

**Department for Work and Pensions**

**Research Report No 381**

# **Staying in work and moving up: Evidence from the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration**

**Lesley Hoggart, Verity Campbell-Barr, Kathryn Ray and Sandra Vegeris**

A report on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions carried out by the research consortium conducting the ERA evaluation. The consortium includes three British organisations – the Policy Studies Institute, the Office for National Statistics, the Institute for Fiscal Studies and MDRC, a US-based non-profit social policy research firm, which is leading the consortium

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First Published 2006.

ISBN 1 84712 088 1

ISBN13 978 1 84712 088 5

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

Printed by Corporate Document Services.

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# Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed towards this research report. Particular thanks are due to the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) researchers who were involved in the fieldwork: Sheere Brooks, Joan Phillips and Isabel Shutes. The following researchers from the PSI also contributed: Karen MacKinnon and Alan Marsh. At MDRC, our thanks go to James Riccio and Gayle Hamilton, who provided insightful comments on several drafts of the report, and to Fred Doolittle, John Hutchins, and Margaret Bald, who reviewed the report. We would also like to thank Hilary Salter and Jenny Yip for research support.

In addition, we want to thank members of the Employment Retention and Advancement programme (ERA) Evaluation Steering Group who provided useful comments on previous drafts of this report. In particular, Jenny Carrino of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ably coordinated, consolidated and communicated comments from these individuals to the authors.

Finally, we would also like to thank all the Jobcentre Plus customers who consented to being interviewed.

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# Glossary

**Advancement Support Adviser**

Employment specialist holding a position specifically created as part of Employment Retention and Advancement programme (ERA). These individuals provide ERA participants with ongoing advice and assistance intended to help them overcome obstacles to steady employment and find pathways to better job opportunities and higher wages.

**Basic Information Form**

A form used to collect information on each individual at the point they were randomly assigned, including demographic data, identifying information and information about any barriers to employment that the customer was facing.

**Employment Retention and Advancement programme**

A programme offering a combination of employment counselling services and financial supports to certain recipients of government benefits or lone parents claiming Working Tax Credit. Its purpose is to help people stabilise and improve their work situations.

**Jobcentre Plus**

The UK governmental institution, an agency of the Department for Work and Pensions, which provides help and advice on employment and training for people who can work and financial support for those of working age who do not work.

<b>New Deal programme</b>	The UK's main welfare-to-work initiative. New Deal services include the development of individual action plans outlining customers' work goals, and job search assistance and training to help them achieve these goals.
<b>New Deal 25 Plus</b>	Mandatory New Deal programme that serves longer-term unemployed people (mostly males) over the age of 25, specifically those who have been unemployed and receiving Jobseeker's Allowance for at least 18 out of 21 months.
<b>New Deal for Lone Parents</b>	Voluntary New Deal programme that serves lone parents (mostly females) who are in receipt of Income Support.
<b>New Deal Personal Adviser or Personal Adviser</b>	Employment specialists, working in Jobcentre Plus offices, who provide job advice and assistance to New Deal customers who were not randomly assigned to the ERA programme group.
<b>Working Tax Credit</b>	Lone parents working less than 30 hours a week are eligible to receive this credit.

# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ASA</b>	Advancement Support Adviser
<b>BIF</b>	Basic Information Form
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>ERA</b>	Employment Retention and Advancement programme
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>ND25+</b>	New Deal 25 Plus
<b>NDLP</b>	New Deal for Lone Parents
<b>NDPA</b>	New Deal Personal Adviser
<b>PA</b>	Personal Adviser
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>WTC</b>	Working Tax Credit



# Summary

## Introduction

Employment retention and advancement programmes are designed to help support low-paid workers and help them progress in work. However, the complex lives and diverse aspirations and perspectives of participants in such programmes can make it difficult to provide suitable assistance.

This report addresses this challenge by exploring the relevant in-work experiences and attitudes of a sub-sample of people involved in the UK's Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme, a large research demonstration project currently testing the effectiveness of a new approach to post-employment support. Drawing on qualitative evidence collected through 170 in-depth interviews with ERA customers, the report focuses on factors significant to work retention and advancement that any in-work support programme, like ERA, would need to anticipate and address.

This report, one of a series being produced as part of a comprehensive evaluation of ERA,<sup>1</sup> is rare for employment studies on low-paid workers in the UK because it shifts the research emphasis away from work readiness and work entry and focuses instead on concepts of retention and advancement. In doing so, it offers a foundation for understanding how receptive low-paid workers may be towards attempts to improve their labour market position through post-employment interventions. Future evaluation reports will assess the delivery and effectiveness of the ERA programme itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The overall evaluation is being conducted under contract to the Department for Work and Pensions by a research consortium involving the Policy Studies Institute, the Office for National Statistics, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, and led by the US-based social policy firm MDRC.

The respondents in this qualitative study come from the three groups that were eligible for ERA:

- Out-of-work lone parents entering the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), a voluntary programme providing work-entry support to lone parents receiving Income Support.
- Individuals aged 25 and over who have been unemployed for 18 months and receive Jobseeker's Allowance entering New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+), a programme providing work-entry support.
- Lone parents working 16 to 29 hours a week and receiving a wage supplement through Working Tax Credit (WTC).

The respondents came to the programme with a range of work histories, family circumstances and other personal characteristics that could affect their participation in the labour market. The study explores how these factors, in combination with respondents' attitudes and orientations to work and to caring responsibilities, contributed to their experiences in work and also to how they viewed work retention and advancement.

### **The ERA Programme and Evaluation**

ERA is a demonstration project that began serving customers in 2003 in six Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales. It was conceived as a 'next step' in welfare-to-work policy, designed to help break the 'low-pay, no-pay cycle' common among low-wage workers. Whereas the current New Deal programmes concentrate on placing unemployed people who are receiving benefits into work, ERA aims to help them retain work and help them advance. As a demonstration project, candidates from the three groups of customers eligible for ERA – ND25+ customers, NDLP customers, and WTC lone parents – were assigned randomly to a programme group that was offered ERA services, or to a control group that remained entitled only to the usual Jobcentre Plus services or to any other services they were normally eligible for in the community at large. ERA customers were offered employment-related assistance from an Advancement Support Adviser for 33 months to help them find suitable work, solve work-related problems and advance in their jobs. Customers working 30 hours a week or more are eligible for a tax-free work retention bonus paying up to £2,400 over their time in ERA, irrespective of their other in-work tax credits. More financial support is available for training and to help with emergencies that might compromise customers' ability to stay in work. The evaluation research will determine whether people in the three target groups receiving ERA services remained in paid work longer, received better pay and conditions, and experienced improvements in other life outcomes compared with their counterparts in the control group.

## Key findings

- **The 'barriers to employment' that make it difficult for many lone parents and long-term unemployed people to enter work do not disappear when they get a job. Some persist or recur.**

For some respondents, staying employed required a continuing struggle with the same skill deficits, caring responsibilities or other personal circumstances that made the transition into work difficult. As respondents entered work, job retention challenges arose. Men who had unstable work histories of manual labour appeared to struggle the most. Many of them believed that the biggest threat to their employment retention was the weakness of the local job market in supplying 'good' jobs and the predominance of temporary contract work. For lone parents, difficulties retaining employment centred on childcare responsibilities and the breakdown of care arrangements, as well as dissatisfaction with working conditions, hours that made it hard to balance work and family life, and the cost and distance of travel to work. Lone parents with more experience of steady work (mostly WTC customers) had fewer problems retaining jobs but they encountered challenges when balancing training with work and family or when they changed employers.

- **The meaning of advancement and the priority placed on it varied greatly among customers. Those who wanted to advance also had differing time scales for advancement.**

Respondents' understandings of advancement included improvements in pay and working conditions, being promoted to a position with more responsibility, and achieving job satisfaction. However, customers differed in how they defined advancement for *themselves*. Many viewed it in terms of job satisfaction rather than moving up the 'career ladder'. Male ND25+ respondents often spoke of a desire for permanent, stable work, while lone parents often aspired to job satisfaction and a better work-care balance.

- **Customers could be divided into those who had positive, ambivalent or negative approaches to advancement. Those whose views were positive mainly wanted promotions, more money, extra responsibilities or a more secure job.**

Some customers wanted to advance where they were and others wanted to move into a different job or sometimes a different field of work. There was also diversity in that some wanted to increase their working hours but did not want extra responsibility; others wanted to advance, but only within self-defined limits. Some customers, mainly lone parents who prioritised their role as carers, were committed to advancing, but preferred to delay it until their family was ready for the change.

- **Some customers held ambiguous or ambivalent attitudes towards advancement.**

These customers did not rule out the idea of advancement or progression; rather it seemed that it was irrelevant to them at the time of the interview. They generally were unsure about what they wanted to do in the future. Some viewed securing a permanent job as a significant accomplishment and prioritised retention over advancement. Some workplaces offered few opportunities for career mobility, and some customers did not like their jobs or the people they worked for. Still other customers were focused primarily on their caring responsibilities.

- **Some customers rejected the notion of advancement for themselves, or were completely indifferent to it.**

Among these customers there was a strong theme of dislike for managers or supervisors; hence they did not want to advance if it meant assuming such roles. This view was often connected to a strong identity as a manual worker. Other reasons for customers' indifference or negative attitudes included prioritising caring responsibilities, not being 'ambitious' or feeling they were too old to advance.

- **How customers responded to problems of retention or opportunities for advancement related to their orientations towards work and care.**

Customers responded to the same barriers and opportunities in very different ways, and the perceived role of work in their lives had an important influence on this. For example, those who had an *intrinsic* work orientation, that is, a desire to work based on an interest in the work itself, were often favourable towards advancement and were most likely to define it as progressing in a job that they enjoyed. Those who were more focused on the financial benefits of working (an *instrumental* orientation) were likely to define advancement as better pay. While some were positive towards advancement, others prioritised stable employment over advancement. Customers who emphasised the *social value of working* and who prioritised care for their children ('being there') had mixed feelings about the idea of progressing at work and taking on more responsibilities.

- **Customers' orientations to work and attitudes to advancement are likely to change considerably over time.**

Importantly, work and care orientations and perspectives towards advancement are not fixed. Changes in customers' personal circumstances and their experiences in work could affect their views and actions regarding advancement. Two main forms of change over time were identified. Firstly, attitudes towards work and advancement changed alongside life course changes. For example, as their children grew older and more independent, customers' attitudes towards advancement could become more positive, while customers reaching the end of their working lives often expressed more indifference to advancement. Secondly, attitudes changed in concert with experiences in work, so that those in steady work, who had successfully managed the initial transition period and had established an acceptable work-care balance, often developed a more positive view about advancement.

- **Although there was considerable variation within each of the three customer groups regarding work and care orientations, strategies for retention and plans for advancement, some common themes emerged from the interviews that distinguished the groups:**
  - **For many in the ND25+ group, advancement goals included getting and keeping a steady, permanent job.** For the majority in this group, who had work histories of unstable and temporary employment, job security was the main priority. Interest in advancement increased as individuals became more securely established in employment, and some aimed in the longer term to improve their skills. They were likely to be receptive to the idea of advancement facilitated by training and incremental steps towards a full-time, permanent, well-paid and secure job. However, many were struggling with agency work or short-term contracts and were discouraged by what they saw as limited opportunities in the local labour market.
  - **For many NDLP customers, starting work was a big step. They were likely to need time to get used to working and organising their lives around work and family before thinking about advancement.** Childcare responsibilities were understandably a critical issue for NDLP customers as they thought about the question of advancement. At the same time, how they viewed advancement in light of their caring obligations varied considerably. Some were motivated to advance to provide for their children financially or to be a working role model. Others, who felt they should limit their work ambitions in order to spend more time with their children, were likely to be more interested in advancement as their children got older. Some NDLP customers who were more accustomed to working, or were work-focused, had an approach to work similar to that of many WTC customers.
  - **WTC customers were more likely to be positive towards advancement, to undertake training to improve their skills and, consequently, to improve their employment position.** As previously noted, attitudes towards advancement can change as customers settle into employment, and WTC customers, who were already working when recruited to ERA, were likely to be further along this road than lone parents who had joined the programme via NDLP. Many WTC customers, attracted by training opportunities, came into ERA with a positive attitude towards advancement and ideas about what they wanted to do. They were less likely than those in the NDLP group to defer advancement. However, this was not unanimously the case. Some signed up to ERA because they had a vague interest in doing something different or 'better', while some placed a higher priority on achieving a better work-care balance than on advancement.

## Conclusion

This study of people's understandings of retention and advancement provides evidence of the need for continuing in-work support. Individuals may overcome employment barriers sufficiently to enter work, but these difficulties may continue to present challenges that need to be managed. New problems can also arise in

work, such as job redundancy and issues with childcare, transportation, finances and job satisfaction.

People respond differently and devise different strategies when faced with threats to their job security and with opportunities to advance in work. Individuals' orientations to work and care influence how they respond, and thus have implications for in-work support programmes aiming to promote retention and advancement. Advisers or job coaches need to be aware of the variety and complexity of individuals' orientations to work and care and the ways that these can shape their future goals, the paths they choose and the obstacles they see ahead of them. These orientations combine in different ways and interrelate with other considerations in influencing decisions about work.

Advancement means different things to different people and these meanings may be difficult to predict, liable to change and take time to understand. Eventually, some people who are initially reluctant may be coached into taking small steps in their advancement; others may be able to take one large step when they are ready. Some may need to move jobs in order to advance; others will be able to make the most of opportunities where they are. Advisers need to understand what advancement means for individual customers in order to help them. Their efforts to support their customers' advancement may also become more effective with the passage of time. Thus, providing useful guidance will require a relationship that extends well beyond the initial transition to work.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The study

This report explores the work-related views and behaviours of a group of men and women with either low rates of employment participation or extended periods out of the labour market. It focuses on individuals' experiences of securing steady employment and their aspirations for advancing in work. It is based on a study of 170 qualitative interviews that form part of a large-scale evaluation of the Employment Retention and Advancement scheme (ERA) – an employment support programme delivered through Jobcentre Plus.<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this report is to understand customers' subjective experiences and perceptions of retention and advancement, **not** to evaluate the delivery of services designed to improve retention and advancement through ERA. This will be undertaken in future evaluation reports.

The study focuses on two distinct subgroups of the working age population – lone parents and the long-term unemployed. Most of these are Jobcentre Plus customers who have entered one of the New Deal programmes. A small number are low-paid lone parents in receipt of Working Tax Credit (WTC). The study was designed to deepen understanding of the ways in which recent benefit claimants adjust to employment and how they view their future prospects. It therefore concentrates on the employment behaviours and aspirations of these people rather than the impacts of the ERA intervention. The study is unique because it shifts the research emphasis away from issues related to work readiness and work entry towards concepts of work retention and work advancement. This is rare for employment studies on lone parents and the long-term unemployed.

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<sup>2</sup> Jobcentre Plus is a Government agency that brings together the provisions of the Benefits Agency and Employment Service, and is aimed at helping people of working age into work and assisting employers to fill their vacancies.

The analysis of respondents' perspectives is structured around three main themes that are associated with future work behaviour:

- Work histories and barriers to work, as relayed by the respondent.
- Care orientation – attitudes towards combining care responsibilities (children and others) with work – this is particularly relevant to the lone parents in the study.
- Work orientation – attitudes towards working.

