been applying for jobs, the fact that they could have applied for others, in respect of which they may have had a better chance of success, was not usually seen as an issue by staff.

Despite the general ill feeling directed at Jobcentres due to conflicting aims, some respondents seemed quite happy with the individual relationships they had built with their advisors. Working relationships had been established which gave respondents the option of saying honestly what they thought about vacancies, so long as the search effort was clear and other leads had been pursued. Mr. Rich and his advisor, for example, had come to an understanding of what were suitable jobs to offer and accept. Messrs. Law, Wittering and Wright felt that their advisors were basically on their side, against the regulations to some extent.

It is interesting to note that respondents with health problems had the most satisfactory relationships with advisors and tempting to suggest that this is because the advisors had

more leeway with which to deal with them. As discussed above, where health problems exist allowances are made in some aspects of the otherwise fairly rigid system. These were clearly appreciated by the relevant respondents. Staff appear to have accepted the respondents' view of future work and have ceased pushing them in directions in which they do not wish to go, providing they are seen to be doing something towards securing their aims.

Advisors are in a very difficult position, charged as they are with matching together two sides that do not really meet each other's requirements. Their efforts to do so appear inept to some respondents. Mr. Tweed felt strongly,

- Mr. Tweed : 'My experience of the people who work there is that they are interested in ticking the boxes that make the government happy and are not interested in the people they are supposed to help. I find it an imposition to go there and sign on and to talk nonsense to people. They don't understand me, what I want; they don't understand the job market. All they see is "Joe Soap" cleaning out stables at £4.00 per hour. I get so frustrated about it. Very disillusioned.'

And Mr. Mitchell,

- Interviewer: 'When you became unemployed how did you feel?'
- Mr. Mitchell: 'Angry'.
- Interviewer: 'With whom?'
- Mr. Mitchell: 'I think the Jobcentre mainly. I was disgusted and it's the worst organisation I've seen in my life and it gets worse the more I see of it.'

Respondents, perhaps with more justification, were also generally dismayed by the quality of jobs, the fact that employers did not respond to applications and that vacancies continued to be displayed erroneously after they had been filled or withdrawn. Jobseekers who have successfully secured work through Job Centres would perhaps provide a more positive assessment of the service they received.

Overall most respondents were very keen to end their dealings with the Jobcentre, but on their own terms. The strength with which respondents considered some vacancies unsuitable and resisted Jobcentre pressure with a variety of methods suggests that only in the face of benefit sanctions would they align their attitudes and behaviour with the aims of the Jobcentre, and then not unquestionably so. Jobcentre staff are perceived by most to be primarily interested in removing them from the unemployment register, regardless of the benefit to the jobseeker of doing so.

Input from family, friends, and social networks

Unemployment experience and consequent flexibility is more influenced by friends and social networks. As well as being central to the degree of exposure to and quality of vacancies individuals enjoy, social networks and friendships impact on behaviour through the pressure for conformity to the norms and values of the group to which respondents belong or aspire to belong. We will start, however, by considering the effect of freedom from membership of any social group has on flexibility. The circumstances of a respondent who is particularly isolated provides an example of the conflicting pressures that push even him between flexibility and inflexibility.

Mr. Trebor is utterly alone in terms of family, friends and social networks and has responsibility only for himself. Having friends and extensive social networks increases the range of vacancies of which jobseekers are aware; being as socially isolated as he is reduces awareness. However, due to his isolation Mr. Trebor need not satisfy the expectations of others, increasing flexibility through a lack of concern with the social aspects of employment. Equally, his motivation to secure employment and the effect of this on his overall flexibility, as well as search effort, is uninfluenced by the desire to avoid the stigma of unemployment experienced by respondents who are more exposed socially. He does not experience any external emotional pressure to find work. Again, pushing in the other opposite direction is the fact that being single reduces Mr. Trebor's expenses to a lesser degree than being a sole earner reduces his income, limiting his pay flexibility. Relatedly, his opportunities to claim in work benefits are also limited by his single status.

Opposite effects have been seen amongst other respondents discussed previously who are more entwined in the fabric of their particular social and friendship groups. Their and Mr. Trebor's experiences indicate that relationships, even of a mainstream type, whether close or otherwise, have diverse effects on application behaviour. Membership of groups that values a work ethic does not straightforwardly influence individuals to accept work purely as an alternative to unemployment because, even in these cases, work is valued for something more than itself. So the effect of social relations can be seen as ambiguous in terms of reducing unemployment duration through flexibility, in contrast with much of the literature on social networks (see Crow and Allen, 1994, chpt. 3, for example). Attention now turns to an exploration of the effect of family on flexibility.

At least four aspects of family arrangements appear to impact on unemployment experience and flexibility: interpersonal relations - with spouses or partners; dependency; dependants; and family of origin.

Spouses

Emotional pressure, and / or support from a spouse / partner has been shown to have an impact on the way unemployment is experienced. Contrary to my expectations, which were

based on the literature reviewed, several respondents reported that their wives were happy with their presence at home: Messrs. Jeffery, Roman and Mitchell suggested that their non-employed wives enjoyed their company. Certainly the presence of wives made unemployment a less isolating experience for the respondent. They shared walks, shopping, talks, TV, problems, or just time. Mr. River was under no illusions, however - his wife liked him being at home primarily because he was able to take some of the work load from her as she looked after their children.

Only Mr. Watts and Mr. Morgan reported disharmony as the defining characteristic of their relationships with their wives. Mr. Black was also aware that his wife's view regarding what he ought to do regarding future work conflicted with his own. These three wives' comments, as recalled by respondents, indicate that they do not have the same reservations as their husbands regarding suitable work. Each values and identifies their husband with a straightforward provider role - somewhat more so than do their husbands themselves.

- Mr. Watts: 'My wife hates it. We live with it a bit more now but as we went down and down, particularly since 1995, we went through a bad year, friction, nagging, you know. It's not bad now, we keep it under control; we back away and don't speak for a day or two. Is the criticism destructive or constructive? - usually destructive'.

And,

- Mr. Morgan: 'It's sort...there's sort of a certain amount of pressure there. I do a lot of stuff for my parents and they buy our shopping etc. My wife would sort of say what was I doing today and shouldn't I be looking for a job instead of doing their garden, but I did still look for jobs as well. Yes, there's a certain amount of pressure.'
- Interviewer: 'What would she have felt about you working in PP [local supermarket]?'
- Mr. Morgan: 'I think she's got to the stage, she'd have said "well go for that". Yeh, but it's self respect.'

And,

- Interviewer: 'OK, how does your wife feel about it?'
- Mr. Black: 'Well, if I don't get some finances sorted out in the next 3 or 4 minutes she'll probably divorce me!' (laughs)
- Interviewer: 'I don't know whether I should laugh or not at that.'
- Mr. Black: 'No, nor do I. It has been an ever increasing strain.'
- Interviewer: 'Has she expressed the feeling that you should just take something, anything?'
- Mr. Black: 'That has been expressed, yes.'

Other wives concurred with their husband's aims and plans for achieving them. Mrs. Rich, according to her husband, is supportive because she can see how hard he is trying to

achieve the aims they share. Mrs. Mitchell supports her husband, advising him to reject work that they both agreed would be demeaning.

- Mr. Mitchell: 'She's the one who's kept me going. She's the one who makes me fight back. Sometimes I say I'll take it and she says no way, you go and have a battle with them [the Jobcentre]'.

He feels that her association with him reflects on her sufficiently to make *how* at least as important as *whether* he fulfils his breadwinner role.

Dependency

Received wisdom suggests that state dependency negatively affects people's capacity and psychological health. Dependence on a spouse can be experienced even more negatively, particularly where the unemployed person was previously the main breadwinner. A working spouse, or one with personal wealth, can remove entitlement to benefits, forcing dependency on their partner, which some respondents experienced negatively[51]. At least had these individuals been able to claim payments, income although admittedly in the form of benefits, would have come to the family via the usual breadwinner, allowing them to retain an element of their normal role. In some cases however, working spouses relieved the financial pressure unemployment would otherwise have exerted and allowed the respondents to be more selective with regards to future work, decreasing their flexibility. In Mr. Peterson's case a working spouse also increased his flexibility in some senses, by making it possible for him to take any position he wanted regardless of the salary it offered. Mrs. Monty and Mrs. Peterson's personal situations had not changed as a result of their husbands' unemployment – Mrs. Peterson was still the main breadwinner and Mr. Monty was still able to contribute to the household with the benefits he received because his wife was working only part-time. Mr. Rich, on the other hand, was uncomfortable because his wife had had to emerge as the sole income provider in their partnership and this created an internalised need for him to find a job and relieve her burden. The desire to do so, however, is not as strong as his need to remain healthy and many vacancies are discounted on this basis.

