

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Coventry University		
Unit of Assessment: 17 Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Improving employment and skills policies to support sustainable employment and in-work progression		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 – 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Paul Sissons	Reader in Employment Studies	2013 - present
Dr Jennifer Ferreira	Research Assistant	2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No.		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Low-paid employment is a persistent feature of the UK economy, with important economic and social consequences, including low productivity and in-work poverty. In 2017, almost 4 million UK workers lived in a household in poverty. Important elements of in-work poverty are insecure work (employment sustainability) and weak labour market progression (the ability of workers to grow their earnings over time). This case study details research with national and sub-regional policy impact, **supporting the roll-out of new programmes to improve employment sustainability and labour market progression**, including the design and development of a £5.2 million programme **supporting improved training and employment outcomes** for over 2,000 health and care workers in eastern England.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Research by Dr Paul Sissons and Dr Jennifer Ferreira at Coventry University has generated new evidence on labour market outcomes and has developed policy and practice approaches for new sustainable employment strategies.

In 2014, Sissons was co-awarded ESRC funding to investigate 'Harnessing Growth Sectors for Poverty Reduction' (G1). The project examined transitions into employment, and career progression and job quality for low-paid workers. The research involved analysis of employment conditions in growth sectors using large secondary-data sets; and state of the art international evidence reviews on what works in relation to employment entry, in-work progression and job quality. Research findings from the project were synthesised and examined through a series of policy workshops. The results were used to develop a set of evidenced policy recommendations for harnessing growth sectors for poverty reduction.

In G1, Sissons led on two of the evidence reviews (including in-work progression (R1)), the analysis of in-work poverty, as well as contributing to other reports and jointly developing policy recommendations. The outputs included new empirical work, evidence base papers and policy development guidance (R1-R2), and research papers published in internationally leading journals (R3-R5). The research found that many low-paid workers experience limited pay progression; and that a range of individual characteristics are associated with low pay and reduced chances of progression. The analyses also identified a sector effect on low pay, poverty and escaping low pay; demonstrating a need to focus on employment conditions. The research also highlighted that employment progression had not been a focus of UK government policy. The work provided a series of recommendations for policies and practices to improve employment outcomes. One example being that moves to more integrated health and social care provided a new opportunity to develop novel employment programmes, by promoting entry and progression through a dual customer approach that focused on employer and employee needs simultaneously.

In 2014-2016, Sissons was a co-investigator on an award from Joseph Rowntree Foundation to work in partnership with Leeds City Region (LCR) to develop sustainable employment strategy

Impact case study (REF3)

options for the city (G2). The research involved evaluating international evidence and conducting new analysis of national and local labour market intelligence indicators. The core project output (R6) included the evidence base, analysis of the opportunities and constraints within the local labour market, and a series of developed policy options for addressing progression needs in the LCR.

The research found low pay locally was prevalent in retail, hospitality and residential care; and that supporting individuals to move between sectors can be an important strategy for earnings progression. The analysis also identified that part-time education and training provision, and careers guidance services, can be supportive of earnings mobility. This informed the development of three interlinked policy initiatives being suggested for the LCR to provide access to employment and training support for low-paid workers:

- A careers information, advice and guidance service providing support for low-paid workers to access training and progression opportunities.
- An in-work advancement service.
- A business support service aimed at enhancing opportunities for part-time workers.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Sissons, P., Green, A. and Lee, N. (2016) *Supporting Progression in Growth Sectors: A Review of the International Evidence*. Cardiff: Public Policy Institute for Wales. Available from <http://ppiwi.org.uk/files/2016/10/PPIW-Report-ESRC-Evidence-Review-Paper-Progression.pdf> [25 February 2021].

R2. Green, A., Sissons, P. and Lee, N. (2017) *Harnessing Growth Sectors for Poverty Reduction: The Role of Policy*. Cardiff: Public Policy Institute for Wales. Available from <http://ppiwi.org.uk/files/2017/06/Harnessing-Growth-Sectors-for-Poverty-Reduction-Policy-Paper.pdf> [25 February 2021].