The first theme provides a descriptive account of past work behaviours and respondents' perceived barriers to work. The second and third themes capture emotive and attitudinal dimensions related to balancing work and life. These three broad themes provide the basis of an analytical framework for understanding the different pathways into work and beyond. The research pays particular attention to those participants who were working or who found work after starting ERA. This report shows how these factors influenced employment-related behaviour. In particular, the study focuses on the way in which orientations towards work and care influence retention and advancement behaviour and attitudes, and the implications of these findings for a programme such as ERA.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 The Employment, Retention and Advancement scheme

The concepts of retention and advancement are central to ERA, and although this report is not a review of ERA and its impacts per se, the research took place within the context of the programme. This section provides an overview of the ERA intervention. The design of ERA, including the rationale and theoretical considerations, is published in more detail elsewhere (Morris *et al.*, 2004).

ERA is a labour market intervention that began in 2003 and 2004 in six Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales. It is a 'demonstration project' that randomly assigns participants to a programme group who receive the new services and a control group who do not. By this means, a subsequent comparison of the programme and control groups will provide an accurate test of the outcomes and impacts of ERA.

Three working age groups are eligible for ERA:

- Long-term unemployed people entering the New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+).
- Lone parents entering the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP).
- Lone parents receiving WTC on the basis of jobs in which they worked between 16 and 29 hours a week.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> WTC is for individuals working 16 hours or more and is assessed in relation to a household's annual income. Those with children will also receive the Child Tax Credit. First introduced in 1999 as the Working Families Tax Credit, it was later adapted in 2003 to take its current form.

ERA applies a combination of active case management and increased financial incentives in order to help people sustain work or upgrade their skills whilst in work. Customers assigned to the ERA programme each have an Advancement Support Adviser (ASA) for a maximum of 33 months over both pre- and post-employment periods. Once in work, coaching continues to help customers negotiate better pay and conditions of work. ASAs may also help with other support activities, such as rearranging childcare if necessary or advising on tax credits. ASAs also have a fund of up to £300 per customer available for financial emergencies that may threaten the sustainability of work. Participants are offered a retention bonus of up to six payments of £400 when they work 30 or more hours a week for 13 out of every 17 weeks. This is offered as an incentive to assist customers to make the transition into full-time, stable employment. Working ERA customers can also qualify for training fees that meet up to £1,000 of the fees paid for a course of approved training, plus a further award of up to £1,000 paid at £8 per hour of classroom study or training.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis through ERA upon work retention and work advancement is conceived as the next step in the Government's welfare-to-work policy: helping people into paid jobs; then helping them to stay in those jobs longer; and later to advance their pay and conditions. To date, the present administration's welfare-to-work policy has three elements:

- Making work pay: in-work tax credits plus transitional benefits.
- Active case management through New Deal programmes, including increased requirements upon unemployed people to actively seek work.
- New services such as Sure Start and the National Childcare Strategy.

The first two of these are directly relevant to ERA. The programme is designed to build on the tax credits and New Deal policies by offering in-work support to people who struggle to retain work and/or find it difficult to improve their position in the labour market.

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<sup>4</sup> Non-working participants in ERA are also part of the respective New Deals they qualify for. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that ERA services are delivered in tandem to the New Deal services the customers are entitled to. The New Deal is a Government programme that aims to support unemployed people into work. ND25+ is a mandatory scheme for those who have been claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for 18 months continuously or for 18 months out of 21; NDLP is a voluntary scheme for lone parents with children under 16 who are not working or are working less than 16 hours a week. Within the New Deal all those participating are assigned a Personal Adviser who will assist customers in job search activities. The voluntary nature of the scheme for lone parents means that those participating have expressed some interest in returning to work; this should also be considered in the reading of the report. The customers who responded to the letter about ERA are those who are participating.

A review of the research carried out in preparation for the design of ERA concluded that there is very little empirical evidence concerning work retention and work advancement, especially for people leaving benefits (Johnson, 2002). But as Johnson also notes, people who struggle to find work tend to be the first to leave a job. Among the more disadvantaged and lowest-paid workers there is often a pattern of recurring unemployment and unskilled, poorly-paid work: often called the 'low-pay/no-pay cycle'. The recognition of this problem provided a strong argument for an intervention aimed at this population.

### 1.2.2 Work retention

Two of the ERA customer groups, NDLP and ND25+ participants, are more vulnerable to problems with sustainable employment. Research on the NDLP has found that 20 per cent of lone parents who had left Income Support (IS) had returned to IS within ten months (Hales *et al.*, 2000), and that lone parents have higher job exit rates even after personal and job characteristics are controlled for (Evans *et al.*, 2004). Analysis of the ND25+ programme has shown that 38 per cent of those who entered employment within six months of the start of the programme were not in work a year later (Morris *et al.*, 2004). In addition, frequent cycling between work and benefits can have a 'scarring' effect on emotional well-being and an impact on future potential earnings and advancement (see Arulampalam *et al.*, 2001).

There are a range of reasons why people leave work and return to JSA (and then ND25+), including not enjoying the job, wanting to find something better, bankruptcy and being made redundant (Bivand *et al.*, 2004). For lone parents, leaving work is often associated with childcare responsibilities. Bell *et al.* (2005) found that parents make decisions about work based on their orientation to work, attitudes to parental and non-parental care, and their views of different forms of childcare. In their work, they explored the lone parents' complex arrangements to combine employment, education and care responsibilities.

Problems with work retention are inextricably linked to pre-existing factors that are known to impinge on work entry. Consequently, joblessness and work retention problems are concentrated in the same populations. External conditions, such as labour supply, employer attitudes and inadequate support systems can act as barriers to finding steady employment.

But even when there are job opportunities, a barrier to staying in work may be something in individuals' circumstances or personal characteristics that acts to delineate the kind of job or hours of work they are willing or able to do. Broadly, these barriers can be summarised as follows:

- Labour market – general job opportunities and a lack of suitable jobs, low-paid jobs and contract work.
- Individual barriers/lack of human capital – qualifications, skills, work history, recent work experience, confidence, poor health and disability.

- Cultural roles and attitudes that devalue work and foster dependency.
- Employer discrimination (e.g. ageism and racism).
- Poor local support – childcare and transport.

Many of the ERA participants who were out of work when they started the programme faced multiple labour market disadvantages. These may be associated with existing community and social factors that can reinforce a psychology of worklessness (Ritchie *et al.*, 2005). A large proportion of Jobcentre Plus customers are housed in socially rented accommodations, which are environments associated with disadvantaged access to sources of local employment and local amenities such as childcare (Speak, 2000).

Individuals who enter ND25+ have been out of work for a minimum of 18 months, and relatively high numbers of them have severe labour market disadvantage, e.g. a lack of suitable jobs, lack of skills and outdated skills, a lack of suitable training, a short or patchy work history, transport difficulties, lack of confidence, lack of motivation to work, and employer prejudices regarding age and work history. Three out of ten say they are suffering from some long-term illness or disability and four out of ten have only basic qualifications or no qualifications. Some of the older long-term unemployed (a quarter are over 50) also have criminal records, drug or alcohol dependence, learning difficulties, mental or physical health problems, personality disorders, are ex-carers, or are people who are simply resistant to re-engagement in paid work. Thirteen per cent belong to an ethnic minority group and eight out of ten ND25+ customers are men (Legard *et al.*, 2000).

The majority of NDLP participants in ERA are female and, like the ND25+ group, they experience a similar array of labour market disadvantages, e.g. poor family health, financial disincentives to working, lack of work skills and experience, lack of confidence, problems with transport, lack of job opportunities and employer prejudices (Millar and Ridge, 2002). But the most common deterrent to lone parents' employment is caring responsibilities and the lack of affordable quality care. Many lone parents deliberately choose to remain labour inactive in order to care for their children, and this decision is associated with the age and number of children in the household. Research suggests that in the longer term, lone parents settle in work as their children enter secondary school. In the shorter term, however, the picture is a little less stable. In the Families and Children Survey, for example, 2,000 lone parents were tracked over the two years between 1999 and 2001. Of those in work of 16 or more hours a week in 1999, 15 per cent were no longer in work in 2001 (Kasparova *et al.*, 2003).

Other lone parents choose to work part-time hours and supplement their earnings with tax credits. These individuals comprise the WTC group represented in this study. Because the WTC group are therefore in work when they start ERA, job retention is generally not an issue for them. These lone parents are characterised by steady work histories, albeit, part-time hours.

### 1.2.3 Work advancement

Compared to work entry and retention, there is relatively little research evidence on advancement in work. The design paper for ERA (Morris *et al.*, 2004) showed the rationale for developing a programme that sought to help low-paid workers advance in work. Concern over advancement is connected to the increase in wage inequality and the decrease in wage mobility across job sectors. Wage inequality in the United Kingdom (UK) has risen since the 1980s (Machin, 1999), while wage mobility has actually declined (Dickens, 2000b; Stewart and Swaffield, 1999). These trends indicate that low-paid workers struggle to progress out of low-paid work. These jobs are generally junior and low skilled, often part time or temporary, with fewer opportunities for training (Dickens, 2000a). Those earning the lowest wages and whose working conditions are poor are generally less able to negotiate better working conditions for themselves (Dex and Smith, 2001). They are also more likely to return to benefits than improve their earnings (Dickens, 2000b). Poor prospects for advancement are associated with spells of unemployment that 'scar' those entering employment.

There is little evidence in the literature on the choices that people make with regard to advancement. A number of studies suggest that a significant minority of workers take on flexible work (temporary or part time) involuntarily. This may be due to the characteristics of workers themselves, labour demand factors and the social context within which individuals make decisions about work (see Kellard *et al.*, 2001; Rangarajan, 1996; Slaughter *et al.*, 1982).

A recent American study has tentatively suggested that low-paid workers can advance when labour market intermediaries (like Jobcentre Plus) help to expand their access to good employers, assist with training, and, crucially, help them develop both mobility and job retention strategies (Anderson *et al.*, 2005). The study acknowledges that more evidence is needed.

By focusing on individuals' in-work experiences and their views on advancing in work, the current study will help fill gaps in the research literature and enhance our understanding of job retention and advancement for more disadvantaged workers.

## 1.2 Outline

This report is based on analysis of customers' work histories, attitudes to employment, and barriers to employment and in particular, their care responsibilities. Its focus is customers' understandings of, and views of, retention and advancement and their implications for retention and advancement programmes. It does not comment upon, nor seek to evaluate, the retention and advancement services that customers have received. This will be done in a later report. This analysis explores to what extent customers share the ideas and rationale underpinning the development of ERA, and how they may be open to such intervention in their own working lives. The report argues that customers bring with them complex sets of characteristics and orientations that inform their understanding of retention and advancement. To better serve

them in programmes such as ERA, these characteristics and orientations need to be understood. Chapter 2 describes the main characteristics of the sample. This includes an analysis of qualitative data related to work histories and employment barriers. This is significant information that contributes to the understanding and development of the work and care orientations that form the analytical base of the report. Chapter 2 also describes the research methodology, including a discussion of how the orientations were derived from the interview data.

Chapter 3 explores customers' care orientations and work orientations' and develops a series of typologies that, it is argued, interrelate in complex and dynamic ways. In developing these interrelated typologies, the report expands upon the existing work, which has focused on only one of these two areas. This forms the starting point for the analyses of retention and advancement in later chapters, since it is argued that care and work orientations in association with work histories and barriers combine in unique ways to partly shape customers' experiences of retention and advancement. Understanding these typologies has implications for the effectiveness of retention and advancement programmes.

Chapter 4 considers retention issues raised by those customers who were in employment or who had been in employment since random assignment. These include temporary contracts, travelling to work, financial problems, care responsibilities, and working conditions. The chapter explores how customer experiences of, and reactions to, retention issues are related to their work histories, barriers, and orientations. The chapter considers the retention issues raised by customers and the implications that these have for an employment retention and advancement scheme and those working to support it.

Chapter 5 describes customers' experiences and attitudes towards advancement, again drawing upon the orientations developed in Chapter 3. The chapter explores positive, ambivalent and negative attitudes towards advancement, and discusses how these relate to work histories barriers, and orientations, as well as the implications for advancement support.

The conclusion draws together the above discussions and focuses on the differences and similarities between the ND25+ and lone parent groups involved in ERA. In conclusion, the study considers the implications of the findings for a programme such as ERA.



## 2 Research methodology and sample

### 2.1 Methodology

A research consortium working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus is undertaking the evaluation of the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme. The consortium consists of three British organisations – the Policy Studies Institute, the Office for National Statistics, and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) – and one US organisation, MDRC, which leads the consortium. The evaluation is divided into four research strands:

- An Impact Study – to determine ERA’s effectiveness in improving outcomes for customers in terms of work outcomes, such as employment stability, earnings, terms and conditions of service; and non-work outcomes, such as housing and family formation.
- A Process Study – to ‘unlock the black box’ and show how ERA operated and explain why the observed outcomes may have arisen.
- A Cost Study – to find out what the ERA programme costs to operate.
- A Cost-Benefit Study – to compare the value of the programme’s outcomes with its operational costs.

This research report is based on one part of the Process Study research. The Process Study is qualitative and collects in-depth data on the experiences of and views about ERA from a range of stakeholders, including ERA customers, Jobcentre Plus staff (both advisers and managers), and other key informants, such as DWP personnel involved in the design, management, or delivery of ERA. It uses semi-structured interviews (for all stakeholders), focus groups (for DWP and Jobcentre Plus staff) and analysis of documentary material.

The research reported here consisted of a total of 170 semi-structured interviews carried out with two cohorts of ERA customers in Autumn 2004 and Autumn 2005. The cohorts were distinguished by the length of time they had spent on the ERA

programme. Cohort 1 interviews (68) took place with customers up to a year after random assignment and Cohort 2 interviews (102) approximately 18 months after random assignment.<sup>5</sup> Interviewees were quota sampled according to district and customer group, although due to limited uptake by WTC customers early in the programme, Working Tax Credit (WTC) respondents (35 interviews) were interviewed only in Cohort 2, while New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) (64 interviews) and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) (71 interviews) interviewees were sampled in both cohorts. The two cohorts also differed slightly. Cohort 1 contained a small number of control group customers; Cohort 2 contained only programme group customers. Further, the sampling strategy for Cohort 2 purposively selected customers with post-random assignment work experience, in order to adequately capture perspectives on retention and advancement in work.

Interviews were conducted in customers' homes or in a public location convenient to them and typically lasted 45 minutes to one hour. Customers were asked to describe their current situation, work and benefits history, future plans, views on advancement, Jobcentre Plus experiences and ERA support (refer to Appendix A for the interview topic guide.) All interviews were tape recorded (with respondent consent) and transcribed verbatim.

### **2.1.1 Data analysis**

Interview transcripts were coded and analysed with the aid of the N6 software package. This package speeds up the process of sorting data and facilitates rapid retrieval of coded data. Stage 1 of the process consisted of general coding aimed at breaking the data down into units based on broad topic areas covered in the interviews. Stage 2 consisted of more detailed coding within topic areas to identify themes emerging from the respondents themselves. One analytical strategy entailed systematically reviewing the data and comparing and contrasting across cases according to the emerging themes, in order to identify patterns and connections. A second strategy consisted of examining individual cases to consider the linking of experiences, views and ideas within the accounts of individual customers. From these two strategies, typologies of customers were developed based on the orientations to care, work and advancement which emerged from the accounts they gave. These are described in later chapters of the report. Customers' experiences within and across typologies were then compared and connections were made. Lastly, a team approach was employed to cross-validate the typologies and emerging themes.