Dependants

Having dependants can affect flexibility. The presence of young children can affect it through the impact of in work benefits on wage requirements. The presence of older offspring has an ambiguous effect because they can be either a financial asset or a burden.

Only Messrs. Black, Peterson and River had young children to support. Mr. Black is unfamiliar with the in work benefits system, not having worked since his baby was born, but

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[51] Women have until recently been dependent on their husbands making claims on their behalf which may or may not have raised similar concerns for them, although it seems less likely if they had not previously been in employment.

Mr. River having received Working Families Tax Credit or its equivalent for fifteen years, is fully aware that his earnings made little difference to the household income. His flexibility as far as wages were concerned was therefore maximised by the presence of a number of children. As far as Mr. Peterson is concerned means tested benefits of any sort are out of reach due to his wife's earnings.

Mr. Morgan's children were working and contributed to the cost of running the house and food, whilst Mr. Mitchell's children, who were either on low incomes or unemployed, were a financial burden. These circumstances have to be taken into account when considering vacancies and, particularly in Mr. Mitchell's case, impact to increase reservation wages because mature children are not considered relevant to in work benefit calculations and he still views himself as their provider.

Wider family

Parents still played a part in respondents' accounts (despite the fact that the youngest was in his mid thirties), as did other birth family members. In some cases they helped out. Mr. Black and his wife, for example, had not felt the financial effects of the first year or so of his unemployment because he had been able to draw help. Mr. Anthony received financial assistance from his brother on so formal a basis that the DSS refused to pay him benefits because he had an official income. In both these examples the negativity that the financial stress of unemployment generally causes is absent and therefore not a factor driving increased flexibility. However, financial pressure had been replaced by an equally demoralising sense of indebtedness. Mr. Soton's father helped him out financially and supported him emotionally because he shared the same occupation and was aware of the amount his son had invested over many years in pursuing it. In other cases family members needed or enjoyed the support their unemployed offspring were able to provide. Far from pressurising her son to find work, Mr. Marsh felt his mother enjoyed his company at home and he saw leaving her, either to relocate or to start work, as awkward. Mr. Jeffery had cared for his parents whilst remaining registered as unemployed. This situation had continued for a number of years during which time he had not sought work of any type. Had the Jobcentre been aware of his situation would have been referred to alternative benefits; instead his parents had prevented him finding work altogether, despite his registered unemployment.

Other respondents felt their families offered unsolicited and often unhelpful advice. Mr. Stevens had regular 'fallings out' with his father, who he felt gave the impression that he thought his son an 'idle waster'. Mr. Peterson's in-laws, whilst trying to help by phoning to ask if he had seen this or that vacancy, made him feel as though they thought he was not trying sufficiently hard or capable of helping himself. Offers of help finding work could be rejected because respondents wanted to make clear that their unemployment had not been due to their inability to identify and secure vacancies, but to employers' bias or excessive

competition - nothing that neither they, their families, nor anyone else could do anything about.

Failure to achieve versus the effects of failing to achieve

Thus far we have considered how respondents view the unpleasantness of the unemployment experience itself, which occurs as a consequence of failing to succeed in securing work. This sub section takes a different but no less important perspective and looks at the impact of failing to achieve something that is considered deserved, worked at and aimed for, *per se*, regardless of the consequences of such a failure. Mr. Mitchell clearly thought this was an important issue,

- Interviewer: 'Do you mean feel these jobs would be demeaning?'
- Mr. Mitchell: 'Yes.'
- Interviewer: 'Has your self esteem suffered through being unemployed?'
- Mr Mitchell: 'Yes, it's almost pushed me to the brink of suicide....'
- Interviewer: 'Because you haven't got a job or because the fact that you haven't seems so unfair?
- Mr. Mitchell: 'I think because it seems so unfair.'
- Interviewer: 'So are you saying it's not the day to day life of being an unemployed person, it's the fact the there's something you should be able to get but can't have.'
- Mr. Mitchell: 'Yes, you've hit the point there.'

Mr. Mitchell's responses suggest that even if the negativity of the unemployment experience could be reduced through higher levels of benefit for example, or improved customer service in Job Centres, were he to continue to seek work and continue to fail to secure it, his health would suffer. This would not necessarily be because he was missing the latent benefits of employment, but rather because he consistently failed to achieve what he set out to do. Mr. Mast's concern with the lack of feed back he receives from potential employers and Mr. Tweed's emphasis of the bafflement he feels at his failure to secure work reflect similar concerns. Mr. Law asks,

- Mr. Law: 'I got a bit disheartened with not succeeding even at silly jobs – like a parks attendant for example – how hard can that be? I suppose I was looking for the easy life but when I failed to get jobs like that I got really fed up'.

And Mr. Roman,

- Mr. Roman: 'It doesn't make sense. I've been told I'm too old, unsuitable, how can I be unsuitable to sweep carriages out on the railway? Pushing a brush?'

Respondents are indignant at their failure to secure work at least as much as they are dissatisfied with the consequences of doing so. They can not understand why they are unsuccessful and, as Mr. Tweed suggested it is much less painful to be rejected for a good job than for a bad one.

These are tentative explorations into what is potentially a large issue. In general terms jobseekers are thought to experience unemployment negatively for the reasons discussed above and due to the absence of the positive characteristics of employment. Rejection is seen as a process that undermines jobseekers' motivation to apply for vacancies, creating the 'discouraged worker' effect and the belief that suitable vacancies are not available. It would be interesting and informative to investigate the effects of the day to day experience of unemployment as distinct from the effects of the relentless rejection the long term unemployed face and this as distinct from the sense of injustice they have at being unable to achieve what they feel they should.

Training during unemployment

Judging from the way in which the success of training programmes for unemployed people aged over 25 and sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions is measured, training is premised primarily on the basis of helping people to return to work that will last in excess of 13 weeks, rather than necessarily improving their occupational mobility. It is logical, therefore, to expect training programmes to increase the number of vacancies for which respondents are equipped to apply or to increase their chances of success in a field in which they already have a reasonable probability. Several respondents recalled receiving training whilst signing on and in some circumstances it appeared to limit their chances of finding employment through the effect it had on flexibility.

Mr. River's training and the effect it has had on his flexibility raises an issue of the utmost relevance to this study. His training has increased his expectations and limited his flexibility with regard to the complexity and variety of any work he is willing to consider, and the recognition he expects to gain from a post. Formerly he was prepared to accept virtually any driving job; now he will accept only driving jobs with some computer based administrative work attached. His capacity has undoubtedly increased as a result of his training, but rather than adding to the range of vacancies he is willing to consider by supplementing driving jobs with driving / stores jobs, only the latter are now acceptable. Whether his training has opened up more complex and varied work that will recognise his increased skill level is a moot point. If it has not (and given his lengthening unemployment duration it seems unlikely to have done), the training he has received has not concomitantly increased his expectations and prospects - only the former - which has limited his flexibility and may well have extended his duration. Nonetheless, Mr. River has personally benefited from his introduction to IT since the certificate he achieved, which is the only one he possesses, is a source of great personal pride to him,

- Mr. River: 'Why I don't know but in the Jobcentre's infinite wisdom they sent me to a training programme because I'd said I needed IT skills. First they sent me to learn interview techniques. I thought, er, do I really need this but you go because you're almost semi-forced to go or they'll do something catastrophic like stop your

money. Um, I went with an open mind. Then they fixed me up with IT training straight away. I got a 14 week computer course.

- Interviewer: 'Was that good?'
- Mr. River: 'Fantastic. The course was great. I've just down loaded all the lyrics of the songs I like and put them in folders on my desktop. I left the course with a certificate I'm proud of – something I can show people. It might not be nothing to some people but to me it's ....'

Positive outcomes can therefore be identified from training of this sort, but only if the aim is not specifically to reduce unemployment duration and the trainee's motivation is not to secure a particular type of job.

Mr Law's training raises slightly different questions. Mr. River had a history of finding driving jobs, prior to this spell, with relative ease (except during the period in which he was banned from driving) and could, in theory, have continued to do so given an equivalent amount of search effort. Mr. Law, on the other hand, feels he can not return to his previous occupation due to his health restrictions. It is more difficult in his case to identify the effect of training on his likelihood of re-employment. However, it is possible to suggest that had Mr. Law been trained for a much wider range of jobs - in generic IT skills for example - many more would be accessible to him. By permitting him to train for a particular occupation access to that occupation has of course increased. Access to all other occupations he would have been capable of performing has, however, been closed off because they do not meet expectations generated through completion of his course. Elements of his inflexibility understandably stem from his commitment to the occupation for which he is training.