R3. Sissons, P., Green, A. and Lee, N. (2018) 'Linking the sectoral employment structure and household poverty in the United Kingdom'. *Work, Employment and Society* 32 (6), 1078-1098. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0950017017722939>.

R4. Lee, N., Green, A. and Sissons, P. (2018) 'Low-pay sectors, earnings mobility and economic policy in the UK'. *Policy & Politics* 46 (3), 347-369. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557317X15072086455899>.

R5. Sissons, P. and Green, A. (2017) 'More than a match? Assessing the HRM challenge of engaging employers to support retention and progression'. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(4), 565–580. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12161>.

R6. Green, A., Sissons, P., Ray, K., Hughes, C. and Ferreira, J. (2016) *Improving progression from low-paid jobs at city-region level*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available from <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/improving-progression-low-paid-jobs-city-region-level> [25 February 2021].

Grants

G1. Sissons, P. (Col) (2014 to 2017) *Harnessing Growth Sectors for Poverty Reduction: What Works to Reduce Poverty through Sustainable Employment with Opportunities for Progression*. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), grant number: ES/M007111/1. Total grant amount: £177,672.00. Available from <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=ES%2FM007111%2F1#/tab> and <https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2015/harnessing-growth-sectors-for-poverty-reduction/> [25 February 2021].

G2. Sissons, P. (Col) (2014 to 2016) *Jobs and skills in Leeds City Region*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Total grant amount: £94,985.00. Available from

<https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2015/jobs-and-skills-in-the-leeds-city-region/> and <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/improving-progression-low-paid-jobs-city-region-level> [25 February 2021].

The quality of the research is conveyed through its publication in top-ranking journals in field, its use by other researchers, and through the award of grants from international and national funders.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Sissons and Ferreira's research has generated new evidence on labour market outcomes, employment sustainability and progression, and established novel approaches to addressing these issues. This work has impacted on national and sub-regional policy and practice in the following ways.

Stage 1: Shaping policy design

The research has been influential in shaping policy thinking. In 2016, building on discussions of policy needs to support sustainable employment (G1), Sissons was invited by the Cities and Local Growth Unit (a cross-departmental government unit) to participate in activities to inform policy design for employment innovation pilots, to be trialled in different parts of the country and to provide learning for new national approaches to employment and skills. Research evidence was used to make the case for a greater emphasis on employment pathways and progression from low pay in the design of new approaches. As a result of these discussions Sissons was invited to provide input to detailed programme design with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (Stage 2).

Stage 2: Working with cities to develop local and regional approaches to sustainable employment

In 2017, Sissons was invited to work with stakeholders in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority to utilise research insights to support the development of a new approach to employment entry and in-work progression (see 'Appendix A of S1 'Key Stakeholders who support the programme and who have been involved in the programme design'). R2 presents the argument for a targeted sector approach, and also the potential benefits of integrating provision across health and social care – these ideas are explicitly taken-up in the core design, as detailed in the business case for funding (S1):

"In the report Supporting Progression in Growth Sectors, Sissons et al (2016), review the international evidence on in-work progression in growth sectors this 'points to a potential benefit of a sector based approach'" (2016:3).

"In the designing of the model we have been able to take aspects that appear to have been successful in other programmes (as reported in Sissons et al, 2016), and align these to the local context in order to develop an Innovation Pilot that has the greatest opportunity to be successful in its outcomes and impact. This includes learning from the design of models focused on health and care."

The business case for funding, which drew extensively on the research, was successful and the Health and Care Sector Work Academy programme received funding from national government as an Employment Innovations Pilot. The £5.2 million programme is an innovative model of activities to support employment entry and in-work progression in the health and care sectors. The programme provides funding to "train around 2,100 people to secure and progress in a variety of occupations in the health and care sector" (S5) and is subject to a robust evaluation to inform the next steps of national policy development (Stage 3). The role of the research in the development of the programme is detailed in a supporting letter from the programme lead (S6): the research:

"directly informed our thinking around the delivery model adopted in the programme, including a 'dual-customer' approach seeking to meet both employer and individuals'

needs; linking employment entry to longer-term career opportunities; and the targeting of the health and social care sectors.”