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the interviewees have been or will be followed up for a second interview for the longitudinal element of the Process Study research; however the results reported here are from Wave One interviews only. The longitudinal findings will be reported on at a later date.

Data from all 170 interviews are used throughout the report, with the exception of the chapter on retention, which draws only upon the interviews with customers who had worked at some stage since being randomly assigned (147 interviews). In order to protect the identities of the people who participated in the research, both individuals and Jobcentre Plus districts are presented in anonymised form. Districts were assigned a number, and individual respondents were all given a unique code.<sup>6</sup> In cases where individual participants are discussed in greater detail (boxes), aliases are used.

## 2.2 Sample description

The following section describes the characteristics of the customers in the sample based both on the semi-structured interviews and on information from the Basic Information Form (BIF), an electronic database completed by Jobcentre Plus staff during the ERA random assignment procedure. Data from the BIF are summarised in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1 Sample characteristics**

	<i>Column percentages</i>			
	<b>ND25+</b>	<b>Customer group NDLP</b>	<b>WTC</b>	<b>All</b>
Average age	38	33	38	36
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White British	78	78	86	79
Other ethnic group	16	20	14	17
Prefer not to say/unknown	6	3	0	4
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	75	14	6	35
Female	25	86	94	65
<b>Marital status</b>				
Married/cohabitating	22	0	0	8
Separated/divorced/widowed	17	31	51	30
Single never married	59	69	49	61
<b>Number of dependant children</b>				
0	84	0	0	32
1	3	51	46	32
2	10	29	43	24
3+	3	19	11	12
				Continued

<sup>6</sup> Respondents' codes appear in brackets when they are referred to or quoted. Codes with the prefix ND+ refer to ND25+ customers; those with the prefix LP refer to NDLP customers; and those with the prefix WT refer to WTC customers.

**Table 2.1 (Continued)**

	<i>Column percentages</i>			
	ND25+	Customer Group NDLP	WTC	ALL
<b>Highest educational qualification</b>				
GCSE/O level equivalent	22	31	34	28
A level	3	5	6	5
GNVQ/NVQ/SVQ	30	28	35	28
Degree or higher	11	9	3	8
Other	13	9	11	11
None	22	18	11	18
<b>Employment barriers</b>				
Reports at least one barrier	55	59	60	58
- Childcare	3	44	54	31
- Transportation	22	18	17	19
- Health	14	10	3	10
- Housing	11	10	0	8
- Basic skills	9	1	3	5
- Other	25	10	6	15
Proportion who worked since random assignment	75	90	100	87
Total sample	64	71	35	170

Source: BIF completed at time of random assignment.  
Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

### 2.2.1 Demographic characteristics

The average age of participants was 36 years. NDLP customers were, on average, slightly younger (33 years) than the other customer groups (both 38 years). The ethnic composition of the sample was primarily White British (79 per cent). Most respondents were single or no longer married, although 22 per cent of ND25+ customers reported living with a partner.

The lone parent and ND25+ customer groups were distinguished by gender and the number of dependent children in the household. Three-quarters of the ND25+ group were male, while the vast majority (86 per cent to 94 per cent) of the NDLP and WTC interviewees were female. The majority of the total sample were therefore female (65 per cent), due to the high proportion of lone parent participants. Few (16 per cent) ND25+ customers reported dependant children in their households, whilst around half of NDLP and WTC groups (52 per cent and 46 per cent respectively) had one dependent child in the household, and the rest had two or more.

Educational attainment among the sample was relatively low. Most individuals (56 per cent) had achieved either minimum academic qualifications in the form of a General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or equivalent, or vocational skills. A further 18 per cent reported no qualifications. Few had attained higher-level qualifications (A level or degree). This reflects the characteristics of the wider NDLP and ND25+ populations (see Evans *et al.*, 2004, and Legard *et al.*, 2000).

### 2.2.2 Work histories

The description of customers' previous work experiences is based on the accounts given by customers in the interviews and includes their experiences up to the date of the interview.<sup>7</sup> Their work histories fall into three main types. One was a group of 'female returners' who had taken an extended period of time out of the labour market to have children and then decided to return to paid employment. These were mostly NDLP customers, but also comprised some WTC customers and a small number of older female ND25+ customers. Of those with a more continuous history of economic activity, customers could roughly be divided into those with a manual work background and those who had predominantly worked in the service sector. However, there was also some overlap between the two as some customers had crossed sectors. Manual workers were mainly ND25+ customers, along with a few (mostly male) lone parents. Service sector workers were mainly lone parents either in the WTC or NDLP groups, with a small number of ND25+ customers. There was also a smaller group of ND25+ and NDLP customers who had very limited paid work experience.

In general, gender was more significant than customer group in terms of patterns of work histories. For example, the few male lone parents were more similar to male ND25+ customers than to female lone parents, and female ND25+ customers were more similar to female lone parents. However, NDLP customers were more likely than WTC customers to be female returners who had taken extended periods out of work.

#### *Manual work histories*

All those with manual work histories were male, mostly in the ND25+ customer group, but there were also some male lone parents. Generally those with more skilled jobs had experienced more stability, staying within the same area of work (although not necessarily with the same employer) and had more continuous labour market participation. Those with unskilled jobs tended to have experienced more temporary and casual jobs punctuated by periods of unemployment.

One common pattern was a period of stable manual employment, often with a long tenure at one company, followed by a redundancy and a break in stable employment. This was particularly characteristic of older men in the sample, and resulted in their taking lower-paid and lower-skilled employment or moving to self-employment, although some respondents were still unemployed at the time of the interview. One example of this was a 50-year-old man who had worked in a factory for 19 years

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<sup>7</sup> Given that, as noted previously, customers who had experience of paid work since random assignment were purposively sampled for Cohort 2, the total sample contains more individuals with recent paid work history than would be usual within the wider population of these customer groups.

before being made redundant and taking a series of temporary jobs. At the time of the interview he was self-employed as a taxi driver (ND+36). Another example was a 52-year-old man who had worked in engineering for the same company for 30 years and had advanced to a management position before being made redundant. Since then he had taken a job installing blinds, and at the time of the interview was a quality technician for a company manufacturing electronics (LP28). A small group of men had experienced a very long period of unemployment (ten years plus) following a redundancy, which had in itself become a barrier to work, even though in some cases they had completed several government training schemes (New Deal and its precursors) and had substantial voluntary work experience.

A smaller number of respondents had started in manual work but subsequently retrained or moved into different areas of work, including in the service sector.

### *Service sector employment*

These respondents were mostly women, both single women without children and women who had continued working after having children without any significant period of time out of the labour market. Employment histories in this group were quite diverse. Some had undertaken predominantly unskilled work, such as in catering, call centres, or retail, sometimes combined with production work in factories. In these cases, respondents' work histories were often unstable, punctuated by periods of unemployment, ill health, or caring responsibilities. There were also those who had more stable white-collar trajectories, who mostly did administrative work. Some customers in this group were in the early stages of their working lives and so had not yet experienced significant advancement, whilst a small number had moved up the career ladder, including in a few cases into managerial positions. Finally, there were those whose work histories were more mixed, as they had combined different fields of work. These customers' work histories often included periods of self-employment and sometimes managerial, professional, or creative work. There was also some movement between manual and service sector fields.

### *Female returners*

Female returners are those who took an extended period out of the labour market to bring up children and then decided to return when their children were older.<sup>8</sup> Issues regarding this group of workers discussed in the literature have tended to be related to downskilling following an extended work or career break. However, the experiences of respondents in this group in the sample varied according to the nature and extent of their work experience before they left the labour market to

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<sup>8</sup> There were a small number of men in this category but we have retained the name 'female returner' as it is well-established in the literature on female employment patterns (see Rubery *et al.*, 1999). Male lone parents in the sample were generally less likely than females to have taken extended periods out of work to care for their children, and consequently had more continuous work histories.

bring up children, how long they had remained outside the labour market, and whether they had worked part time during this period. Together, these factors influenced the type of work they were subsequently able to obtain. There were examples of those who were pursuing jobs similar to those they had previously, some who had downskilled and some who had upskilled. Returners were mostly lone parents who, at the time of the interview, had recently returned to work. However, it should be noted that there were also a few older ND25+ females who had 'returner' work histories but were at a different point in their life course, having originally returned to work some years earlier.

### *Limited labour market experience*

A small number of customers in the sample had very limited paid work experience. The majority of these were young (all but one were under 40). Their reasons for labour market inexperience varied. Some had particularly severe barriers which had kept them out of paid employment, for example, drugs problems, criminal convictions or learning difficulties. Others had come from abroad and had no paid labour market experience in the United Kingdom (UK) (although they may have worked in their home countries). Another subcategory is women who had children early and then left the labour market, and who consequently had little paid work experience.

### **2.2.3 Employment barriers**

When their BIFs were being completed, respondents were asked about potential problems associated with securing and sustaining work, and these employment barriers were further probed in qualitative interviews. Work barriers identified in the BIF related to childcare, transportation, health, housing, and basic skills. Approximately six in ten customers in the sample identified at least one such barrier that might affect their future work. This was similar for all customer groups. Among lone parent customers (both New Deal and WTC), the primary barrier was childcare, followed by transportation; for ND25+ customers, transportation was the main concern, followed by health. A number of customers, particularly in the ND25+ group, cited a barrier not listed on the BIF, classified as 'other'. There is no further information from the BIF on what these barriers were, but some insights can be gained from the qualitative interviews.

In the interviews customers were asked if they felt there was anything holding them back or making it difficult for them to achieve their immediate work goals. Non-working customers provided a range of responses, ranging from '*nothing at all*' to complex circumstances that they believed they needed to resolve before entering work. Broadly, the range of issues echoed those listed above from the BIF information. Lone parent and ND25+ customers reported many of the same barriers, such as a lack of work experience in their preferred occupation, limited qualifications, barriers to learning (eg, negative attitudes to education and training), health problems and problems with transport.

ND25+ customers, who were mostly men with manual work histories, were more likely to refer to a low supply of permanent jobs and jobs that paid a 'decent wage' as barriers to work. Lone parents were more likely to express concerns about caring responsibilities and finding work where the hours could be coordinated with their childcare preferences. Female returners, who had longer periods out of the labour market, were more likely to cite low self-esteem and lack of confidence as barriers. Older customers sometimes cited problems with age discrimination.

The use of the term 'barriers' and the identification of individuals with 'multiple barriers' to work seems to suggest that all barriers are equally detrimental to work and that it is the *number* of barriers that is important for individuals. It may also suggest that a single barrier will have the same effect for each individual. Both of these assumptions are questionable. Hasluck and Green (2005) argue that multiple barriers to work do not simply stack up in a cumulative manner but interact together, providing a varied range of constraints and opportunities for different individuals to overcome. In our sample, although limited skills, qualifications and work experience often went hand in hand (as the work histories of those in low and unskilled jobs were often characterised by periods of unemployment), this was not always the case. Sometimes customers were highly skilled but there was a mismatch between their skills and the jobs available: older skilled manual workers, eg, who had moved from permanent skilled work to less secure work. As we also argue later in the report (Chapter 4), overcoming barriers is usually not a one-off event but an ongoing process that continues as customers enter paid work.

Customers' perceptions of their barriers to employment are also, inevitably, subjective. In general, customers in the sample were much more likely to identify demand-side issues (such as the local labour market, employer discrimination or lack of local support such as transport or childcare) as employment barriers, rather than supply-side issues relating to their own characteristics and attributes (such as skills, qualifications, or confidence). Customers also had different attitudes to similar issues, and saw them either as obstacles to work around or conversely as insurmountable barriers. This was most apparent with respect to care responsibilities. Individuals with similar-aged children had different views on how to combine care and employment. These differences partly depended on their attitudes both to work and to care, which influenced whether or not they were able and willing to bridge barriers. These issues are explored in more detail in Chapter 3.

# 3 Understanding work and care orientations

## 3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores respondents' understandings of work. It examines what work means to them, how they value it and what they wish to gain from working. It also explores respondents' understandings of their caring responsibilities and whether and how these impact upon their views of paid work. Different ways of valuing paid work and care and different perceptions of how they can be successfully combined have important implications for the operation of retention and advancement programmes. Advisers aiming to promote retention and advancement need to engage customers in the programme successfully and build a productive working relationship with them. This is likely to be most effective if they can tailor their marketing of the programme and the types of assistance they provide to their customers' diverse views and understandings of work.

There is an extensive literature on orientations to paid work and care, although little of it specifically considers what they mean for work retention and advancement. The literature is differentiated by gender. The literature on women's work/care orientations has tended to focus primarily on the extent to which caring obligations weaken or conflict with a paid-work orientation. A separate literature on work orientation, mainly focused on men, has been concerned with identifying the strength and nature of work commitment and how it is affected by changes in the labour market.

Hakim (1996, 2000) provides a provocative account of women's work/care orientations, identifying three types of 'work-lifestyle preferences' among women: 'home-centred', 'work-centred' and 'adaptive', which she maintains are based upon women's preferences and which remain constant across the life course (Hakim, 2000 [6]). Others have criticised the characterisation of these 'preferences' as voluntary and have drawn attention to the way that gender discrimination in the workplace and widely-held ideas about male and female roles also shape women's

labour market patterns, while women's priorities regarding paid work and care also change over the life cycle (Crompton and Harris, 1998). Nonetheless, women's diverse understandings of how to prioritise work and/or care responsibilities are important factors. Duncan and Edwards (1999) and Duncan *et al.*, (2003) make reference to 'gendered moral rationalities'; that is, social and cultural understandings of how to combine work and care, which are related to notions of what being a 'good mother' means. They identify three ideal types: 'primarily mother', 'primarily worker' and 'mother/worker integral', with individuals approximating to one or the other. They suggest that these orientations are shaped by class, culture, ethnicity, and local gender cultures. Similarly Bell *et al.*, (2005), in a study of lone parents, map respondents on a continuum from 'strong' to 'weak' paid-work orientation and a related continuum from 'strong' to 'weak' orientation to providing parental care. They emphasise that these orientations are dynamic and will change across the life course, and also that such 'deeply held' orientations combine with more pragmatic considerations when lone parents are making decisions about undertaking paid work (Bell *et al.*, 2005 [23]).

In the main, a separate literature has discussed the strength and nature of men's work orientation. This dates back to the affluent worker study by Goldthorpe *et al.*, (1968), which distinguished 'instrumental' from 'intrinsic' work orientations to explain the apparent anomaly that car assembly workers expressed considerable satisfaction with their work. This was explained by the emphasis 'instrumental' workers placed upon wages rather than the intrinsic satisfaction of the job. Other studies followed, suggesting that orientations varied according to the stage in the family's life cycle and according to context, implying that workers held 'multi-stranded' rather than 'single-stranded' orientations (see the discussion in Crompton and Harris, 1998). Other studies have looked at the effect of labour market context, in particular, the effect of job insecurity and experiences of unemployment on work orientations (Gallie *et al.*, 1998; McDowell, 2003). In discussions of men's work orientation, generally paid work is assumed to be central to men's identity, and it is rare for there to be any consideration of family or other 'life' issues outside of work. However, Charles and James (2003) argue that the priority given to paid work and family in the lives of both men and women is variable and subject to change over the life course. They recommend dispensing with the idea of work orientation as a central and stable 'life interest' in favour of recognising the multi-stranded and dynamic nature of orientations.