Mr. Mitchell's attitude suggests that even when training is provided on the basis of updating or refreshing skills it can have a limiting affect. Jobcentre support for training suggested to Mr. Mitchell, arguably quite reasonably, that such an investment was considered sensible and that work at an appropriate level would be expected to follow.

- Mr. Mitchell: 'I've done education courses even while I've been unemployed, to improve my skills on management courses. They've sent me and I've got certificates and I can't understand why they then force me to go for these [low skilled, low paid] jobs'.

Advisors are charged with ensuring an outcome of some description from interviews with long term unemployed jobseekers. A referral to a training scheme when there is little else an advisor can do to secure a positive outcome is perhaps understandable - Mr. Roman's comments suggest that it is one that is used repeatedly with some who are very hard to place in work.

In total contrast Mr. Rich has received very basic training in relation to the level at which he had worked in the past merely certifying him, as required by law, to undertake low level work in his usual field. This has increase the number and range of vacancies for which he is able

to apply and given his willingness to do so should have increased his chances of employment. Had Mr. Mitchell received training to assist him in securing the low level assembly work he told me he would be prepared under some circumstances to accept, rather than more management training courses, his prospects may have been improved.

Training during unemployment, therefore, has an ambiguous effect on flexibility and thence duration. The rationale for training unemployed people is to increase their chances of finding work through equipping them with additional skills (which may simultaneously increase upward occupational mobility, but that is not necessarily the intention) or, in some cases, initial skills. Where additional skills are made available they supplement existing ones and therefore should add to the range of jobs for which a jobseeker is considered suitable. Jobseekers may well be more attractive to employers after training. However, from the point of view of the trainee it is not necessarily the case that additionally vacancies are added to the range that is considered accessible. Instead vacancies that may have been acceptable prior to training are replaced rather than added to. If ill health or disabilities prevent the deployment of existing skills alternative skills increase the employability of the respondent. However, even in this case, if the respondent was capable pre-training of performing work available in their vicinity, the effect of training may be non-cumulative in terms of adding to the stock of acceptable vacancies. Only where training increases the range of vacancies *both* acceptable *and* available to respondents can it be seen as a success if one accepts the underlying aims on which it is premised[52].

Other independent variables

This section briefly considers some additional independent variables that are theoretically linked with long term unemployment. The focus is not on these variables as barriers to employment through the way in which they disadvantage applicants in the recruitment process (which they nevertheless do). This section concentrates instead on how they are viewed by respondents and operate as barriers to flexibility which is, to a large degree, within a respondent's control. The point is to explore the way in which age, duration, human capital and influence respondents' (in)flexibility with regard to the work for which they would apply.

Age

[52] I have a large amount of anecdotal evidence that confirms respondents' attitudes. A customer who had spent a year training as an IT technician, followed by six months of unemployment continued to hold out for a technician's vacancy because he invested a year training to be one. The New Deal for Young People, and particularly the training and education element of it, can act to prevent jobseekers taking work because to take an unskilled and otherwise undesirable position would jeopardise their opportunity to train to do something more favourable. Additionally graduates, who during their studies often work in low skilled and temporary vacancies to fund their education, once qualified may register as unemployed and attempt to seek only the work they feel they are qualified to do.

Age has chronological, subjective, and life course dimensions, each of which can impact upon flexibility and duration of unemployment. Chronological age is considered to be problematic in employment terms because of the inverse relationship between it and re-employment. Between 1990 and 1996 only 14% of men aged 45-64, who were unemployed at the beginning of the period had found work by the end (Duncan, 2003, p. 102) and only 70% of people aged between 50 and state retirement age are in work, compared with 75% of those below 50 (National Audit Office, 2004, p.3). Why this should be the case is contested but employer discrimination on the basis of chronological age is identified by the sample as one of the main reasons for their failure to secure job interviews. For older interviewees there is potential for chronological age to affect flexibility in response to this perception, but subjective age (or the age one feels) is more obviously important.

Many older respondents, in contrast to the way they sense employers perceive them, feel keen to learn new things and enjoy or even insist on novel or challenging experiences. Several were considering accepting trainee positions in potentially rewarding occupations, but experiencing problems,

- Mr. Peterson: 'It seems everyone wants someone who's 100% experienced. To change career at my age – they want, they look at what I've done in the past not what my capabilities are for the future. They assume that only young people can learn for the future.'

Some, however, concur with this view feeling they already know as much as they are capable of retaining and want jobs that utilise their existing skills and abilities, rather than offering new learning opportunities or challenges. The younger respondents (arbitrarily those below 45) mostly tended towards the former position and sought new challenges and were happy to retrain. This willingness depends in part on the level of success enjoyed in work histories and the confidence they had developed, however, with some only prepared to stick with unskilled jobs or something they had done previously. Ironically when it comes to degree of preparedness to develop new skills, face new challenges and to engage in life long learning, respondents who demonstrate the least flexible overall are the most flexible. Equally paradoxically, in relation to Jobcentre vacancies, a diminution of enthusiasm for what may be seen as new demanding or challenging experiences actually increases the number of vacancies to which a jobseeker may have access. Many Jobcentre vacancies (almost one third were found to demand nothing in terms of skill, qualifications or experience in chapter three) fail to offer challenges and can be seen as unappealing because the tasks they involve are too easily performed.

Individuals' life course experiences also bear on their level of flexibility, particularly in terms of reservation wages and willingness to relocate. Respondents spoke of the way in which their attitudes had changed as their children were born and grew. Often comments were in connection with maximizing earnings but stability, a lack of geographical mobility, and

concern about living environment and life style all featured when children were dependent. Divorce was another life course event that impacted on labour market participation. Businesses had ceased as a result of divorce, and as mentioned previously, housing tenure, with its influence on flexibility, proved very susceptible to its impact.

Duration or length of time elapsed since last work

The length of time that has elapsed since a respondent last participated in the labour market is likely to be an important factor in the flexibility they demonstrate. 'Length of time since last worked' is a more useful concept than that of 'duration of unemployment', which may be misleading (the term 'duration' will be used here to mean length of time since last employed because it is more familiar and less awkward to vocalize). Despite being a key term in employment policy, studies of unemployment and the workings of Job Centres, and being fundamental to classifications, such as 'long term unemployed', duration of unemployment in the traditional sense does not necessarily reflect the length of time a person has been out of the labour market or casually and unsteadily employed. Messrs. Rich and Wright, for example, who had been ill for many years before registering as unemployed, felt that their unemployment had lasted since their previous jobs, not since their claims to sickness benefit had finished. There was little beyond how they each felt health wise to differentiate between the two statuses: similar levels of benefits meant their financial positions were not substantially different and neither the sense of isolation nor stigma felt was influenced by their changing status.

Duration is important because it affects application behaviour in several ways, three of which are particularly relevant in terms of encouraging flexibility. Firstly, as Mr. Black's situation demonstrated, the financial situation faced by an unemployed person and their family is likely to worsen over time. Pressures are more likely to build as savings or loans are reduced and possessions require maintenance or servicing and infrequent but hefty bills arrive. Secondly, the mere fact that the longer the duration of unemployment the more the respondent is exposed to the negative experiences of unemployment, which can wear down resolve and reduce confidence, tends to increase flexibility. Thirdly, I would suggest but can not demonstrate empirically here, the more distant the values associated with working, the more likely it is for respondents to compare vacancies with unemployment, rather than past work, making less attractive vacancies appear more appealing.

In contrast, however, duration can take the edge off search effort and the urgency of finding another job. Messrs. Jeffery, Roman, Stevens, Tome and Wright, for example, had all demonstrated to themselves that they could live reasonably satisfying lives without working. There were aspects of work that they would not sacrifice (despite their relatively flexible approaches) because they had become used to their circumstances over time and were not desperate to remove themselves from unemployment.

Health

Health problems are common amongst long term unemployed people. Perhaps as important as the existence of health problems in terms of application behaviour, are respondents' perceptions of employers' attitudes. Health is or has been an issue of one sort or another for about one third of the respondents, most of whom had been claiming sickness benefits of some type before they registered as unemployed. Problems include epilepsy, back pain, psychological disorder, diabetes and arthritis and two cases that remain undiagnosed.

Four ways in which respondents feel health interacts with unemployment are identifiable from the data:

- ill health caused unemployment;
- ill health was caused by a job or the circumstances of the termination of employment;
- it is seen as a barrier to re-employment by afflicted individuals;
- although only Messrs. Watts, Mitchell and Tweed overtly acknowledged the psychological damage they felt unemployment had caused them, other responses suggested that dissatisfaction was fairly widely spread.