The letter details significant numbers of people who are now finding sustainable employment and highlights the important ‘*human stories*’ of transformation associated with the programme.

G2 developed new research insights on the Leeds City Region labour market and used these to develop a range of potential policy initiatives to support better progression from low-paid work. Leeds City Region utilised the research (R6) to develop new employment and skills strategies. The Report of the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, *Strong Economy, Compassionate City* (S3), discusses ideas developed through the research (pages 9-10 [on interventions drawing from the research]). This over-arching strategy provides the context for the Leeds City Region European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy 2014-2020 document, which sets-out the framework for City Region’s £340 million in EU funding (S4); including developing new funding streams to support in-work progression – supporting those in low income and already in-work (page 130) and a commitment to progression across the labour force (pages 123-125). Within this framework the research informed the £2.5 million ESIF allocation for Skills Support for Low Skilled workers, drawing on the model developed in the research which aligns a combination of careers advice and guidance with skills and training delivery to support individuals to progress (Pages 5-6) (S7).

Stage 3: Further policy development

As a result of the research projects (in 2019) Sissons participated in Department for Work and Pensions evidence workshop on in-work progression to help inform the next steps around policy design (drawing on R2, R3, R4, R5). The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough programme will provide new learning to inform the next phase of policy development. Findings from the research (R1-R5) also continue to provide an evidence base for decision-making at different levels of government, for example in the National Assembly for Wales (S2, S8).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (2018) Career and Pay Progression Innovation Pilot Business Case: *The Health and Care Sector Work Progression Academy*. Peterborough: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. Available from <https://www.citycollegepeterborough.ac.uk/app/uploads/2018/09/Business-Case.pdf> [25 February 2021].

S2: National Assembly for Wales, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (2018) *Making the economy work for people on low incomes*. Wales: National Assembly for Wales. Available from <https://senedd.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11562/cr-ld11562-e.pdf> [25 February 2021].

S3: Riordan, T. (2015) *Strong Economy, Compassionate City* Report of the Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, Report to Executive Board, Leeds: Leeds City Council. Available from <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s137808/Strong%20Economy%20Compassionate%20City%20Cover%20Report%20Annex%201%20131015.pdf> [25 February 2021].

S4: Leeds City Region LEP (2014) *European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy 2014-2020*. Leeds: Leeds City Region LEP. Available from <https://www.the-lep.com/media/2275/leeds-city-region-esif-final-31-jan-2014-revised-may-2014-final.pdf> [25 February 2021].

S5: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (2019) *Devolution Deal Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (2019)*. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. Available from <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/assets/Uploads/ME-Framework-Mar-2019.pdf> [25 February 2021].

S6: Executive Principal and Assistant Director, Skills and Employment, City College Peterborough (2020) *Impact of Dr Paul Sissons’ research into improving work entry and in-work*

Impact case study (REF3)

progression policies upon the development of the Health and Care Sector Work Academy, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority testimonial letter to Coventry University.

S7: Leeds City Region (2014 to 2020) *European Social Fund Call for Proposals. Skills Support for Low Skilled – Call Reference OC20S17P0734.* Department for Work & Pensions and European Union. Available from

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/58f89b8be5274a06b30001bd/Leeds_OC20S17P0734.pdf [25 February 2021].

S8: Green, A. Sissons, P. and Lee, N (2018) *Response to Welsh Government MEW 12: Making the economy work for people on low incomes.* Wales: National Assembly for Wales.

Available from <https://senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s64271/MEW%2012%20-%20Professor%20Anne%20Green%20Dr%20Paul%20Sissons%20Dr%20Neil%20Lee.pdf> [1 March 2021].