In this chapter we develop two interrelated ways of categorising respondents: their orientations to paid work and their orientations to care. These categorisations derive from our inductive analysis of the interview material, and therefore emerge out of the respondents' own accounts of the importance they placed on paid work and caring responsibilities. The work orientation typology, discussed in Section 3.2, describes the varied meanings and significance that paid work has for individuals. Our analysis suggests that these understandings of work can be plotted on four dimensions: 'instrumental', 'intrinsic', 'social' and 'self-identity'. It is the meaning

and significance of paid work for individuals that we are discussing, rather than the strength of their work commitment. We recognise that individuals' orientations to paid work are multi-stranded; therefore individuals may hold complex views that relate to all four dimensions. However, for many individuals their orientation will most closely approximate to one dimension or another. This may, of course, alter over time, as orientations are also dynamic.

The care orientation typology, discussed in Section 3.3, is conceived as a continuum, which runs from 'exclusively care-focused' to the exclusion of paid work at one end, to 'no care responsibilities' at the other end. Most lone parents and some New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) respondents are positioned somewhere in the middle, according to the priority they place on paid work or providing care. Again, these orientations are conceived as fluid rather than static positions. Although the two typologies are separate, in practice they relate together in particular ways; that is, certain work orientations are more likely to be associated with certain care orientations. We explore the interrelation of the two typologies and provide some case examples in Section 3.4, before turning to the implications for retention and advancement programmes in Section 3.5.

### 3.1 Work orientations

Respondents discussed what work meant to them, what its significance was in relation to other aspects of life, and what they valued about it. There was considerable diversity in these discussions across the sample, which revealed different ways of thinking about and valuing work. A total of 16 different themes were identified that emerged from the words of the respondents, which can be mapped against four dimensions: 'instrumental', 'intrinsic', 'self-identity', and 'social'. Figure 3.1 lists the different themes under the four dimensions. As can be seen, some themes relate to more than one dimension. These themes are the explored further with illustrative examples.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The sub-themes within each dimension are inductively generated from respondents' accounts and remain close to the actual words used by respondents, whereas the four dimensions are researcher-generated constructs.

**Figure 3.1 Work orientation dimensions**

<p><b>Instrumental dimension</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o money-oriented</li> <li>o 'a decent job' (pay, stability, conditions)</li> <li>o economic provider (for family, children)</li> <li>o self-sufficiency</li> </ul>	<p><b>Intrinsic dimension</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o intrinsic interest in nature of job</li> <li>o desire for responsibility</li> <li>o autonomy/self-direction</li> <li>o pride in doing job well</li> <li>o 'something I enjoy'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social dimension</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o social relationships at work</li> <li>o 'gets me out of the house'/relieves boredom</li> <li>o improves relationship with children</li> <li>o 'something easy'</li> <li>o 'something for me' (aside from the children), self-development</li> </ul>	<p><b>Self-identity dimension</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o worker identity ('always been a worker')</li> <li>o work ethic (work as a moral code)</li> <li>o 'something for me' (aside from the children), self-development</li> <li>o economic provider (for family, children)</li> <li>o self-sufficiency</li> <li>o improves relationship with children</li> </ul>

### 3.2.1 The instrumental dimension

Meanings of work that were closest to the instrumental dimension included:

- a desire for financial reward;
- a concern to have a 'decent job', which might be defined as one with good pay, good conditions, or stability;
- a desire to provide financially often for family or children; and
- a desire for self-sufficiency and independence.

Very few if any respondents were purely money-driven in their work goals; but equally there were very few respondents who did not mention the financial rewards of work as being of some significance to them. A common expression among ND25+ older men, in particular, was a desire to earn a 'decent wage' in a 'good', stable job, thus combining concerns about pay with concerns about working conditions and security. This should be seen in the context of the work histories of these respondents (as described in Chapter 2), which were often characterised by a succession of temporary and unstable jobs, sometimes after a redundancy following a period of more stable work. This was typical of one ND25+ respondent in his 30s, who was working as a self-employed building labourer after being made redundant from a job in electronics processing. He stated of his ideal job:

*'Having plenty of work and making a decent amount of money...get out, do it, and get paid at the end of the week.'*

(ND+24)

Those respondents who did express a desire to 'make some money', as opposed to simply earning enough to get by, were generally those with more skilled or better-paid jobs or those who were taking the self-employment route. One common motivation for self-employment was to secure some stability (as seen above); however, another was to secure greater financial gain. For self-employed customers, a money orientation was usually combined with an intrinsic attachment to a particular type of work (discussed later).

Although expressions of a desire to work only in order to 'make money' were relatively rare, respondents often spoke of the importance of financial rewards, either to 'provide' for their family or to be economically self-sufficient. Both men and women who had family responsibilities expressed the desire to earn money to 'provide'. One older ND25+ man in his 50s who was working as an electrician for a building company preferred working to claiming benefits because it was important for him to be able to contribute towards household expenditures:

*'Well at the end of the day, if and when I wasn't working, it was putting more pressure on my now wife, you know, obviously for paying the mortgage and that, because the money you do get off the Jobseeker's, you know, for a fortnight, is not too clever, I would say.'*

(ND+47)

A lone parent in her 20s with a three-year-old daughter, working in administrative work for a housing association, also said that paid work was important to her because it allowed her to provide for her daughter:

*'Well I've got a child here and she sort of needs things and if I don't work then I mightn't be able to provide for her. I've sort of got to work. I've got a household to run and she needs things.'*

(LP18)

Similarly, both ND25+ customers and lone parents often contrasted earning money positively with claiming benefits, as it allowed them to be financially self-sufficient and independent of the state. This view was often associated with a negative attitude towards claiming benefits. Lone parents sometimes expressed self-sufficiency in terms of the desire to be independent of an ex-partner or other family members.

These examples show how instrumental themes were also related to other dimensions, in this case, to the self-identity dimension. Respondents' expressions of a desire to work in order to be a financial provider or to be financially independent of the state showed how work could be central to their self-identities. For example, the ND25+ respondent above (ND+47) who wanted to work so that his wife didn't have to pay the mortgage suggested the way in which work is important to masculine identity. Masculine identity has been conventionally understood in Britain as relating to the family 'breadwinner' role, as opposed to the female 'caregiver' role (see McDowell, 2003). It is important to note that there were also a number of lone parents who

emphasised the importance of providing economically for their children as an integral part of being a 'good mother'.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.2.2 The intrinsic dimension

Themes that were categorised as close to the 'intrinsic' dimension included:

- an interest in doing a particular kind of job;
- a desire for responsibility at work;
- a desire for autonomy or self-direction in one's job;
- pride in performing well at work; and
- doing something one enjoyed.

An intrinsic orientation to work is often contrasted to an instrumental orientation, with the former defined as an interest in the work itself and the latter as an interest in the financial remuneration from work. In practice, individuals often combined elements of the two types of orientations. Respondents in better-paid and more highly-skilled jobs, including those who had some professional, managerial or supervisory experience, tended to emphasise the intrinsic nature of the work as important. These were often respondents who also emphasised the desire to 'make money' from work. This was particularly the case for self-employed respondents, who often combined a strong interest in the nature of the work and a desire to make more money.

Three closely related clusters of work attitudes were defined as intrinsic: an interest in the nature of the job, a desire for responsibility at work and a desire for some autonomy or self-direction. Often individuals combined these three elements, but in some cases respondents focused on one or the other. One ND25+ respondent, a man in his 30s who was on New Deal at the time of his interview but was trying to set himself up as a self-employed music promoter, embodied a 'classic' intrinsic orientation. He rejected financial remuneration in favour of doing what he wanted to do. Speaking of his past experiences of Jobcentre staff encouraging him to take other work, he stated:

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<sup>10</sup> Duncan *et al.*, (2003) suggest that the integrated mother/worker orientation is more common among African Caribbean mothers in the United Kingdom (UK) who have a stronger tradition of paid work after childbearing as well as higher rates of single parenthood and/or 'visiting' relationships with male partners. There is some support for this in our study. Some of the African and African Caribbean lone parents did express strong economic provider orientations, even those who had very young children. This differed from some of the White British lone parents who were more likely to express this as children got older. However, we do not have sufficient numbers of ethnic minorities in our sample to explore this in any detail.

*'[I]t's just that I wouldn't stick it, even if they paid me £20,000 a year I couldn't, so rather than waste their time, waste my time, I thought I'll sit down and wait 'til the opportunity comes to do what I want to do.'*

(ND+10)

It was not only those with higher-paid and higher-level jobs, however, who were interested in the nature of the work, taking on more responsibility or having more autonomy. One lone parent in her 20s who had a history of factory and shop work spoke of her desire to take a job with more responsibility in the future:

*'[L]ike when I was working in [retail], I was getting trained up like a manager or assistant manager or whatever, they were showing me bits, ... so I knew more about it myself, and then felt more confident about it myself, stuff like that, so I could just go for assistant manager's job instead of just going in as like a sales assistant and then trying to work my way up.'*

(LP15)

Similarly, a Working Tax Credit (WTC) lone parent in her 20s, also with a history of retail work, spoke of how her current job as a healthcare assistant was important to her because it was in the field she wanted to work in and for which she had undertaken training:

*'Because I felt as if when I was working in the shop I was just wasting my qualifications, and like my brain was freezing up so, so now that I'm in it, at least I can keep my brain ticking over if I do go to uni to do my nursing, do you know what I mean? So it's better that, I don't know, it feels better that I'm actually doing what I want to do, rather than working in a shop and wasting what I went to college for.'*

(WT12)

Another theme that falls within the intrinsic dimension was an expressed concern to do something that one is good at or that one does well. Male manual workers commonly expressed this concern. They also had more instrumental concerns, such as having decent pay and stability. Often they valued manual skills over and above 'office' or 'managerial' skills, as can be seen in the comments of this ND25+ respondent in his 20s who worked in a warehouse:

*'I prefer to be hands on, wouldn't be able to sit in an office on a computer all day ... I'd rather be out on the floor getting stuck in really.'*

(ND+29)

Finally, a commonly expressed concern among the respondents was to be doing a job that they 'enjoyed'. This was a sentiment heard across the sample from all three customer groups and from those with different primary work orientations. This illustrates the way that customers' work orientations were multi-stranded and usually combined a number of different elements.

### 3.2.3 The social dimension

Understandings of work that related to the social dimension included:

- a concern with social relationships;
- a concern with the implications of work for children;
- a desire to 'get out of the house' or to fill time; and
- a desire to take a job that did not impinge too much on non-work time.

It is often suggested that women are more socially oriented in their understandings of paid work than men – who are conversely generally viewed as more instrumental (see Dooreward *et al.*, 2004). For the most part, this was true of this study. Many of the lone parents, particularly female returners who had taken a period out of the labour market to raise children and were seeking to or had recently re-entered work, spoke of their desire to work to combat the isolation or boredom they felt at home, often because their children had started school. A common refrain was that paid work was something to '*get me out of the house*'. For example, one lone parent in her 30s with three children and little previous paid work experience who was currently working in a daycare centre for elderly people, stated of her work:

*'I've got something that takes me completely away from the kids and my everyday.'*

(LP58)

However, some of the men in the sample who had experienced a period on benefits also wanted to find work to '*get out of the house*'. For example, a young ND25+ man currently working as a valve fitter stated of his reasons for working:

*'You get bored by Monday hanging 'round the house; you don't know what to do.'*

(ND+03)

Both men and women said that social relationships at work were important. Lone parents usually referred to the value of interactions and relationships with other adults, which were separate from relationships at home in the family. A number of lone parents had suffered from depression or other health problems following a divorce or separation, and in these instances, paid work took on an extra value as part of the coping process. Men usually spoke of the importance of social relationships in terms of having good work mates or 'having a laugh' at work.

Lone parents also said that it was important to them to work for their children; some expressed the feeling that having an interest outside the home improved their relationship with their children.<sup>11</sup> Some parents of younger children believed that having a paying job enabled them to use formal childcare, which aided their children's socialisation.

Another widely expressed conviction was that a parent's paid work provided a good role model for children. This attitude was closely related to the way that respondents valued paid work as enabling financial self-sufficiency and independence from state benefits, which was discussed earlier. The respondents who believed that as a working parent they were providing a good role model for children combined both the 'social' and 'self-identity' dimensions: they were concerned about their social relationship with the child and also saw work as an element of identity. As discussed further in Section 3.3 on caring orientations, many lone parents valued a job that was 'limited', either in terms of hours or the demands of the job, because it did not unduly conflict with caring responsibilities. Some respondents without children, particularly ND25+ men, made similar comments about valuing work that was not too physically taxing or demanding, or which had short working hours (although there was rarely a preference for part-time hours) that did not unduly impinge on 'life' outside work (e.g. leisure time). One ND25+ respondent in his 40s who was working as a gardener after a long period of unemployment expressed this sentiment. Of what he valued about his job, he said:

*'[T]he people there are good with it, this is where we, like, go round together and just get on with it, there's no, "Oh you've got to hurry up and do this", and it's so easy, it's just everybody's relaxed, nobody's like rushing about, everybody knows the work's got to be done at the end of the day, so we just get out and do it.'*

(ND+25)

### 3.2.4 The self-identity dimension

The final work orientation dimension was self-identity. As with all the orientations, it does not represent a sole focus. Indeed, because self-identity expresses an attachment to work, it is more of an overarching theme than the others. Ways of valuing work that related to this dimension included:

- the expression of a work ethic or the moral value of working;
- the expression of a strong identity as a 'worker'; and
- a desire for self-fulfilment through work.

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<sup>11</sup> Of course, many parents felt that their caring responsibilities precluded significant involvement in paid work and to this extent saw paid work as detrimental to their relationship with their children. This is discussed further in Section 3.3 on caring orientations. In this section, we discuss only the ways in which work was (positively) valued by respondents.

Many respondents expressed strong statements of their identity as a worker, often encapsulated in the phrase 'I've always worked'. This was true of lone parents as well as of ND25+ respondents, though not, of course, of those who had taken long periods out of work to raise children. Respondents often asserted this identity by distinguishing themselves from other people on benefits: *other* people on benefits were lazy, did not want to work or were happy to take 'handouts' from the state. One man in his 40s with a history of manual work but who was currently unemployed, for example, stated:

*'I'm 45 and the majority of my life I've been working; it's only because I've been made redundant.'*

(ND+51)

Assertions of work identity are very similar to the desire to be self-sufficient and independent of the state, as discussed earlier. They combine both instrumental (financial) and identity concerns. Expressions of a work ethic or the moral value in working are very closely related to the assertion of a work identity, since the latter entails making a claim to a moral identity. This could be seen clearly in cases where respondents explicitly positioned themselves as 'better' than other people on benefits, as in the following statement:

*'I'd sooner be working...I don't know how people can stay on the dole year after year.'*

(ND+16)

ND25+ men commonly expressed the dimension of work identity or the moral value in working along with more instrumental concerns, such as the desire for a 'decent job' or a 'regular wage'. Again they revealed the multi-stranded nature of orientations and indicated that there were very few people for whom work was of purely financial interest.