Ill health and disability have an ambiguous impact on flexibility. In some respects they increase it because the respondent, aware of the limitations already in place on what they are able to do not want to restrict themselves still further. Having said that, respondents were also inflexible with regard to the tasks they would be prepared to undertake in the future, so as to avoid any recurrence of their ill health - they would not damage their health for the sake of securing work.

Whilst the experience of unemployment had undoubtedly been a psychologically negative one to some degree for all respondents, this does not mean that they were defeated and malleable. Rather most who felt they had been psychological damaged by their experiences felt angry or resentful at their failure to succeed and were not inclined to drop their restrictions beyond a certain limit as a result. The exception is with regard to isolation and the negative feelings it provokes. The most straightforward solution to problems of isolation is employment - virtually every sphere employment involves some interaction: even the most flexible respondents by and large stipulated a desire to work with other people, having been unable to overcome the experience of isolation unemployment engendered during the current spell.

Human capital

The primary position of human capital in explanations of long term unemployment was discussed in chapter one. In terms of application behaviour it is important to understand how jobseekers view what is as much a potential barrier as a facilitator to work. Whether respondents attribute any of the causes of their unemployment to their own human capital

deficiencies will affect their flexibility, regardless of the actual level of their accomplishments. Equally, if they feel themselves to be well qualified, highly skilled or greatly experienced they are less likely to see a need to be flexible.

There were some highly qualified people in the sample although, as can be seen from the omissions at table 9 one third had no qualifications at all. A lack of qualifications does not indicate that the respondent sees themselves as lacking in human capital, however. Nearly all the sample had been working for many years and the relevance of qualifications had waned after entry into particular occupations for most. More importance was attached to experience and proof of progress within an occupation or organisation - this was considered adequate justification for placing restrictions of acceptable work. Qualifications acquired only recently, however, tended to be used overtly to justify inflexibility regarding future work. Mr. Soton, for example, suggested that he merited a particular level and type of occupation on the basis of his high level qualifications. Equally, Messrs. Law, Mitchell and River would have liked to use their qualifications in their future work.

Table 9 Respondents' qualifications

Qualifications and licenses				
Anthony		A levels		
Collins		A levels		
Jeffery	City and Guilds			
Law	HGV license	A levels	Legal exec. qualification	
Marsh	Apprenticeship			
Mast			HND	
Mitchell			HND	
Morgan			Part degree	
Rich	Apprenticeship	A levels		
Soton			Degree	PhD
Terrace			Part degree	
Tweed		A levels	Degree	
Watts	Apprenticeship			
Wittering	Apprenticeship & C&G	A levels		
Wright	Apprenticeship			

Summary

In this chapter we have considered ways in which work histories, unemployment experiences and biographical data can contribute to our understanding of differences in the levels of flexibility demonstrated by respondents. Findings suggest that respondents behaved in ways that correspond with theories discussed in chapter one. They act in a way that fits predominantly with an expectancy-value model of behaviour, where expectancy refers to the likelihood of the desired outcome and value concerns the outcomes that are desired.

We saw that respondents' expectation of securing preferred work was influenced by the control and success they had enjoyed in their work histories. This was moderated by a

number of other factors and experiences including the point in their work trajectory at which unemployment struck, the unemployment experience itself and the way in which they interpreted their failure to secure the work they sought.

The point at which unemployment struck affected flexibility through the perception with which it left respondents regarding how successful they had been and the extent to which the twists and turns of their work histories were within their sphere of control or influence. The level of confidence enjoyed by respondents depended in part on what they saw when they looked back. Respondents who had had, and were confident about their chances of resuming, successful work trajectories were less flexible than those who had faced shattering experiences which had destroyed their confidence.

In addition to judging what they could reasonably expect to achieve respondents' used their work histories to justify their inflexibility on the grounds of desert. Where nothing had changed that would make them less capable in relation to the work they usually undertook and to which they wished to return, they saw no legitimate reason why they should fail.

We looked in the last chapter at what respondents demanded with respect to future work and the characteristics of vacancies to which they attached value. Here we saw that unemployment experiences and the impact of family and friends and society at large have a bearing on the value of securing a particular job over a job *per se*: social contact, for example, became much more important in its absence; stigma and shame emphasised the importance of securing work, but not work that was itself stigmatised from the respondents' point of view. The need to escape unemployment was never so pressing that a job *per se* (which met subsistence needs) would suffice. Experiences were, nevertheless, not homogenous being affected by a number of factors, the most important of which was financial position and the degree of social isolation endured.

Both expectation and value were affected by the other independent variables considered. Being older increased the relevance of career paths and contract details making only permanent work in the core of the labour market appear valuable. It also worked to both decrease expectation in the light of employer prejudice and increase it in view of extensive experience. The possession or perception of possession, of human capital also clearly increased expectancy. Qualifications and experience in their previous occupations made respondents feel justified in continuing to seek jobs in that or similar fields and of similar quality. The acquisition of new qualifications, and especially those funded by the Job Centre, prompted respondents to feel justified in looking for the sort of work for which they had trained.

Chapter 6 Summary and conclusions

Introduction

This study grew from what I identified as problems with New Labour's position on insufficiently high and poorly distributed labour market participation and on long term unemployment, and with their solutions. In labour markets around the country vacancies exist side by side with unemployment (Manning, 2004, p.22) and the fundamental problem is seen as a mismatch between what employers demand and jobseekers offer. Concentration focuses on deficient skills, qualifications and employability, including weak labour market attachment. At a macro level the situation is expected to worsen as the sort of work unskilled people without qualifications would traditionally have done increasingly disappears from the structure of employment, and is replaced with work that makes greater human capital demands, which they are unable to meet. Account is only taken of jobseekers' concerns to the extent that they demand to be better off in work.

The solutions proposed include life long learning and a much stronger focus on education at all levels and training; the creation of an economic climate in which vacancies (both high and low skilled and well and poorly paid) are encouraged; a strictly managed and (dis) incentivised out of work and in work benefits regime; programmes designed to keep non-participants in touch with the labour market and an emphasis on the responsibilities of people capable of work to find jobs. Since the potential efficacy of solutions is constrained by the quality of the analysis of the problem I undertook this study with the aim of testing some of the notions surrounding long term unemployment. If insufficient qualifications, too few vacancies, a lack of work ethic and benefit or poverty traps had been found to explain long term unemployment, it is likely to be amenable to the solutions put forward by the government. If other barriers had been identified that are not addressed, the solutions are less likely to be effective. This chapter reviews the steps taken to arrive at a position from which to evaluate the government's assessment and the literature reviewed at the outset. It then summarises the main findings which provide the basis for the conclusions reached and discusses some possible implications of the alternative position adopted.

Summary of steps and key findings

I reduced the explanatory strength of a general lack of jobs as a factor in unemployment by locating the study in a buoyant labour market. The importance of jobseekers' barriers, as opposed to employers' barriers has been emphasised by concentrating on an area in which many low or unskilled vacancies exist (Hepworth, 2004). In this area respondents who were not 'choosy' would have found numerous vacancies for which they met the application

criteria each week[53]. There are many jobs which require few skills and can, in theory, be undertaken by any able bodied person.

- Almost 90% of jobseekers in the quantitative study could have applied for more than 10 undemanding vacancies in the fortnight in which the data were collected; 30% of jobseekers had access to more than 100; and 11% had access to 10 or fewer undemanding vacancies.

The quantitative work also revealed however, that when jobseekers' demands were considered few vacancies came up to scratch. This was something of a contrast with the usual emphasis on employers' unsatisfied demands in terms of human capital, for example, and demonstrated, at least superficially, that in the Bournemouth and Poole area many vacancies remained unfilled because jobseekers found them unsatisfactory.

Vacancies were unsuitable either because they did not match jobseekers' practical demands - they were for work beyond jobseekers' travelling distances, or for hours of work which were impossible to satisfy due to restricted public transport, for example - or for more affective or 'chosen' reasons (understood principally in terms of economic and social / psychological theories) they did not do so. I treated occupation and pay as this type of restriction on the basis of the argument put forward in chapter three. Taking them into account on top of practical restrictions reduced still further the number of vacancies for which jobseekers in the sample could technically have applied.

- When occupation was excluded from jobseekers' consideration but all other criteria (excluding pay) both on the part of the jobseeker and employers, such as hours, location, human capital, access to transport etcetera were taken into account many vacancies remained accessible to many jobseekers. 66% of them had access to at least 10 vacancies in the period; 47% had access to 20 or more; 41% to 30 or more; 37% to 40 or more and 30% to 50 or more vacancies. When occupation was included in calculations 47% of the sample could not apply for any vacancies in the period; 53% could apply for 1 or more; 37% for 2 or more; only 16% had access to 4 vacancies or more.

Wanting to do a particular sort of job, therefore, dramatically reduced jobseekers' chances of finding ones for which to apply. Pay had a similar effect, although as was noted, it was not possible to test the impact of pay as rigorously as it was other factors.

The quantitative data did not reveal whether or why jobseekers would stick to pursuing particular lines of work and this is important because the actual impact of stated restrictions depends ultimately on how flexible jobseekers are in relation to them. Since quantitative methods, arguably, do not allow the complex trade offs and cost / benefit calculations

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[53] Applications may have been unsuccessful but the purpose was not to evaluate the reasons that employers reject applicants, rather the reasons potential applicants reject vacancies, since in order to secure work an application obviously must first be made.

jobseekers perform to be identified, I interviewed 24 people, selected as described in chapter two. Using qualitative methods I set out to fill in the gaps in the understanding that the quantitative study had left. Responses provided a means of looking at recognised barriers to work in a different way. The method used, by removing the need to begin the data collection process with a clear idea of what was likely to be important as I had had to in the quantitative study, also highlighted different barriers.

Analysis of the qualitative data took place on three levels. Firstly, I examined the data for expressions of concern about the character of future work - what key things made vacancies attractive or unattractive - and six aspects were identified in chapter four. Secondly, I explored responses to find out how and in what different ways these aspects were considered important. Thirdly, in chapter five, I sought to explore the conditions that gave rise to the different sentiments expressed. For this last level I had purposefully collected data that would allow analysis of the factors (work histories, unemployment experience and biographical details) which I hypothesised would be a source of differences in expectations of work and consequent levels of flexibility. These steps allowed the identification of five types of respondent which are detailed in what follows. The types are not entirely mutually exclusive since, as discussed earlier, most responses contain inherent contradictions.

Even the small sample selected included respondents who identified a lack of work ethic, little human capital, financial constraints or discouragement as barriers to work, in accordance with some angles of each of the approaches discussed in chapter one. Extensive research has been conducted into resolving problems relating to this group and they are the central focus of policy and programmes. These respondents had worked in the past and found that to do so was not in their interests and their work histories were irrelevant to their current situations. This is partly because of the length of time that has elapsed since they last participated but also because work was never central to their identities. One of the most striking distinctions between this and other groups is that they had difficulty describing what they would consider ideal employment and, apart from social interaction, missed nothing about work. Employment is seen, primarily because of the constraints it places on freedom in terms of time and supervision, as unattractive in principle. Few pressures influence these respondents to sacrifice their freedom because their social networks are limited and reflect their values. They are not motivated by financial reward and in work benefits are also irrelevant. Mismatches between the demands of vacancies and demands of these respondents appear not to be the source of their continuing unemployment - they were flexible in relation to most aspects of work and could therefore have applied for all the undemanding vacancies in their geographical area, given reasonable health. However, their responses also suggested that they rarely put themselves in a position to test the impact of the flexibilities they claimed. They do not apply for jobs unless pushed to do so and are sufficiently comfortable with their experiences of unemployment having adapted to it and

nervous of change. Respondents who lacked work ethic were not necessarily lacking in education or abilities, nor did they come from disadvantaged social backgrounds, although some did. It seems unlikely that training and education would improve their chances of employment, at least whilst they do not recognise its benefits.

The second group of respondents possess a strong desire to be self supporting, are dissatisfied with benefit levels and / or reap rewards from working through the interaction with other people that is generally involved. Their search effort is stronger because they are pushed by their unemployment experiences and pulled by jobs *per se*. Their identification with a worker role pulls them in general terms back to the labour market but having reached the current spell via varied but adverse routes, their confidence in securing attractive work diminished. They recognise a total disjuncture between their work histories and their future prospects and are very flexible. Securing employment is important to them personally, regardless of status, stigma or shame. Few jobs are discounted by these respondents who remain unemployed because employers failed to select them despite their extensive job search. Increased numbers of vacancies even, or perhaps especially, of poor quality, would improve the chances of these respondents, since they loose out in the face of competition. They have human capital, in terms of skill and experience but it is inappropriate for the positions to which they now have access. These positions are limited by their health and employers' attitudes towards the jobs they have occupied in the recent past, their lack of formal qualifications, the time they have spent out of work and to their ages. Employer subsidies and anti-discrimination legislation may assist this group by making them relatively attractive to employers. Carefully planned training and education, designed specifically for the labour market to which they have access and in relation to hard-to-fill vacancies, could increase their access to vacancies whilst not decreasing their flexibility as it may in other cases.

The third identifiable group attaches value to material circumstance and had arrived at this point by one of two routes. The first was followed by respondents who had always been extrinsically orientated and motivated to work and change jobs purely to maximise their earnings. Work histories are sufficiently influential to lead them to expect similar rewards from future work. They experience work as disutility and both search effort and flexibility was constrained by an uncompromising attitude to financial reward: as confidence in securing well paid work diminished, so does search effort, more so than reservation wage.

The second route was followed by respondents whose circumstances had changed to a degree and they realised they may have to sacrifice all aspects of work to earn a sufficient income to meet their expenses, which had become their central focus. They had enjoyed many aspects of their work histories but as confidence or hope of obtaining comparable work reduces their priority has become to secure their material well being, which they will sacrifice other aspects of work to ensure. They considered themselves to be in an

emergency situation which they were struggling to resolve and there was a sense of movement and energy amongst this group. As they continue to fail to secure sufficiently well paying work they feel they have two choices to: hold out because if they do not they will loose all they have in any case and experience a complete disjuncture between their past and future lives; or attempt to take control and initiate steps to limit damage as much as their circumstances allow - by selling their homes, for example.

Neither subset of this group of respondents could in practice be assisted through in work benefits either because their levels are insufficiently generous to compensate for disutility or because they fail to cover pre-existing commitments - none found the thought of being better off in work, but nonetheless loosing their homes, an attractive proposition. They could not afford to take a large proportion of available jobs, even if they paid more than unemployment benefits. This is either because they had insurances that paid out only whilst they remained registered unemployed; they felt they were in a better position to continue to seek well paying work if they remained unemployed and had time to devote to the task; or because the only aim of working - to meet their income requirements - is unachievable. On the other hand, however, because pay lacks symbolic significance and status and recognition are irrelevant to this group, there is at least a theoretical potential to incentivise work.

This group seeks the sort of work that is subject to a great deal of competition - being well paid but not generally involving large investments in education and training. It is the sort of work all less skilled or educated jobseekers seek and to which graduates may be 'bumped-down' (Green, 2001). Training, at least to the level offered by the Job Centre is unlikely to allow them to be successful in securing them. Training even at a higher level will arguably not make up for the disadvantage they face due to their ages or unemployment duration when in competition with more highly trained younger people recently graduating from further or higher education. Neither, it should be noted, do their financial positions allow them to start at entry level in occupations in which they have little or no experience, whether or not such occupations offer career paths and prospects. Nevertheless they continue to consider suitable all work that meets their wage requirements, regardless of its type or quality.

The fourth group includes respondents who expect to secure work that will provide more than extrinsic rewards. They expect to enjoy the tasks they undertake, as well as, rather than instead of receiving what they consider adequate financial reward. Adequacy of financial reward may be judged either with reference to meeting commitments; in relation to a notion of value, based on work history experiences; or in comparison with benefits, so in work benefits may help to reduce barriers for this group. Desirable tasks are those that in a practical, immediate and almost physical sense satisfy the needs of their personalities or characters: they hold no symbolic significance. Whilst there is some agreement regarding unappealing tasks there is little in respect of those considered attractive. They feel justified

in their inflexibility regarding tasks: pleasant tasks are a reward for having invested and made sacrifices - they have served their time and expect to continue to receive the returns they had begun to enjoy but lost through no fault of their own. Most people in this group had worked in just one or two occupations throughout their work histories and where they had made moves they had stemmed from disillusionment with their previous occupations. Even where they lack confidence of success in obtaining equally attractive work the alternatives are too unpalatable to consider and they avoid taking action preferring to remain in the limbo of unemployment rather than having to commit to an unappealing path.

Education and training would only address the problems of this group in circumstances where attractive vacancies are available but they are unable to apply for them because of a lack of human capital. Demand (industry) led training may improve the chances of respondents securing work, but work of the type for which training is available in Bournemouth and Poole, because of its industrial base, is amongst that judged unattractive by respondents in this situation. Some had identified occupational areas in which they felt training would theoretically enhance their prospects, given the existence of vacancies requiring particular licences, for example, and that they would find enjoyable. They were disappointed not to be able to find courses available through their Job Centres, presumably because employers and skills councils had not identified areas of need. They sensed, in any case, that jobs in new occupations were closed to them because employers were not prepared to provide opportunities to people without experience, especially where they were too old to occupy junior positions. This type of sentiment was present amongst respondents as young as forty.