A slightly different theme within the self-identity dimension was the sentiment that work was an opportunity for self-development or self-fulfilment. Commonly, lone parent returners had this attitude – those who had taken time out to raise children and were at a stage where they wanted to work for their personal development or self-improvement. A common sentiment was that engaging in paid work provided 'something for me' which was separate to the home and family. One female returner, a lone parent in her 20s who had previously worked in shops and factories but now wished to retrain as a hairdresser, stated:

*'I wanted to do something new, to get me out of the house, a course kind of thing, and get qualifications that I could go out and do something on my own.'*

(LP57)

In her case, this desire was particularly strong because she had suffered from severe post-natal depression after the birth of her first two children. Similarly, others whose work history was patchy for one reason or another (e.g. mental health, drug use or criminal convictions) often saw work as an aspect of personal fulfilment or getting one's life 'on track'.

### 3.2.5 Individuals' orientations to work

As we have emphasised, individuals held multi-stranded work orientations which often combined a number of different themes that related to more than one of the four dimensions identified. It should also be noted, however, that these work orientations are not static and are likely to change over time. Notwithstanding this complexity, individuals' orientations were often more closely associated with one dimension rather than another. Thus while some of our respondents seemed equally moved by instrumental, social, and intrinsic concerns, for example, and were thus best described as having a mixed orientation, others had one primary orientation. Mapping individuals according to their primary orientation produced some patterns across the sample. For example, the ND25+ group was much more likely to express primarily instrumental concerns about work, particularly the customers who had manual work histories. The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) customers were more likely than the ND25+ or WTC customers to express social concerns. Social concerns also related to work history; female returners, who were more common in the NDLP than the WTC group, were more likely to express social orientations to work.

A qualitative analysis of the way individuals combined different elements of work orientation also suggests that certain clusters of themes were commonly expressed together. Some of these were identified in the earlier discussion. ND25+ men who had manual work histories, for example, often combined a concern for a 'decent job' with self-identity motivations, such as an identity as a worker or as an economic provider. Lone parents whose work history was interrupted were particularly likely to make reference to a desire to 'get out of the house', to build social relationships and to find self-fulfilment through work. Lone parents who had more continuous work histories were more likely to stress identities as economic providers and to emphasise the benefits of paid work for their children. Finally, respondents in more senior jobs and those who were self-employed were more likely to combine interest in financial remuneration with a desire to pursue a particular line of work. As the preceding discussion demonstrates, however, there were exceptions to all of these common patterns. The important issue for retention and advancement programmes is to be able to identify the motivations of the individual customer without prejudging according to preconceived categorisations.

Finally, orientations should also be seen as provisional and subject to change over time. Respondents often talked about the way their work orientations had changed at different stages of their lives. A common example was the female returners who had returned to the labour market. They had primarily social orientations but developed more instrumental or intrinsic orientations over time with greater work experience. Another common pattern was to change orientation according to transitions in later life. A number of older respondents suggested that they had shifted from an intrinsic orientation centred on responsibility in earlier life to a social or instrumental orientation as they got older.

### 3.3 Caring orientations

In addition to work orientations, respondents' accounts were also analysed for their orientations to caring. Like the work orientations, the care orientations are researcher constructs derived from the interviewees' responses. Given the nature of the sample, almost two-thirds of whom were lone parents, the overwhelming concern was caring for dependent children. Thus, although a small number of the respondents did care for elderly or sick relatives, childcare is focused on here. We use the term 'care orientation' to describe the way in which respondents prioritised their caring responsibilities in relation to their paid work. Thus the continuum we developed runs from 'exclusively care-focused' to the exclusion of paid work at one end, to 'no care responsibilities' that impinge upon paid work at the other end (see Figure 3.2). In between are 'care-focused workers', who place a priority on caring for their children over and above paid work; 'work-focused carers' who place a greater priority on combining paid work with their caring responsibilities and 'peripheral carers' who place a priority on paid work over the provision of care.

**Figure 3.2 Care orientation continuum**



The majority of ND25+ customers, given that over three-quarters have no dependant children living with them, were classified as having no care responsibilities. Therefore, the continuum primarily applies to the two lone parent groups and a minority of the ND25+ group (some of whom had some childcare responsibilities and commitments even if their children did not live with them). However, where people were positioned on the continuum was not determined solely by the nature of their responsibilities (e.g. the number and ages of their children) but by the priority they placed on their care responsibilities and, in particular, how they viewed them in relation to paid work. Thus, as we discuss below, a common trajectory was to move along the continuum from 'care-focused worker' to 'work-focused carer' and then to 'peripheral carer' as children got older. However, there was also considerable diversity among those with similar-aged children according to how they prioritised paid work in relation to care. Individuals should be seen as being positioned at points along this continuum rather than falling into discrete 'types', although most will be nearer to one point than another. Individuals' positions on the continuum were also dynamic over time. One likely direction, towards placing a higher priority on paid work as children got older, has already been suggested. However there may also be movements in either direction caused by other life events (e.g. having another child, re-partnering or losing a job).

### 3.3.1 Peripheral carers

Those positioned at or near the peripheral carer point of the continuum tended to be those whose care responsibilities were marginal and did not create a frequent demand on their time, but nonetheless exerted some impact on their work patterns and/or attitudes to work. These were mainly parents (usually fathers) who were not the primary carer for their children, including some non-resident fathers who were paying maintenance and/or were in contact with their children, as well as primary carers with resident older children. Even if children were not living with the father, however, they nonetheless placed some economic and emotional responsibilities on him. One ND25+ respondent in his 20s, the father of two young children who did not live with him, described how his working patterns (night-time shift work) were ideal because they allowed him to spend time at the weekends with his children:

*'Because I finish on Friday morning I don't have to be at work until Sunday night, so I can pick the kids up Friday afternoon, drop them off Sunday afternoon and have enough time to sort myself out for work.'*

(ND+12)

As peripheral carers, this group had limited care responsibilities and placed a priority on employment over care. Caring responsibilities had only a minimal impact on the type of employment they took or the hours they worked. Some peripheral carers had to negotiate with their employers in order to fulfil their care responsibilities; however they did not believe that care-giving precluded employment. In fact, they were more likely to say that their care responsibilities encouraged paid work, eg, when they emphasised their need to provide economically for dependants. This attitude is associated with an instrumental orientation to work that emphasises the desire to be an economic provider for the family or to be financially self-sufficient, as discussed earlier.

### 3.3.2 Work-focused carers

Those positioned at the work-focused carer point on the continuum placed a priority on combining paid work with their childcare responsibilities. These were mostly lone parent respondents (both NDLP and WTC), and all were working full time or seeking full-time work. Thus they did not see their childcare responsibilities as preventing paid employment, although they may have limited the hours or the type of work they were able to do. They reconciled their paid work and caring responsibilities either by using formal or informal childcare<sup>12</sup> or a combination of the two, by limiting their work hours to those that fit around the school day or, if they had older children, allowing them to look after themselves for limited periods.

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<sup>12</sup> Formal childcare is registered by the Office for Standards in Education or is approved and this enables the parent to access tax credits. Informal care is not registered and is frequently provided by friends and family.

Many customers in this position had older children and had moved from being care-focused workers to being work-focused carers as their children got older. One WTC lone parent in her 30s had worked part time in a shop and did some childminding when her children were small, but had begun to increase her hours in her current job, serving in a café, as the children grew older. She commented that in the past she had wanted to earn a bit of her own money but also to spend time with the children. But now that her children were in secondary school, it was the right time to increase her hours. Her orientation to work stressed the importance of paid work to her self-development and fulfilment as the children got older:

*'[Y]ou know I do enjoy working, and I think as they get older, it's time for me again.'*

(WT35)

This respondent was also prompted to take more hours at the café when she split up with her husband; this demonstrated the effect of other life events in changing the way respondents prioritised work and caregiving.

Although the trajectory described above was common, there were also work-focused carers who had primary school or preschool-aged children. These respondents typically used some form of childcare in order to combine paid work with their care needs. However, attitudes to the use of formal childcare varied. One lone parent in her 20s who worked full time as an administrator said that she valued the use of formal childcare for her son's development:

*'I think that children that do go into nurseries do improve a lot quicker than children that don't go into nurseries – not all of them – it gives them social skills; they're able to interact with other children, learn right from wrong.'*

(LP21)

However, she also admitted that she found it difficult at first:

*'It was really strange him not being there, ... while he was settling in at the nursery, ... it was horrible when he went in and he would cry, then it was really hard.'*

(LP21)

Another lone parent, also working full time, used a combination of a nursery place and care by her cousin to provide childcare for her three-year-old son while she worked anti-social hours in a petrol station. She preferred family care but her cousin was unable to cover all of her hours:

*'I'd prefer if she were able to have him constantly, because he's picking up more with her than he has been at the nursery.'*

(LP10)

As these examples suggest, although respondents did not always view care arrangements as ideal, because they wanted to combine employment with care, they made 'emotional reconciliations'.

There were also some lone parents in the work-focused carer position who had older children. Thus whilst the National Childcare Strategy covers (and thus pays tax credits towards the childcare costs for) only children up to the age of 14<sup>13</sup>, some lone parents with older children identified ongoing care issues that affected their employment, such as issues with teenage children's behaviour which might result in having to take occasional time off work to attend meetings at school. Such concerns may restrict employment, for example, to jobs that are local or easily accessible. However, the less often such problems were identified, the closer the individual was positioned to the peripheral-carer point on the continuum.

### 3.3.3 Care-focused workers

Those closer to a care-focused worker position placed a priority on caregiving over employment to the extent that they viewed their caring responsibilities as substantially limiting their paid work. They tended to have children who were primary school or preschool aged. However, as we saw above, it was not simply the age of the child that determined care orientations, and some had older children. These respondents typically spoke of the need to 'be there' for their children, but did not see caring as completely precluding the possibility of paid work. Like the work-focused carers, they had different ways of reconciling their paid work with care; however, they were usually working part time. An example is a lone parent in her 30s who returned to work as a part-time hairdresser after taking about eight years out of work looking after her children, now aged eight and ten. She chose part-time hours to fit in with her children's school day:

*'I'm there when they get in from school and that's the way I want it to be.'*

(LP40)

When respondents' children were school-aged, the predominant means of combining work and care, as in the above example, was to choose working hours that fitted within the school day and often also allowed parents to drop off and pick up children from school. When children were preschool aged, the predominant pattern was to use informal childcare and funded early-years education where appropriate. Respondents often ruled out formal childcare on the basis of cost or trust:

*'You know, you could be a registered childminder, but that doesn't necessarily mean my children would want to stay with you or I'd feel comfortable leaving them with you, you know what I mean?'*

(LP59)

However, as discussed earlier, a common trajectory was for care-focused workers to move closer towards work-focused carer positions over time, and some, such as LP40 referred to above, discussed how they could see themselves working more over time as their family situation changed.

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<sup>13</sup> or age 16 with special educational needs.

### 3.3.4 Exclusively care-focused

There were only a very small number of exclusively care-focused customers in the sample, who were full-time carers to the extent that they saw this as precluding paid work. This is due to the nature of our sample, which included lone parents who entered ERA through enrolling on NDLP, a voluntary programme for those who wish to look for work, and WTC customers who were already working at the time they entered ERA. Thus care-focused customers would constitute a much larger proportion of the broader lone parent population than of our sample (compare, for example, Bell *et al.*, 2005). One customer in the sample who was positioned at this end of the continuum was a 39-year-old lone parent (LP16). She was caring for her eight-year-old daughter who had a medical condition, as well as her sick mother. She expressed a desire to take some paid work but wanted to limit this to just two or three hours a day and found that such work was impossible to obtain.

### 3.3.5 Care orientation and customer groups

As suggested above, most of the ND25+ respondents had no care responsibilities, or if they did, they were peripheral carers. The NDLP and WTC respondents were ranged across the work-focused carer and care-focused worker continuum, with a few positioned closer towards the peripheral carer position. There were no obvious differences between WTC and NDLP lone parents in terms of their positioning on the continuum. This could be the result of not always knowing how long WTC customers had been in work at the point of random assignment, and would warrant future exploration of duration in work and care orientation. However, it also highlights the importance of understanding how individuals' care orientation influences their work patterns, and that there is no preset indicator for determining it. There were also few differences between the female and male lone parents, although the number of the latter in our sample was small. However male and female lone parents did differ in their areas of employment. Many manual jobs did not provide part-time work hours, and this had implications for the possibility of combining employment and caring.

Where people were positioned on the continuum was shaped by a number of different factors. A complex set of negotiations relating to the age of the child and the cost and availability of care determined the variation in orientations among those with similar-aged children. Yet these factors also interacted with other social and cultural attitudes. These included:

- parents' understandings of their children; for example, how they perceived their children's vulnerability in view of potential risks in the locality, such as crime, how mature they believe their children were, and thus how they perceived the need for care;
- how they saw their children's needs, including balancing the educational, social and economic benefits of different forms of childcare versus caring for the children themselves;

- their views of appropriate care providers (such as attitudes towards formal versus informal childcare), which were likely to include issues of trust (as seen with LP59 above) and were inevitably tied up with understandings of one's own role as a carer; and
- complex notions of 'good mothering', such as being an economic provider, a role model, or having a physical presence and 'being there' for one's child.

These complex negotiations explain why those with a youngest child of preschool or primary school age were found in *both* work-focused carer and care-focused worker positions. Those with secondary school-age children (age 11-16), however, were less likely to be care-focused workers and more likely to have moved nearer to the work-focused carer or peripheral carer positions, based upon their understandings of the decreased vulnerability of children as they get older. Care orientations, therefore, should be seen not simply as individual 'preferences' as Hakim (2000) asserts, but as emerging out of a combination of individual choices, in interplay with socio-cultural expectations, personal circumstances and structural factors. As such, care orientations involve *continual* negotiations around all of these factors and can thus result in individuals changing positions on the continuum. This will be seen in the following chapters when retention and advancement experiences are discussed in more detail.

### 3.4 Interactions of work and caring orientations

The work and care orientations discussed provide two different ways of categorising the customers in the sample. However in practice, orientations and attitudes towards work and towards combining work and care are interrelated. As we have argued previously, work and care orientations are complex and fluid, and can change over time. Nevertheless, common combinations of work and care orientations can be identified. These include:

- **Care-focused worker with social orientation to work.** These were female, mostly NDLP lone parents, and a few WTC and often female returners who had taken time out of work to care for children. They were generally just at the point of returning to work at the time of the interview. They placed a priority on caregiving over paid employment, and held primarily social orientations to work. They emphasised the importance of paid work as something different to care that gave them a break from their care responsibilities and 'got them out of the house' to meet other adults and develop new social relationships.
- **Work-focused carer with intrinsic orientation to work.** These were mostly female lone parents from both NDLP and WTC customer groups who had a variety of different work histories. Some had moved to the work-focused carer position as children grew older, as they felt it was time to concentrate on themselves and take on more responsibility at work or have a 'career' in a field they were interested in. Many developed this orientation as a result of more exposure to the workplace. Alternatively, they may also have continued working while their children were young, especially if they were committed to a particular type of work.

- **Peripheral carer with instrumental orientation to work.** These were mostly male ND25+ respondents who had a history of manual work. Their main focus was on working to earn enough money to get by in a stable job. They often combined this orientation with concerns related to self-identity, such as earning enough to provide for children and family or being economically self-sufficient rather than reliant on the state. Care responsibilities were relatively minimal and usually reinforced their moral identification with wanting to be an economic provider.

Some illustrative examples of these common combinations are provided in Boxes 3.1-3.3:

Although we have identified common combinations of work and care orientations, it is important to keep in mind that orientations to work and care are complex and multifaceted, and combine for individuals in different ways, depending on an array of factors, as described earlier. One less common example is described in Box 3.4.