The main distinction between the fifth and all previous groups is their degree of concern with the way they perceive others will judge them on the basis of their labour market position or the way they judge themselves in comparison with others and their former selves. Of all respondents these are the most closely entwined with the labour market and rely most heavily upon it in terms of their identity and psychological well being. They feel they have a great deal to offer and expect commensurate returns. Returns are not necessarily judged in terms of the level of enjoyment a job offers - work is too serious a business to evaluate in this way - but in terms of satisfaction based on challenges, demands, difficulty and the ability to demonstrate their capability to themselves and others. The industry into which the occupation falls, and the social status, seniority, responsibility and pay attached to a position all reflect the value of the incumbent and vacancies have to be congruent with the self concept these respondents have developed, and have had reinforced, over years of labour market participation.

The fifth type of respondent does not require greater human capital. They know they are capable of performing the jobs they seek and importantly in terms of understanding their unemployment, many others they do not. They tend to look to external factors in order to

explain their lack of work and believe that they will ultimately succeed because they have done in the past and they can not pinpoint reason why they should fail in the future. There is virtually no disjuncture between the past and the future from the point of view of these respondents. They have a sense of self efficacy that prevents them accepting that the future may not be as they had anticipated and expected. They are the least flexible of respondents, but since they have the most to gain from working in satisfactory work their desire to secure work and their search effort is, in contrast, amongst the strongest. In work benefits are, in general terms, irrelevant to these jobseekers because they could not countenance occupying a position that would qualify for a top up in order to provide a living wage. Exceptionally, however, in work benefits may be acceptable if they enabled self employment, part-time work at the desired level, or work for a not-for-profit organisation, for example, which could benefit from their skills.

These five categories can be incorporated into the following broad model of application behaviour.

- When individuals become unemployed and begin to seek a new job the level of flexibility they demonstrate regarding the vacancies they consider suitable will be influenced by a combination of their interpretation of their work histories and their experience of unemployment. Those who valued their work histories seek to replicate the most important aspects, and believe they can, providing they have not endured any traumatic events which have undermined their confidence. They do this because: a) they define themselves by the positions they occupy and a decline in position causes a diminution of self esteem which is more difficult to deal with than is the decline brought about by unemployment, which is seen as a transient position, or b) because financial reward was one of the most important aspects of past work and current material concerns are closely related to past earnings. Those who did not value their work histories and see less distinction between working and unemployment are very flexible but may be less motivated to seek work.

Conclusions and Implications

Whilst the above model is discernable from the data and literature, some subjects, which will be addressed in turn, require further comment and / or question.

1. What are the contrasting effects of training and how it can both contribute to and detract from labour market participation?
2. How does temporal orientation i.e. whether an individual is primarily influenced by the past present or future impact on flexibility and the chances of securing work in the short term?
3. Is the neglect of experience in respect of the skills debate important?

4. Would job seekers' flexibility increase given greater opportunities to reassess their positions in the light of relevant information?

5. What are the potential effects of raising the retirement age?

6. What is the impact of private insurances and their role in continuing unemployment?

7. What role does gender play in what respondents considered suitable employment and would the study have benefited from the inclusion of women?

8. How well does the typology of respondents described above fit with mismatch, economic or social-psychological approaches to long term unemployment?

1. Training and its effects

Responses suggest that training can close more doors than it opens. I could have perhaps addressed this issue more directly if I had concentrated on studying the attitudes of graduates or college leavers. I did not do so because much is already known about their job preferences and because they are not usually disadvantaged in the labour market. Being young, newly qualified and prepared to accept entry level positions (even if in a restricted selection of jobs) balances favourably with being older and either having experience but no qualifications, or qualifications but no experience and being unprepared, unable or considered unsuitable to take an entry level job.

For my respondents training and education can certainly not be seen as unequivocally making more jobs accessible in any meaningful way. Some respondents had undertaken training and had clearly been unsuccessful in finding work; and those who possessed greater degrees of relevant human capital were on balance less flexible. For every job to which a specific qualification or quantity of experience gives access, there are many more for which it makes no difference. If there is an unwillingness to consider vacancies beyond those for which one has trained or is experienced due to the investments made in gaining this capital, possessing it reduces the chances of securing a job. One of the strongest messages to come from this study is that the potential benefits of training and education for the unemployed, and more broadly, can be oversold and that the risks involved in increasing human capital can, in contrast, be under estimated. Some of the skills literature discusses actual or potential under employment or over-education, but not in relation to the long term unemployed. This study finds that the prospects of underemployment and over education are issues in respect of the long term unemployed, and for non-financial reasons. Clearly the more trained or educated a person is the more likely they are to be underemployed in an area dominated by the hotel and catering, retail and personal care sectors. The incidences of training amongst the sample demonstrated that, even with the negative experience of unemployment pushing them towards flexibility, respondents held out for the sort of work for which they had trained and none had trained simply to get another job, rather with a view to a particular one. If there is room for error in predicting growth occupations and demand for skills and, in contrast to some claims, a large proportion of newly created positions will be

low skilled; if discrimination, at worst, or inconsistency, at best, exists within recruitment processes casting into doubt any claim of meritocracy; and if insufficient demand exists for skills those in disadvantaged positions possess they will fail to secure skilled employment even if their skills are equal to those of competitors. In this scenario there can be little doubt that increasing levels of qualifications (in areas purported to be related to the labour market rather than education for the sake of knowledge) can have a detrimental impact on the flexibility of potential jobseekers and consequently on their chances of securing work. Not only is this a problem in its own right, given aims of high levels of participation, but it also makes it difficult to fill the least attractive vacancies, so that staff shortages, rather than skill shortages damage productivity.

If training closes more routes out of unemployment through its negative effect on flexibility, than it opens, it too delays re-employment and must be given a place in explanations of long term unemployment and a different one to that which it usually occupies. Equally, if the long term unemployed respondents show this level of resistance to under employment is it not possible that we are storing up problems by aiming to put more, rather than different, people through higher education? Fewer (but more socially diverse) rather than more graduates are needed to help the unemployed and other labour market entrants including lone parents and the disabled obtain the sort of work that they would be happy to perform, and, as far as graduates are concerned, less is also clearly best.

2. Orientation to past, present and future

The second point of importance surrounds the concerns respondents expressed about the effects of taking jobs in occupations in which career paths do not exist. These were shown by some of the research covered in chapter one to be well founded. Respondents see breaking with their past employment as initiating or likely to initiate a fundamental change in their lives well into the future and perhaps for the remainder of their working lives. Taking poor quality work is seen as a life sentence from which recovery is impossible. A solution - to professionalise and certify work in these areas - brings with it its own problems, however. Certification is, if not vital, very important to the professionalisation of industries and occupations that currently lack career structures and fail to provide opportunities for advancement. It offers a way to make occupations more attractive. However, once they are seen as attractive and suitable the people who may have been able to secure positions in them initially but did not want to, are likely to no longer be able to, despite potentially possessing all the skills required to merit a credential. They may merely lack a certificate. Attempts have been made in several sectors, including hotel and catering (Keep and Mayhew, 1999) to increase attractiveness in this way and (regardless of any upskilling)

qualifications have become more relevant. The problem for those without qualifications is thereby exacerbated, although they remain as capable as ever they were[54].

Some respondents who had experienced setbacks had in the past managed to hang on to the paths they had planned by taking less than satisfactory jobs because they were confident they could get back to where they were heading. Age clearly influenced confidence, however, and where respondents felt they had been discriminated against but could do nothing about it, they were very keen to return to work with clear progression paths. They could no longer rely on their own ability to get them where they believed they should be and were disinclined to see poor work as a stepping stone. Respondents appear to have the knowledge and foresight to anticipate 'revolving doors' even without personal experience. In some senses the respondents who needed to be the most flexible due to what they perceived to be ageism were the least flexible because of it. Before encouraging individuals to take the steps involved in becoming more qualified (for the purpose of labour market participation rather than for the sake of education) we must be confident that their qualifications will have equal value to those held by others whose characteristics in other respects differ. Additionally we must be sure that jobs are available that require them in order to make it worthwhile for jobseekers to invest and to take entry level jobs without fear of remaining in them for the duration. They also need to be satisfied that their qualifications will not be devalued through qualification inflation because in the latter stages of their working lives they do not have the time to continue to meet changing goal posts.