The examples discussed in the boxes illustrate the different ways in which customers achieve a satisfactory balance between their work and caring orientations. However, for other customers, the negotiation might not result in a satisfactory outcome, which could potentially threaten sustainable work patterns. Some work and care orientations complement one another and facilitate relatively simple solutions to work patterns, whereas others are more difficult to negotiate (see Bell *et al*, 2005). People also renegotiate work patterns over time, as they continually reassess their and their family's position in relation to work and caring.

### Box 3.1

#### Care-focused worker with social orientation to work: Jackie (LP67)

Jackie was in her early 30s with two children, aged 10 and 13. She had worked as a waitress for a short while before having her first child, and on and off until her second child was born, before taking time out to raise them. At the time of the interview she felt that because her children had both entered school, she could now take a part-time job working school hours. She had taken a job in her local hospital for 22 hours a week. She liked the fact that it got her out of the house and that she was not still at home while her children were at school:

*'I just felt, you know, what am I going to do? Am I going to be like this forever? And like I say he's nearly 10 and me daughter, she's 13, and I'm thinking, God, they're going to be left school and I'm going to be stuck on my own. I'm going to be, you know, well lost really, aren't you, you know? So that made us really, and like I say it was quite a horrible thing being stuck at home and, you know what I mean? And I just wanted to be out there, doing whatever.'*

Jackie discussed how she felt nervous about going back to work, but how it helped her feel more confident. She did not see herself as being much better off financially, but felt that she was doing something for herself. Her desire to ensure her working hours fit in with the school day allowed her to maintain her orientation to providing care herself where possible.

**Box 3.2****Work-focused carer with intrinsic orientation to work: Luda (LP22)**

Luda was in her late 30s with one child, aged 14. She had come to the UK as an asylum seeker several years ago and had subsequently done a postgraduate certificate in education and was now working as a teacher. Since her working day was longer than her son's school day, she allowed him to look after himself for a short period of time after school, and commented:

*'My son is very independent; he's very serious for his age, he's very serious, and I never had any problems.'*

Luda was passionate about the school where she worked and about teaching, and she also felt that it was important that she work to be a role model and provide financially for her child.

*'[B]ecause the confidence in your future, and for my child's future as well, it is important... At first, he wants to study at university, and he will need some financial support, and the difference in financial situation when you work and if you don't work, it's obvious... Financial, and confidence, what you think about yourself. And for my son as well, I don't want [him] to be ashamed of his mum, I don't want him to say to his friends, "Oh my mum is being on benefits", in our society, not too many people are getting benefits so.'*

Thus Luda had a multi-stranded work orientation. It combined intrinsic, instrumental, and self-identity concerns in her approach to work. These all contributed to her work-focused carer orientation, which emphasised the need to combine caregiving with engaging in paid work.

**Box 3.3****Peripheral carer with instrumental orientation to work: Tom (ND+51)**

Tom was a man in his 40s who was unemployed at the time of the interview, and had a history of manual work in a variety of different fields (including gardening, driving and factory warehouse work). He then experienced a long period of unemployment and had recently completed a six-month New Deal work placement in gardening. He was keen to find work again, as his daughter lived in another part of the country and he wanted to be able to afford to go and see her more often. His orientation to work stressed the importance of a job to his self-identity as a worker and as an economic provider for his family, while he also expressed a pride in 'hands on' manual labour:

*'I've been slogging all my life, but I've never been one for, well not education, but learning a skill. I just like getting stuck in on a job, earning a wage at end of week, and that's it, looking after my family.'*

Tom's manual work history did pose a barrier due to the lack of work available locally and the predominance of short-term contracts, which conflicted with his desire for 'stability' and a 'decent wage'.

**Box 3.4****Care-focused worker with instrumental orientation to work:  
Theresa (LP33)**

Theresa was a lone parent in her 20s with a preschool-aged child who attended nursery and was cared for by family while her mother worked part time in a shop. Although Theresa enjoyed getting out of the house to work, her main motivation was to be financially self-sufficient and to earn her own money to pay the bills and mortgage. However, she was not willing to work more hours at present as it would mean sacrificing spending time with her daughter. She felt that she might work more hours as her daughter got older, but stressed that she would have to balance the economic gains against any detriment to the relationship with her daughter:

*'Yeah because I think if I'm just going to get the same wages working three days I'd rather not, I'd rather spend the time with my little girl rather than being at work and no better off financially for it.'*

Theresa demonstrated how individuals negotiate around different orientations in order to find sustainable and satisfactory work patterns.

### 3.5 Implications for employment retention and advancement programmes

In this chapter we have explored individuals' orientations to work and to care and how these interact. We have shown that there is considerable diversity across our sample in the ways that respondents thought about and valued work, and in how they felt their caring responsibilities limited their ability to work. These complex orientations expressed by individuals have great importance for their retention and advancement experiences.

Orientations by themselves do not determine employment outcomes, but interact with a range of other factors. We suggest that orientations are multi-stranded and dynamic, and emerge out of a combination of personal preferences, social and cultural expectations (for example peer groups and family), and social-structural factors, such as educational achievements and work histories. Moreover, orientations combine with more pragmatic considerations in individuals' decision-making about entering, remaining in, and moving up within work: How much does the job pay? Can I get to the workplace? Do I have a conveniently located nursery? An example of the ways these combine is with respect to the barriers that individuals face in entering and remaining in work that were outlined in the previous chapter. Orientations to work and to care will affect how individuals perceive these barriers and thus how and whether they can be surmounted.

The barrier of childcare is a good example. Previous research shows that factors such as the cost, availability, hours, location and appropriateness of childcare can all pose barriers to parents' employment (Hofferth and Collins, 2002; Bell *et al.*, 2005).

However an individual's caring orientation will also influence how he or she sees the appropriate options for childcare. This means that two people with similar-aged children and with a similar range of childcare available could still have very different views of whether their caring responsibilities enabled them to work, depending upon the emphasis they placed on the importance of providing care themselves. This has policy implications, as it suggests that the provision of formal childcare is not always enough for individuals to secure and retain employment (see Barlow *et al.*, 2002; Duncan *et al.*, 2003). However it is important to qualify this by remembering that orientations are not static but change over time. Individuals may alter their orientations as their children get older or as a result of a particular experience, including the experience of using childcare (see Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004). Similar to other kinds of barriers, individuals' orientations will influence how they perceive childcare barriers and whether they can see ways of overcoming them.

Another example could be a man who has a strong male-worker identity and family-provider orientation that influences his judgement of what is an acceptable job (in terms of wages or type of work). He might perceive a deficit of suitable jobs in the local labour market as a barrier.

As we argue further in the next chapter, barriers to work are rarely one-off obstacles that are overcome when individuals enter work, but are more likely to be ongoing concerns that recur after individuals are employed. Thus work and care orientations also have an important influence on employment retention and affect how customers perceive and handle retention issues. The sustainability of care arrangements to support a parent's employment is one key retention issue. As we have suggested, care orientations profoundly influence perceptions of 'appropriate' care arrangements and thus also play a role in an individual's decision making if care arrangements break down. Whether the breakdown of care arrangements results in the parent moving out of work, reducing their working hours or putting in place alternative care arrangements is therefore likely to depend on an array of factors: Are other forms of childcare and support available? What is the attitude of the employer towards the employee's childcare responsibilities? What are the individual's attitudes towards what is appropriate childcare? What are the parent's feelings about paid work?

Orientations are likely to have a profound influence on advancement too, since what is valued about work will shape how people wish to progress in the future as well as how they wish to get there. Some of the intrinsic orientations identified, such as valuing responsibility autonomy, or the nature of work are, by their nature, likely to be conducive to a positive approach to advancement. Individuals who have instrumental orientations to 'making money' or to being 'a provider' are also likely to favour advancing if it results in higher pay. Conversely, individuals who take pride in manual craft skills and are disinclined to do office work might not favour some advancement paths.

Orientations to care are also likely to play a role in shaping people's long- and short-term goals. Individuals who have care-focused orientations might limit either the extent or the timing of their advancement. Care-focused workers might rule out advancement until their children are older, because they see it as incompatible with their caring responsibilities. Either they do not wish to work full-time hours or they place a higher priority on their home life. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Advisers or job coaches who seek to work with customers on retention and advancement need to be aware of the variety and complexity of individuals' orientations to work and care and the way that these can shape their future goals, the paths they choose and the obstacles they perceive. We have stressed throughout this chapter that, although we can identify some patterns in work and care orientations, there is no simple relationship between individuals' orientation and their personal characteristics, such as customer group or the number and ages of their children. Furthermore, we have argued that work and care orientations combine in different ways and interrelate with more pragmatic considerations to influence decision making. This has implications for how and when retention and advancement services are presented to customers. It all points to the need for bespoke programmes which allow advisers or job coaches to develop relationships with customers so that advisers can understand customers' orientations to work and care, and offer support, advice and services appropriately. It is also key to our argument that customers' orientations are not set in stone but are dynamic and amenable to change, including potentially through successful engagement in a programme run by skilled advisers.

## 4 Employment retention

The qualitative study included interviews with individuals who were working or had been working while part of the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme. Many of these people had little or no recent previous work experience.<sup>14</sup> This chapter concentrates on the experiences of these 147 individuals and specifically on their struggles to retain their employment. This focus moves beyond traditional concerns regarding barriers to work entry in order to spotlight common circumstances that threaten to undermine job retention among lone parents and the long-term unemployed. Later in the chapter, the discussion draws out the implications of these work retention experiences for in-work support programmes and relates these to the separate ERA target groups.

An underlying assumption is that work retention is a *process*. Individuals can move through this process at different rates and can achieve greater job security through different means and strategies. It is evident that individuals' barriers to employment, identified in Chapter 2, can recur as retention issues that can influence employment behaviours. Understanding the work and caring orientations that were explored in the previous chapter can provide insight into why individuals respond to similar work-life issues in different ways.

### 4.1 Factors that impact on work retention

Respondents were asked whether anything in their work made it difficult for them to continue working. Most were broadly satisfied with their work and felt secure in continuing their employment. This was particularly the case for lone parents in the Working Tax Credit (WTC) group who were already employed when they were recruited to the ERA programme. But a substantial number of customers who started work only after entering ERA had experienced a change in their employment circumstances. Some were no longer in work and others had changed jobs or work hours. Issues affecting retention included: temporary contract jobs, redundancy, caring responsibilities, dissatisfaction with working conditions, money problems and problems related to travelling to work.

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<sup>14</sup> Some lone parents were already working when they were recruited to ERA. These are the Working Tax Credit group of lone parent respondents.

### 4.1.1 Temporary contracts and redundancy

After only a short spell in employment, some people were made redundant or had lost their jobs because they had been working on a temporary contract. The relationship between temporary work and unemployment is empirically well-established, as temporary job markets are criticised for contributing to the low-pay/no-pay cycle (Holmlund and Storrie, 2002; White and Forth, 1998). This is an ongoing concern in the United Kingdom (UK) labour market.

Respondents who had manual jobs or worked in low-skilled, service sector work mainly reported these experiences, as they were more likely to be offered seasonal or casual employment. These cases were almost exclusively associated with the New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) group. Some customers had a history of temporary work, either a series of casual jobs in different fields or a series of temporary contracts within a specific line of work that used temporary contracts. Several of these individuals expressed their frustration over a 'serial' employment pattern, as one respondent, a 28-year-old woman who had worked in a series of temporary contracts in office administration, stated:

*'There seems to be a fluctuation of temporary – and then if it is permanent it's part-time permanent, ...so it can be quite difficult to find a full-time permanent job that pays a decent wage.'*

(ND+19)

Some working respondents did not secure another job right away; others were able to find a replacement job quickly. Within the boundaries set by the local labour market, individuals' orientations to work partly shaped their ability to retain their employment. Box 4.1 illustrates the case of one ND25+ customer in his 40s who, at the time of the interview, had recently been 'laid off' from a seasonal contract. He was considering a number of different options in order to secure his goal of employment and stable 'decent' work, despite a predominance of temporary contracts in his line of work.

#### Box 4.1

##### Temporary contracts as a retention issue: Jonathon (ND+20)

*'[T]hese days, you cannae get a job where you can turn round and say, "I'm going to work here for the rest of my life", like me dad did and granddad did and all that, you know, you can't even do a trade now, ...you've got to be versatile... if you're not multi-skilled, you'll come a cropper in the end, won't you?'*

Jonathon, in his late 40s, had worked in various different lines of work. He spent some time in the armed forces, and then worked in a permanent job for a long period which he eventually had to give up for health reasons. Since then he had worked in a variety of jobs, most recently for six months on a seasonal contract.

Continued

**Box 4.1 (Continued)**

His future goal was to remain in work. Because he recognised that this was unlikely to be with one single employer, he wished to keep different options open. He loved his most recent job, and one option for him was to return there next year. He regarded this employer as a good one and thought there was a good chance of being taken on permanently:

*'[T]here was a lad finished in January and he'd been there for 48 year; it's a job that you get that you keep for the rest of you life, do you know what I mean?'*

Alternatively, while working on the seasonal contract, he also found out about another job going as a boatman, which he wished to apply for since it related to his leisure interest in fishing:

*'I'm in for another job, what they call a boatman; obviously you can see I'm interested in boats, so I mean that's the real job that I would prefer.'*

Another option for him was to take temporary building work through an agency. He knew that this was primarily temporary work but saw it as an important fallback option en route to his goal of permanent employability:

*'I've registered with all the agencies, and like I say, you might pick three weeks up here and have two weeks off there, and pick three weeks up there, but your hours all add up, and once you've got your 300 hours that licence is in your back pocket then. And then hopefully you'll get on with one of the main contractors...where they're shifting about all the time, but they've always got building work on.'*

Jonathon combined an instrumental orientation to achieving decent, stable work, with a more intrinsic orientation towards doing something that he enjoyed (such as a job on the river). However, his belief in the importance of employability also motivated him to try out different paths and keep his options open. Ultimately, he was likely to retain employment, even in a labour market characterised by a predominance of temporary contracts.

In contrast, another male ND25+ customer in his 40s, who had also just finished a temporary job at the time of the interview and had a history of short-term contracts, was waiting to see what came up in labouring or warehouse work. He had made no concrete plans for securing further work. Of his approach to work, he stated:

*'I'm just like a cobweb; I just get pushed around by the wind, and if...somebody says, "Do you want to do a labouring job?" I just say, "How much?"...I still don't particularly know what I want to do.'*

(ND+18)

The two customers' different orientations to work partly shaped their different responses to a similar environment of short-term unstable work.

In addition to temporary contracts and seasonal work, some customers experienced redundancy whilst on the ERA programme. This threat to job retention was less predictable and it was therefore particularly challenging for individuals to stay in employment by finding a replacement job. For example, one man in his 30s had been working seven months as a labourer in a small, leather-goods factory when his employer let him go because of a drop in sales. His work orientation was primarily intrinsic, which helped to explain why, after several months of unemployment while on ERA, he was looking into self-employment opportunities in the leather-working field:

*'I've got a really good CV...but it's trying to find someone who'll take me on who's not frightened that I might jump over there. There are patterns where I was unfortunate, a lot of redundancies...[In the last position] I think it was between my job and a new machine, and the new machine got it.'*

(ND+49)

#### **4.1.2 Caring responsibilities**

Sustainable care arrangements are key to maintaining employment. The discussion in Chapter 3 showed how, especially for lone parents, juggling work with care was an ongoing concern. This issue was complicated by each individual's views on how to balance paid work with care preferences. Whether the breakdown of care arrangements resulted in the parent moving out of work, reducing their working hours, or putting in place alternative care arrangements was likely to depend on an array of factors. These might include the availability of alternative forms of childcare, individual attitudes about appropriate childcare, attachment to a specific job and how flexible and supportive an employer was.