3. The importance of experience

The third point is that whilst training and education had only a small impact on the numbers of jobs for which the first sample could have applied, and the responses of the smaller second sample suggest some of the dangers of investing without great care in education and training, provision of the opportunity to gain experience could make a positive difference. Knowledge of the role experience plays in explaining long term unemployment and problems filling vacancies is very limited, however. This is arguably because we do not know, and have no easy way of finding out, what experience the work force or potential work force has and how it compares with what is demanded by employers. Particularly amongst older people, for example, it is relevant that a lack of qualifications is taken as indicative of a lack of skill. This is entirely at odds with the ways in which some of the respondents saw themselves and with the influences that bore upon them, which brings us to the fourth point.

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[54] In theory all aspects of labour could be certified, in which case all unskilled work will disappear. All unskilled people, i.e. those without a certificate, regardless of their capacity to undertake tasks or their experience of actually doing so, would appear to be unsuitable and a training and education need would exist for all of them.

4. Self assessment

With the exception of the first and second groups respondents had views of themselves that were primarily based on their previous labour market experiences. In most cases they had nothing else to go on, having rejected the stereotypical mantle of an unemployed person. As well as being distressing employers reported lack of response to applications or failure even to notify the outcome of interviews, meant that respondents lacked feed back as to why they had been unsuccessful in securing the posts they sought. They did not know how they appeared to employers and in some cases consequently continued to enjoy a level of confidence in securing desired work that may not have been justified. Had they been given an opportunity to understand employers' legitimate concerns they would at least have been in a position to act upon them. Instead a lack of feed back and suspicion regarding age discrimination, which they were powerless to alter, encouraged respondents to look externally for the reasons for their continuing unemployment. Additionally, if it does take longer for people as they get older, or any particular group, to secure work equivalent to that which they previously enjoyed, despite equal capacity with other applicants, there is an argument that they should be made aware of this to allow them to realistically measure their progress against an average. Permitted periods (i.e. the time in the early stages of unemployment when jobseekers are allowed to seek equivalent work) should also be extended to the average length of time taken to secure relevant work by similar others. This would enhance the prospect of equitable outcomes for all age groups and perhaps encourage labour market participation into older age since unemployed people could be entitled to seek work of their choosing for as long as it takes on average for a similar person to secure it. Equally jobseekers may attach more legitimacy to expectations that they become more flexible if they feel they have been given a 'fair crack of the whip' in securing work of their preferred kind.

5. Retirement

Relatedly, it is ironic that if older respondents retired, rather than seeking work, some suggested they may be prepared to accept the sorts of jobs they disparage as jobseekers. It is equally ironic that if, as intimated, the retirement age increases, people who currently struggle to find suitable employment will perhaps be less inclined to take work that is dissimilar from that they have enjoyed in the past. Instead of being able to rationalise 'a job' as better than no job in their last years in the work force they will be further away from that point at a given age and have more to sacrifice by taking a poor job.

6. Insurances

The fifth point relates to private insurance, and particularly mortgage insurance. The effect of the policy to encourage mortgage holders to take out insurance is ambiguous. Mortgage insurance clearly cuts to cost of benefits payable on a weekly basis (after a qualifying period of up to 39 weeks), and because private insurances are time limited also reduces the

disincentive effect of taking a poorly paid job, at least towards the end of the term. However, possession of an insurance policy reduces pay flexibility dramatically in the shorter term. Insurances inflate pay demands to a level that ensures the value of the insurance is recouped through employment. Since in work benefits take no account of mortgage costs all low paid work, and in an area such as Bournemouth and Poole most job centre vacancies meet this criterion, is unsuitable, potentially delaying re-entry and increasing costs.

7. Gender

I excluded women from this study because there are only a handful of women registered for over 12 months in the Bournemouth and Poole area; and, I suggested, those who *are* registered appear superficially to have reached this stage of unemployment via very different route to their male counterparts. This study can not therefore compare the potentially different application behaviour of men and women, or the sources of any differences. Gender nevertheless played a part in the application behaviour of the men I interviewed, as well as possibly influencing the impression they attempted to create - slanting their responses in some cases to suggest how positively they were managing, for example, in order to maintain their self-image as capable men. A few respondents acknowledged that the gendered nature of some employment, such as shop work, made it unattractive because it undermined their masculinity. However, since feminised occupations also rarely pay well or enjoy high status their objections could have been on these grounds, in much the same way as were other low status poorly paid occupations - because they failed to confirm respondents' identities as labour market successes, rather than necessarily as men.

Whilst it is possible to conclude that some of the men in the sample *were* sensitised to the gendered nature of some occupations, it is not as easy to conclude that women, given similar work histories and temporal orientations would not judge these occupations in similar ways. To evaluate this position and contribute to our knowledge of differences and similarities between men and women's attitudes to the labour market it would have been helpful to have included women in the study. Nevertheless given their rarity amongst people unemployed for more than 12 months it is difficult to envision a situation where I would have been able purposefully to select those who matched my selection criteria. The value of including those who failed to meet it depends on the importance attached to securing interviews with people with stable work histories. With hindsight, this appears to be one of the main factors effecting application behaviour in a buoyant, if fairly low skilled labour market, and as such an important variable which it would have been a shame potentially to obscure.

One way to counter these problems would have been to include women with shorter durations of unemployment. It is possible that some of the disproportionate lack of very long term unemployed women stems from their willingness to be flexible in respect of some aspects of work: excluding them clearly hides this difference. However, if duration and

experience of unemployment play an important part in flexibility, as they appear in some cases to, including women with shorter durations would also, perhaps, have been counter productive. Traditionally differences between men and women in judging the suitability of occupations would be explained in terms of the multiple sources from which women derive their identity. More recently, however, the greater social and political emphasis on participation in the labour market and in higher education, the presence of anti-sex discrimination legislation and of changing family formations may have begun to undermine the validity of this view for some groups of women. In order to tap the differences and similarities between men and women and the flexibility they demonstrate towards the labour market it is perhaps necessary to conduct research that does not factor in the duration and unemployment experience as a variable but which captures fairly newly unemployed people, perhaps of 13 weeks duration and examines the diversity that exists both in levels of flexibility and past work histories.

8. Mismatch, economic and social-psychological approaches revisited

Economic theory predicts that in general the least flexible respondents invest the most effort in their search because they have the most to gain from securing the sort of work that meets their requirements. The more flexible they become and the poorer the quality of work they would consider, the less effort is warranted. However, findings suggest that the most flexible respondents do not necessarily search the least and this implies the relationship between the two is not straightforward.

Economic theory also suggests that jobseekers perform cost / benefits calculations involving whether or not to their interest is best served by tolerating their unemployment experiences and waiting for a better vacancy or by applying for the one at hand. However, in addition to comparing anticipated future experiences with current experiences some respondents also used past experiences in their calculations. This was because they possessed confidence that they would secure work of their usual sort and that, in reality, they would be sacrificing *this* work and not unemployment to take any currently available alternative. In this set of circumstances any connection between benefit levels and the decision of whether or not to apply is unclear. Some respondents gave the impression that they would put up with virtual destitution or even illegitimate means not to be forced to accept the wrong sort of job because to do so would, amongst other things, reduce their chances of securing the sort they wanted and they were sure it was only a matter of time before they would succeed. For other respondents the choice was much more straightforward. Would they prefer the experiences a vacancy was anticipated to offer or to continue to experience unemployment? They would have applied for work providing it made them better off financially to a sufficient degree (or offered them social contact) because the choice *was* seen as being between continuing unemployment and this sort of barely acceptable vacancy. If the comparison is

between pay and benefits, as in this case, benefit levels may more readily influence how attractive a vacancy seems.

Finally, with respect to economic approaches, I would argue that the current preoccupation with them rests on questionable premises: the comparative ease with which pay, or at least income, can be manipulated; the contemporary ideology regarding the function of the labour market - as a legitimate vehicle for the distribution of resources; the correlation between unsatisfying work and low pay and the difficulty filling what are primarily classified as 'low paid jobs' (for convenience - given their diversity) is complicit in the over-identification of economic disincentives as barriers to work, compounding the neglect of more affective psychological and social aspects.

Findings of this study suggest that the attitudes and behaviour of some sections of the long term unemployed should be understood in terms of theories used to explain job satisfaction, choice and moves and graduate job search, in addition to those currently deployed. They also beg the question of whether unemployed people should be expected to sacrifice their expectations or whether, since society plays a large part in raising them, society also has some responsibility for allowing their satisfaction. If this is the case both the quality of jobs the government seeks to attract and the proportion of the population that is encouraged to engage in higher education need careful consideration.