In the study sample, few respondents left employment solely because their care arrangements failed. It was more common for lone parents to reduce their work hours in order to balance their care with their work. Most of the individuals who reduced their work hours had managed to negotiate them with their current employer; however a few switched to a new employer who offered fewer hours.

One mother of three children exemplified the strain of a full-time working lone parent. She was working night shifts as a fork-lift truck driver but could not cope with the hours. She switched to a part-time job as a care assistant, finding it much easier to address her family's needs:

*'I wasn't there for the children, I wasn't doing much, I was always just too tired. So I gave that up and I had a break for a couple of months, and now I've gone back to work 16 hours.'*

(LP54)

Another lone parent who worked in a retail shop was relying on her eldest child (aged 20) to collect her son from school. When her eldest found work she chose to reduce her hours in order to be home after school for her son. Although she experienced a drop in income, she found part-time work less stressful and she appreciated the extra time she had with her children:

*'I did have a really big loss in money with going to part time. I mean with the Working Tax and all...I'd rather have quality time than the money to be honest, it's one of them things, you can't do both, so I'd rather do without the money and have the time to be able to do things instead.'*

(LP62)

Choosing to reduce work hours in balance with childcare may be viewed as a strategy to aid work retention since it is undertaken so that paid work can be sustained alongside caring responsibilities.

These respondents provide evidence of the fluidity between the work-focused carer and care-focused worker orientations discussed in Chapter 3 and the importance of viewing them along a continuum. Choices related to care and work interact with the availability of the preferred care, including parental care. Parents will undoubtedly take time to adjust their work patterns in order to find one that fulfils their care and work orientations. Although they may not sustain the same number of working hours, this strategy can aid retention. Lone parents' desire to care for their children themselves can override the extent to which they are willing to work for pay. Consequently, many lone parents choose to work part time and balance the values they attach to paid work with their caring responsibilities.

### **4.1.3 Working conditions**

A number of customers expressed dissatisfaction with their employment conditions. Their concerns centred on the terms of work, the working environment, and relationships with employers and colleagues. Customers' reactions to unsatisfactory working conditions varied. Some customers found a replacement job before leaving work; others were willing to leave employment before securing other employment. A few left work altogether with no plans to return in the near future.

Dissatisfaction with work was more common among female respondents, particularly lone parents who had recently returned to work. Many of these individuals would be characterised as having a predominantly 'social' orientation to work, as they had no strong identification with a specific job or field of work but saw jobs as interchangeable. But other factors also came into play. For example, one lone parent in her 20s with two young children (LP47) reported dissatisfaction with her job in a food-packing plant. At the time of the interview she had been working for six months doing three ten-hour shifts, but stated that she could not continue because the work environment had affected her health. In addition, she felt that she was missing out on time with her children because of her long working hours. Ideally, she wanted a job with fewer

hours that would allow her more time with her children, and she expressed a willingness to leave work before she had secured other employment.

This case illustrates the complexity of decisions about work when attitudes and circumstances interplay. This person was classified as having a combined social and instrumental orientation to work, as she mentioned both her wages and work colleagues as things she valued about her job. However, poor working conditions and an unsatisfactory work-life balance undermined these positive qualities. This respondent's desire to work fewer hours again showed the fluidity of the orientations of the work-focused carer and care-focused worker, and how a parent might move towards being more work-focused only to find that it was not practical to sustain.

Even though they were dissatisfied with their working conditions, some customers were motivated to remain in their job until they found other work. A case example of this is supplied in Box 4.2.

#### Box 4.2

##### **Working conditions as a retention issue: Angela (ND+56)**

*'I've actually got an interview next Wednesday; it's another clerical job with the local council. So if I don't get that, I'm going to keep applying...I mean if I get a clerical job up [at the supermarket] I would stay up there, you know, but as it is, there's nothing available, so gonna look elsewhere.'*

Angela lived with her partner and two children, one in school and one preschool age. She worked part time doing administrative support when her children were young but suffered from depression and spent a period of time off work before entering the ERA programme. At the time of the interview she had been working at a local supermarket for over a year. She was hired at 18 hours a week but this was cut back to 12 hours because business was slow. She worked early morning shifts (6am to 10am) and found the job tiring because she was constantly on her feet, sometimes without a break. However, she was happy to be home from work mid-morning, when she was able to attend to her youngest child. Her partner was self employed, and he and the grandmother cared for the children when Angela was at work.

Angela was unhappy with the loss of wages when her hours were reduced and would have much preferred to return to clerical work, as before her illness. Ideally, she wanted to work part time so that she could continue to be flexible for her family. However, the family needed the extra cash and Angela also viewed the extra income as money for herself. The supermarket job was intended only to be a temporary measure until she secured work in her field. Her plan was to find alternative employment before leaving her current job to ensure minimal disruption to her income: *'I don't have much choice. I need the money.'* She was accustomed to having her own wage and was reluctant to give this up entirely:

Continued

**Box 4.2 (Continued)**

*'I like to have my own money than asking my partner for it, you know. I'd like to have my budget, you know what I mean, like, rather than having to ask all the time....I do like to work, you know. But its a necessity more than anything else, working.'*

Angela re-entered employment after six months on the ERA programme. She admitted she took the first job that was offered as a temporary measure. Her strong instrumental orientation to work motivated her to remain in employment whilst she searched for something that suited her vocational interests. But her wage was capped by her desire to work part-time hours as a care-focused worker, at least until her children were older.

**4.1.4 Financial issues**

It was during the transition period, in the early weeks and months of work, that customers found themselves particularly vulnerable to financial instability. Their main concerns during this period included paying for childcare, rent and Council Tax, and often related to shortfalls during the transfer from benefits to wages. The situation could also be exacerbated by debt.

A number of respondents who were in work at the time of the interview felt that they were no better or only slightly better off in work. An example of a respondent who returned to benefits was one 20-year-old lone parent (LP12) with a preschool-age child. After three months, she left her job as a care assistant in a nursing home partly because her childcare arrangements (family) did not work out, but also because she was not able to live on her wages. The hours she worked were unpredictable from one week to the next. This variation in income had also caused problems with her tax credits, and at the time of the interview she was paying back an overpayment, which caused her considerable hardship. Because of this experience, she was reluctant to re-enter work immediately and had decided instead to retrain as a beautician.

Another lone parent maintained she was not financially better off in work compared to when she was on benefits. Her financial situation was worsened by debt that had accrued during her failed marriage. One solution for paying off the debt was to increase her income by working more hours. However, she chose to remain in part-time employment in order to spend more time with her two school-age children (care-focused worker). She had considered returning to benefits but felt that work had been good for her, since she had suffered from depression after her husband left:

*'I know I'm not financially better off working, but it gets me out of the house and talking to other people. And it's not all about my life and what's going on with my life.'*

(LP41)

In this case, despite little financial gain, she retained her employment because of other social and self-identity values of work. But her wish to care for her children limited her work commitment to part-time hours.

#### **4.1.5 Travel to work**

For some customers, the cost and distance of travel made it difficult for them to sustain work. It was not uncommon for working customers to rely on public transportation because they did not drive. Travel to work was more problematic for those customers who had caring responsibilities. They often had more complex journeys because of the location of childcare. Bell *et al.*, (2005) have illustrated the complexity of travel arrangements for those who have to combine work with caring responsibilities. This has been referred to as 'trip chaining', as parents stop at multiple destinations en route to work (Hasluck and Green, 2005).

Transport issues were more complex for those who had to work antisocial hours and who did not have supportive employers. For example, one lone parent (LP10) with a preschool-age child was working full time in a petrol station. She relied on the bus for transport and her journey included dropping her child off at her sister's on her way to work. However, on the days when she started the early shift, buses were not running and she had to pay for a taxi. She was finding it financially difficult to continue relying on taxis and had asked to change her work shifts. Unfortunately, the employer refused. At the time of her interview, this respondent was considering whether or not to stay in the job.

In contrast, with the aid of a supportive employer, respondents were sometimes able to resolve travel issues that threatened work retention. One lone parent (LP53) of two children originally worked from 9am until 1pm but found it difficult to get to work on time. She had to first drop her children off at school and then rely on local buses to get to work. She was able to negotiate with her employer to work from 10am until 2pm, allowing her to maintain employment that suited her care-focused worker orientation.

## **4.2 Retention issues and in-work support**

Drawing upon the qualitative interviews, this chapter examined individuals' experiences of current or recent work while they were enrolled in the ERA programme and addressed various issues that threatened the sustainability of employment.

Many of the working customers were content with their employment situation and, at the time of the interview, did not anticipate any problems. However, given the composition of the ERA target groups, it was reasonable to expect that some would encounter difficulties in sustaining work. The job retention experiences confirm that the issues that make it difficult for individuals to secure work in the first place do not necessarily go away when they are working.

The findings also underscore the notion stated at the beginning of the chapter that retention is a *process*. For people with little recent work experience or with unstable work histories, like many in the study sample, the transition into continuous employment takes time and is not necessarily a straightforward journey. Routes to this end may be interrupted by changes in work hours or employer, and job loss. Working customers had to cope with issues that threatened to undermine work retention: temporary contract jobs, redundancy, caring responsibilities, dissatisfaction with working conditions, money problems and problems related to travel. Work and care orientations are also important influences on work retention and affect how potential problems are perceived and handled. Together, these are issues and attitudes an in-work support programme would need to anticipate and address.

How then might an intervention have a more visible impact on helping resolve the challenges of staying in work? It is possible to identify in the evidence of this chapter some clear areas where an in-work support service could play a greater role in promoting sustainable employment.

#### *Temporary contracts and seasonal employment pose a significant problem for work retention*

Customers in areas where local labour markets or particular sectors of the labour market favour temporary employment may face recurring retention problems, particularly those who have a manual work history. This is especially the case for customers who often gravitate towards such employment and do not wish to retrain. This highlights the need for a retention programme to try and counteract the uncertainty of local labour market demands.

It would be hard to challenge a view that temporary contracts are better than none, if that is the choice facing customers. But an in-work support programme should be prepared to help customers who are on temporary contracts secure more sustainable employment. The underlying expectation is for support staff to maintain ongoing contact with the customer, perhaps look for new and more secure work elsewhere, and explore the possibilities of the customer retraining while negotiating an extension to the existing contract. This task would be greatly helped by staff understanding what individual customers value in their work. Carrying out such a programme requires allocating staff time to this support function when staff workloads are planned.

#### *Care arrangements are often fragile*

At any level of labour market participation, care responsibilities are hard to reconcile with working full-time hours. For lone parents re-entering the labour market or for other workers who have care commitments, they are famously difficult. Simply aligning home, childminder and workplace on a single bus route can be a major achievement. Such difficulties that were only marginally overcome, just enough to allow work, will easily regress into insupportable problems following small changes in arrangements or small increases in care requirements or care time. An in-work

support programme can help customers keep this balance under frequent review so that arrangements for care respond to the need for care. This may entail anticipating changes and problems with a care back-up strategy. Such a service could appeal as much to customers' basic attitudes and orientations to work as to their practical needs. A reduction in a customer's working hours, for example, could lead to a more acceptable work-life balance, as the need to rely on others for care was eased.

*Debt customers have incurred while out of work and adjustments to welfare benefits can threaten the financial viability of work*

An in-work support programme should anticipate the financial implications of moving into work and help with budgeting and advice on benefits and tax credits. Further exploration is needed in this area, but problems with payments and lack of awareness of entitlement to payments could interplay.

*Working conditions, including happiness at work and relationships with colleagues, are significant factors that can affect job retention*

The discussion of work orientations has shown the importance some people attach to job satisfaction. Simply liking or disliking a job, even hating it in some cases, seemed to have a strong impact on respondents' views on retention. Securing agreeable work and working conditions ought to start with the job search and adequate job matching to people's perceptions and expectations. The cases discussed in this chapter confirm that personal preferences related to intrinsic work interests, working hours and work-life balance can influence customers' commitment to working. Work not only needs to pay; it also needs to be practical and satisfactory.

The influence of job dissatisfaction on retention also highlights the importance of advisers' continuing to stay in touch with customers who are working. This intervention should be ongoing in order to capture issues as they arise, recognising that working conditions may not meet expectations; they may negatively change or the dynamics of work and home may be at odds.

*Employers have a role to play in retention decisions*

Respondents whose employers were flexible discussed the advantages of being able to take time off when their children were sick or being able to utilise flexi-hours to their advantage to combine work with training and home life. Respondents also reported that unsympathetic employers, on the other hand, contributed to their feelings of unhappiness, which in turn resulted in some respondents wanting to leave employment or reduce their hours. To help ease these issues, an in-work support programme could coach customers on negotiating terms with employers and possibly play a role in these negotiations.

### 4.2.1 Retention and the ERA customer groups

Adjusting to work and changes in work inevitably entail changes in personal lives. The experiences of customers in this study provide evidence of the need to establish a more holistic approach to tackling problems with work retention. Personal circumstances and factors outside of a specific job need to be addressed in order to ensure that the employment retention process can function smoothly.

#### *New Deal 25 Plus group*

Probably the biggest threat to employment retention for the ND25+ group was the local job market and the predominance of temporary contract work in some vocations. Many of the study customers in this group had predominantly instrumental work orientations and unstable work histories of casual manual labour. Many still gravitated to this work while on the ERA programme. A restricted labour market might mean that support advisers might not be able to dissuade customers from taking up temporary work but they could help maintain the flow of employment by establishing an ongoing job search. This would require regular contacts and updates whilst the customer was in work. A longer-term solution would be to encourage upskilling and retraining. This activity could be ongoing while the ND25+ customer was in work. A thorough career counselling service could be built into the training to help direct individuals to vocations that would suit their intrinsic interests and aptitudes.

#### *New Deal for Lone Parents group*

Work entry and re-entry for the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) group was complicated by the fact that they all had children in the household to care for and financially support. Their children's well-being was paramount in decisions about work, e.g. the number of hours and the location in relation to home, school and childminder. The NDLP group was over-represented in the findings related to care responsibilities, dissatisfaction with work, finances and work travel. The variety of retention issues that arose for this group highlight how complex the transition into work can be for lone parents. How they might respond is influenced by the importance they attach to working as well as their orientations to care. Although maintaining flexible and affordable childcare was the biggest concern, some lone parents had to contend with the practicalities of using public transport to get their children to schools/childminders before beginning their work day. Others were questioning if a working wage was economically feasible, as they were coping with debt repayments and the financial implications of changes to welfare support such as housing benefit. Some were not happy with a job that did not justify all the disruption it had contributed to their lives.

In-work support advisers need to be prepared for all these eventualities and, at the same time, reinforce the social and self-identity values connected to earning a living. Sometimes they might lend a sympathetic ear; at other times they would need to find practical solutions. The evidence suggests that a support programme geared to lone parents would need to directly or indirectly supply specialist advice on childcare, benefits/tax credits, budgeting and career counselling.