Appendix 1: Quantitative sample

Table 10 Details of the quantitative sample

Age bands	Frequency (people)	Durations	Frequency (people)	Health Problems	Frequency (reported incidences)	Qualifications	Frequency (reported incidences)
25-30	28	12-18 mths	88	Effecting lifting	37	None	114 (people)
31-35	37	19-24 mths	36	Effecting mobility	19	Driving – HGV, LGV, PCV, forklift, plant	7
36-40	30	25 mths +	73	Addictions	3	NVQ1 and 2	9
41-45	20			Breathing / heart	15	NVQ3 and 4	2
46-50	29			Sight or hearing	8	CSEs	10
51-55	25			Psychological / psychiatric	7	1 to 4 A – C GCEs or GCSEs	25
56-60	24			Allergies	3	5+ A – C GCEs or GCSEs	24
				Other	11	A levels	17
						CLAIT or ECDL	2
						ONCs	6
						HNCs, HNDs and BTECS	17
						C&Gs	24
						1st Degree or higher	13
						Other	16

Appendix 2: Qualitative sample

Table 11 Details of people who took part in the qualitative research

Mr.	Age	Marital status	Housing	License / Transport	Dependant offspring	Qualifications/ certified skills	Most recent 'usual' occupation	Most recent occupation	Current health problems
Anthony	39	Single	Owner occupier with mortgage	Yes / no	No	A levels	IT manager	IT manager	No
Black	44	Married	Private rented	Yes / no	1		Avionics buyer	Avionics buyer	No
Collins	52	Divorced	Private rented	No / no	No	A levels	Civil Servant	Labourer	No
Floyd	56	Divorced	Owner occupier with mortgage	Yes / yes	Non-dependent		Salesman	Salesman	No
Jeffery	54	Married	Social housing	No / no	Non-dependent	C&G	Semi-skilled machine operator	Warehouse person	No
Law	44	Single	Private rented	Yes / yes	None	A levels / HGV	Driving instructor	Driving instructor	Yes
Marsh	50	Divorced	Parents' house	No / no	Non-dependent	Apprenticed	Sportsman	Factory worker	Yes
Mast	37	Single	Owner occupier with mortgage	No / no	None	HND	IT technical support	IT technical support	No
Mitchell	55	Married	Owner occupier with mortgage	Yes / no	Adult - at home	HND	Electronics engineer	Electronics engineer	No
Monty	64	Married	Owner occupier	Yes / yes	Non-dependent		Senior sales executive	Senior sales executive	No
Morgan	50	Married	Owner occupier with small mortgage	Yes / yes	Adult - at home		Buyer	Buyer	No

Peterson	51	Married	Owner occupier with mortgage	Yes / yes	1		Sound recordist	Sound recordist	No
Rich	56	Married	Private rented	Yes / no	Non-dependent	Apprenticed	Electronic engineer	Electronic engineer	Yes
River	41	Married	Social housing	Yes / yes	11		Driver / storeman	Driver / storeman	No
Roman	45	Married	Social housing	No / no	None		Painter and decorator	Painter and decorator	No
Soton	30	Single	Parents' house	Yes / yes	None	BSc /PhD	Chemist	Chemist	No
Stevens	40	Single	Private rented	Yes / no	None		Driver	Driver	Yes
Terrace	51	Married	Owner occupier with mortgage	Yes / yes	Adult - at home		Senior IT manager	Senior IT manager	No
Tome	57	Single	Private rented	No / no	None		Waiter	Waiter	No
Trebor	51	Divorced	Private rented	No / no	Non-dependent		Retail manager	Carer / driver	No
Tweed	55	Divorced	Private rented	Yes / no	Non-dependent	Degree	Senior sales and marketing executive	Senior sales and marketing executive	No
Watts	59	Married	Owner occupier with small mortgage	Yes / no	Non-dependent	Apprenticed	Engineer / pipe fitter	Engineer / pipe fitter	No
Wittering	44	Divorced	Hostel	Yes / no	No contact	Apprenticed / A levels / C&G	Draughtsman	Kitchen porter	Yes
Wright	57	Divorced	Private rented	Yes / yes	Non-dependent	Apprenticed	Sales executive	Sales executive	Yes

Appendix 3: Method of calculating jobseeker / vacancy matches

There follows (at table 10) details of the number of vacancies which were available to ten of the sample (of 100) once their demands and employers' demands relating to the criteria listed on the next page were taken into account. These details were achieved using syntax commands to search the SPSS spreadsheet of vacancies for matches for each jobseeker under each criterion.

Example: The second row down, second column from the left shows that jobseeker 1 matched all the vacancies on the basis of whether they were full or part-time. This indicates that this jobseeker was prepared to consider either full time or part-time vacancies. The next column also indicates that he is fully flexible and will work any days Monday to Saturday. In the third the number is reduced because he will not work any hours in 24, but limits them to between seven in the morning and six in the evening. The fifth column shows that once account has been taken of these conditions laid down by the jobseeker, 247 vacancies are still accessible to him. And so the process continues. This jobseeker is seeking either general office work, a librarian post or work as a horticulturalist. The occupations he is seeking are addressed under the 21st criterion and he has only eleven vacancies for which he could apply at that point. When area in which he is prepared or able to work is considered this figure reduces to seven. However at this point all the other criteria have been excluded - all we are looking at is the number of vacancies that are of the Standard Occupational Classification code he is seeking and in his travel to work area. Criterion 25 includes all restrictions on behalf of employers and job seekers and this jobseeker is left with just 1 accessible vacancy.

Table 11 shows the scores achieved by the process just described for each criterion. Jobseekers on average fared slightly better than the one used in the example. They land up with an average of 2 vacancies that match on all counts.

Table 12 Example of spread sheet detailing numbers of matches per job seeker
(for 10 jobseekers) across all considered criteria (*See below for a definition of numbers in this row)

CRITERIA																								
JOBSEEKERS	1*	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
	355	355	267	267	350	355	350	202	355	355	355	355	355	355	202	355	335	335	143	139	11	7	67	56	1
	247	252	249	153	347	355	347	140	355	329	350	329	329	329	135	355	340	340	143	139	13	3	47	20	1
	247	355	355	247	350	355	350	156	355	355	355	355	355	355	156	345	335	325	146	142	14	7	50	35	0
	247	355	355	247	347	355	347	90	355	329	355	329	329	329	84	345	335	325	144	140	6	3	24	15	3
	247	198	249	126	350	337	337	355	355	355	355	355	355	355	355	345	335	325	143	139	53	53	105	42	3
	247	355	249	189	347	355	347	52	296	329	355	287	287	329	51	345	335	325	151	147	13	2	16	6	1
	247	355	355	247	350	355	350	355	355	355	350	355	350	350	350	345	335	325	146	142	20	20	105	86	4
	247	355	300	216	350	355	350	355	355	355	355	355	355	355	355	345	338	328	145	142	3	5	105	72	2
	247	355	355	247	346	355	346	355	296	329	355	287	287	329	287	345	335	325	143	139	5	5	105	65	3
	247	355	249	189	350	355	350	71	355	329	350	329	329	329	69	351	340	336	147	143	16	2	20	7	0

*Notes to table 10
1 = full time / part-time / either
2 = days
3 = start and finish times
4 = combination of 1, 2 & 3
5 = age
6 = health
7 = combination of 5 and 6
8 = location
9 = CCDL
10 = transport
11= phone
12 = combination of 9 & 10
13 = combination of 9, 10 & 11
14 = combination of 10 & 11
15 = combination of 8, 9, 10 & 11
16 = academic qualifications
17 = vocational qualifications
18 = combination of 16 & 17
19 = experience
20 = combination of 16, 17 and 19
21= occupations
22 = combination of 21 & 10
23 = combination of non-demanding vacancies & 10
24 = combination of all except 21
25 = combination of all, including 21

Table 13 Descriptive statistics relating to matches: totals for the sample of 100

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Full time / part-time	100	126	355	266	45
days JS prepared to work	100	198	355	312	65
start and finish times	100	58	355	297	76
combination of 1,2 and 3	100	20	355	209	74
age	100	346	350	348	2
health	100	337	355	351	7
combination of 5 & 6	100	337	350	346	5
location	100	0	355	179	138
CCDL	100	296	355	337	27
transport	100	35	355	338	33
phone	100	350	355	354	2
9 & 10 CCDL & transport	100	287	355	328	29
9,10 & 11 CCDL, transport & phone	100	287	355	328	29
10 & 11 transport and phone	100	329	355	341	13
8, 9, 10 & 11	100	0	355	174	137
academic qualifications	100	345	355	348	4
vocational qualifications	100	335	343	336	2
academic & vocational qualifications	100	325	340	329	4
experience	100	143	181	148	7
experience & aca/voc qualifications	100	139	178	145	8
matching SOCs in any location	100	0	76	17	17
matching SOCs in TTWA	100	0	53	6	10
vacancies without demands in TTWA	100	0	105	53	41
everything into account excluding soc	100	0	153	34	34
total including soc	100	0	17	2	3

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