*Working Tax Credit group*

Lone parents who were already in work of 16 to 29 hours a week and were receiving WTC were recruited to ERA in order to enhance their employment prospects. Sampling issues regarding this group were discussed in Chapter 1, but for the most part, these individuals had more experience of steady employment compared to the other customer groups. This is probably one explanation of why WTC lone parents in the study had few issues with retention; they were further along and had already adjusted to a work routine. Many were with the same employer. But some insights into supporting this group in work can be gleaned from cases where there was a change in their work, where a customer switched work fields (and employers) or took up training while in work. In-work programmes that actively encourage change in order to improve working conditions need to recognise that even those people in relatively steady employment need support to help them adjust to the change. Several WTC customers in the study took up training alongside their work. In a few cases, they needed to reduce their work hours in order to balance the training with their work and caring responsibilities. To ease this transition, in-work support could include advice on negotiating with an employer for reduced hours or help to find another job with fewer hours.

## 5 Perspectives on advancement

This chapter considers respondents' understandings and perspectives on advancement and the degree to which these align with the notion of advancement underlying the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme. The premise of ERA is that poorly-paid, entry-level jobs are more likely than higher-level jobs to be short-lived. This can result in a 'low pay/no pay' cycle. If individuals can be helped into better jobs, their employment position becomes more secure and they can escape this cycle. Such movement into better jobs is the advancement that ERA was designed to encourage. These jobs may be characterised by higher wages, more responsibilities, improved employee benefits or increased training opportunities. They are more likely to be full-time rather than part-time work. It should be noted that employment advancement need not correspond to advancement within a job; it may be that the most effective means of advancing is to begin a new job, perhaps changing also to a more skilled occupation.

The focus in this report is on subjective understandings of advancement and gaining a greater understanding of what may influence different attitudes and behaviour towards advancement. It begins with a brief introduction outlining what respondents understood by the term 'advancement'. It then goes on to analyse how they interpreted the idea of advancement for themselves. Their interpretations are described as a range, from positive to indifferent, and include the reasons respondents give for their own views on advancement and how they see themselves succeeding in their aims. The next section discusses impediments to advancement. It considers both barriers to advancement as well as what may facilitate advancement. Finally, the implications of this analysis for an advancement programme such as ERA are outlined.

## 5.1 Introduction: understandings and definitions of advancement

Respondents were asked what they understood by the term 'advancement' in relation to employment. There was great variety in the responses, but by and large, their definitions corresponded to the way in which advancement was envisaged by the ERA programme – improvements in pay and conditions. Respondents talked about earning more money, moving into permanent work, being promoted (sometimes into a management position), taking on more responsibility and also, more generally, about getting a 'better job'. When asked what they meant by a 'better job', they mentioned pay and also, in many cases, job satisfaction.

This association of advancement with job satisfaction serves to highlight the importance of careful job-matching when customers are looking for work. As outlined in Chapter 3, a wide range of customers talked about the importance of doing something they enjoyed (intrinsic work orientation). Customers' definitions of advancement often did not necessarily involve the notion of progression or moving 'up the ladder', but were associated with self-satisfaction. That might involve getting better at what you are doing and feeling confident about it: for a lone parent hairdresser, for example, *'from being good at cutting to being really good at cutting'* (LP40). Customers also associated training with advancement, primarily as a route towards a better job, as envisaged by ERA, but also in the more subjective sense of feeling that completing a training course may represent a significant achievement.

What was less evident in the definitions of advancement was the notion of working more hours. As expected, New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) and lone parents viewed working hours differently. ND25+ customers were likely to view the aim of working full time as a given and therefore not something to aim towards. Lone parents were less likely to define advancement as working full time, but rather associated advancement with job satisfaction and achieving a satisfactory work-care balance.

Customers who associated advancement with more pay included some who were keen to leave benefits behind them, even to earn enough to move beyond the reach of tax credits. In these cases it was not just the money, but getting better pay for the purpose of not relying upon the state:

*'[A]lthough we're sort of talking money, to be honest my intention is to get off the benefit system. At the moment, um, I'm on Working Families Tax Credit.'*

(LP29)

A number of customers also saw self-employment as advancement, including those who were not self-employed and did not express any intention of pursuing it:

*'I'd actually better myself if I was working for myself. Do you know what I mean? Doing my own stuff and I can earn my own money you know?'*

(ND+42)

In some cases, customers' understandings reflected what was important to them in terms of individual advancement. In others, this was not the case. Customers may have a clear understanding of advancement as promotion and better pay, for example, but then go on to reject this for themselves, as in the following example:

Q: 'What would it mean to you to advance at work?'

R: *'To get some qualification and promote up, a lot more work...I'm just quite content what I'm doing now.'*

(ND+61)

The customers' individual subjective approaches to advancement are now considered in more detail.

## 5.2 Individual attitudes/approaches towards advancement

Customers expressed different attitudes towards advancement. A detailed analysis of these attitudes led us to conceptualise advancement within three broad categories: positive, indifferent, and ambiguous and/or ambivalent attitudes. These categories are based on our interpretation of the entire interview for each customer and therefore take into account information provided in addition to answers to specific questions on advancement.

It was not easy, however, to classify customers into distinct categories. It was clear that customers who were at different stages in their lives, with reference to work experience and family, for example, had different attitudes towards advancement. It is likely, therefore, that as customers move along the life course, their ideas about advancement will also change.

It was unusual to find customers who thought there was no way in which they might advance. Although they often struggled with the concept of advancement and found it difficult to explain how they wanted to progress, when asked what they hoped to be doing in a year's time, most could provide an answer, such as:

'Hopefully yeah, you know, better job, better money, more hours'

(LP13)

Self-employment as one conception of advancement is considered separately.

### 5.2.1 Positive approaches to advancement

Customers placed in this group talked about advancement in the sense, most similar to the ERA definition, of progressing or moving forward at work. This might be through promotion, more money, extra responsibilities, or moving to a more secure job. These customers said they were interested in advancing/progressing where they were, or would try to move into a 'better' job with more pay and better conditions. Within the group, there was variation in the ways customers viewed positive

advancement: Some wanted to increase work hours, but did not want extra responsibility; others did want to advance but within self-defined limits. There were also customers who may well not have known how to respond to the specific questions on advancement. But they did make it clear that they would like to increase hours or have a little more responsibility, or that they did have plans to move in a more interesting direction or into work with better conditions. Customers' concepts of advancement were multifaceted.

This section will consider these different approaches, beginning with an analysis of why and how customers wanted to advance. In some cases, customers felt they had already advanced and were not interested in moving further. This group therefore combines customers who had already advanced prior to the interview, with customers who, at the time of the interview, were keen to advance and those who hoped to advance sometime in the future.

### *Why is advancing important to customers?*

There was a number of reasons why those customers with a positive approach to advancement said that it was important to them. For some it was the extra money: '*I aspire to be rich*' (ND+24); others talked about moving up the ladder and taking on more responsibility at work or having better working conditions. Personal satisfaction was also seen as important. Sometimes this involved a rejection of the notion of advancement solely in terms of money:

*'I think the main thing in going after promotion or any sort of advancement for me personally is that I'd have to be very interested in the work that it involved before I did it. I wouldn't just do it because of the money.'*

(WT23)

Customers also talked about personal goals that might be achieved were they to advance in their employment. These included: getting their 'own place', not being dependent on the state and being a good role model for their children.

One other motivation was to prove something to those around them and also, sometimes, to oneself:

*'[It]'s the fact that you know that you can do better...I've always been told, oh, you can't do this, you can't do that, and lately I've been finding, yeah I can. And the more you tell me I can't, the more I'm going to do it, and I am determined to do it.'*

(ND+30)

Customers who had already achieved a positive change in their employment talked about how this had boosted their self-confidence. For some customers, this increased confidence was achieved by undertaking work they would not have previously imagined doing. This was especially relevant for those lone parents who may have had very limited experiences of working. For example, one lone parent

who had received training through ERA was pleased by her pay rise after working one year in marketing for a community newspaper. She responded positively when asked if she thought she had advanced in her current job:

*'Oh definitely...I didn't think I was very good at sales actually but I am. So I'm a lot more confident...I didn't think I'd be able to do that, but the only reason I feel I can do it is because I've had the training.'*

(LP53)

Customers who had intrinsic work orientations were the most likely to be interested in advancement. This orientation was likely to have led them into jobs with advancement opportunities, where they might derive personal satisfaction through progressing in a job they enjoyed. Those who had an instrumental orientation, and were focused on the financial benefits of working, were also likely to be motivated towards advancement, although they might have been held back by lack of opportunity.

#### *How did customers hope they might advance?*

When customers were asked about their possible advancement, they talked about training and also (those who were in work) about their employers. Some felt that in order to advance they would have to change employers, and this was a real constraint. Others thought they would be able to progress in their current employment:

*'I am quite ambitious. I am happy with where I am and the position I'm in but I have taken on a lot more responsibility, more than I need to, but I'm enjoying the challenges with getting it done and showing I can do it. It's hard but I like a challenge and it is quite challenging.'*

(LP52)

Those who were keen to advance often had an incremental approach to advancement in mind, with plans for the future worked out. This approach, which chimes with the ERA vision, could be described as becoming settled into a work routine or undertaking training (either in-work training, through ERA or with another agency) in order to progress to a 'better' job. Those who had such an approach were quite likely, however, to organise their own progression.

In some cases the customers had short and long-term aims, and advancement had different meanings in each case. Short-term advancement would be seen as continuing with the same work but with some progression (through the same or another employer). Long-term aims might involve a career change (as illustrated in Box 5.1). Some customers who had long-term aims had a 'dream job' in mind.

**Box 5.1****WTC, positive approach to advancement: Ellen (WT35)**

*'I do want to get more, you know, I'd like it; the [names place of work] is wonderful but not a career. You know, I need to think long term really. I need to stay looking at something that will probably pay more, you know. So I do need to push myself.'*

Ellen is a 34-year-old Working Tax Credit (WTC) lone parent with two sons aged 11 and 15. She started work seven years ago in a local café, doing a few hours a week, and as her children got older she slowly increased her hours. She was lucky in that her employer was local and very flexible so she was able to negotiate working hours and holidays to allow her to fulfil her desire to care for her own children and not use formal childcare (she also has the support of her parents). With her children both in secondary school, she now felt that she wanted a career and was ready to pursue her dream job of working with animals. She was searching for alternative work in this area and was also looking into training courses. At the time of the interview she was contacting colleges for their prospectuses.

Advancement was very important to this customer at this point in her life, but she had arguably deferred it while her children were younger in order to enable her to fulfil a care-focused worker orientation. However, and as seen in the orientations chapter, her shift in orientation to work-focused carer resulted in a positive approach to advancement.

There are two other distinct understandings of advancement within this general group (positive approaches). These are now discussed separately.

*Deferred advancement*

Some customers did not reject advancement per se and, indeed, were positive towards the idea of advancing in the future. However, they did not think they were ready to advance at the time of the interview. Some of these customers were undertaking training with a view to future advancement and felt that for them the training itself represented progress.

Customers offered two main reasons for deferring advancement. First, those who had just started work often thought they needed time to settle into work before being ready to talk about advancement. The second reason, mainly given by lone parents, was caring responsibilities (illustrated in Box 5.2).

**Box 5.2****Deferred advancement: Mandeep (LP41)**

*'I've always wanted to work in a hospital, and with physiotherapy...[but] the kids are young; it's not a time for me to sort of like move to, like work at a hospital at the moment.'*

Mandeep is a lone parent with two primary school-age children whose husband 'walked out on them' a few years ago. She had limited work experience before getting married and having the children, but the break from her husband and her subsequent depression forced her out into work:

*'I used to sit here and cry all the time, always crying and always getting really depressed...I know I'm not financially better off working, but it gets me out the house and talking to other people, and it's not all about my life and what's going on with my life.'*

Since starting work she had reconsidered her future plans and resurrected her childhood goal of becoming a physiotherapist:

*'I've always wanted to work in a hospital, and with physiotherapy, but having kids and being separated from me ex-husband, it's just pushed me back quite a lot, well, mind you, it's pushed me forward because I can do it now...it just made me realise I wanted to make something of meself.'*

This was important to her in terms of self-development and her personal goals:

*'I've always wanted to have a good career behind me.'*

She was also motivated by her desire to ensure that she was financially self-sufficient for herself and her family:

*'[A]nd I want a job where, you know, I've got sort of, some sort of pension scheme and something for my kids...I don't want to be a burden on my kids when I get older.'*

Even though she had identified a goal – to be a physiotherapist – Mandeep felt that she could make only small steps towards it at the moment. For example, she was currently working part time in a care home and completing National Vocational Qualifications in care. She didn't think she was ready to move to a hospital-based job which would be farther from her home and with longer hours while her children were still small:

*'[T]he kids are young; it's not a time for me to sort of like move to, like work at a hospital at the moment...I don't want them to go somewhere else and spend time somewhere else. I want them to come home and then spend time with me.'*

Customers' care orientation constrained their desire to advance (both in the sense of working more hours and in securing 'better work'). The discussion on care orientations in Chapter 3 highlighted the influence of attitudes towards care on

delaying advancement and the role of the family life course. Yet it is clear that the stages at which children enter preschool, primary school and secondary school offer some key 'landmarks' for lone parents' working lives that can delay making a change in employment. As in the case of work entry, many lone parents wanted to wait until their children were older before moving on to something new.

### *Limited advancement*

Some of the customers who said that advancement was important to them were, nevertheless, reluctant to progress beyond a certain self-defined limit. Sometimes this reluctance stopped them short of a movement into management, but in other cases it precluded simply taking on more tasks. The limits thus varied for different customers: Some wanted to advance to a supervisory position but not go into management; others wanted a few more hours but were not interested in extra responsibility. Once again, job satisfaction emerged strongly. Many such customers expressed interest in advancing until they reached the point where they were happy and satisfied with their work. Some defined such advancement as getting better at what they were doing and specifically rejected the idea of promotion. For example:

*'Not so much getting promoted. To get better at the job and learn more about the job and advance myself that way is more important than actually getting a promotion.'*

(LP30)

Chapter 4 showed the importance that many customers, especially females, attached to job satisfaction and how this contributed to work retention. This was also the case with advancement. Most customers who had found work that was satisfying saw this as advancement in itself. Some were more positive towards the idea of advancement because they felt they had progressed enormously to be in that position. One WTC customer, for example, said she had advanced in the past and felt that she could not take on any more responsibilities, or work any more hours, even if it meant a higher income:

*'To be honest with you, the next step up,...line management, which is managing a small team, is so much more hassle than the pay is worth.'*

(WT23)

For lone parents, a reluctance to take on additional responsibilities at work was often linked to their assertion that they wanted to be available for their children:

*'Well if it would mean going higher in work, I wouldn't want to be a manager. I'm a senior stylist anyway, so the next one would be manager, and I wouldn't like to do that. 'Cos it's just too much responsibility what with [child's name] only being little.'*

(LP06)

Chapter 4 also illustrated how customer responses to retention problems were partly influenced by a combination of their work orientation and the importance attached to the monetary gain of employment. This also seemed to be the case with advancement. Some customers talked about their ability to manage on a limited income as an additional reason why they limited their advancement ambitions. Lone parents, in particular, would talk about being able to manage on limited money and not being concerned too much about more money coming into the house.

### **5.2.2 Ambiguous or ambivalent approaches to advancement**

Customers in this group were neither positive nor indifferent towards advancement. During the course of the interview, they did not respond positively to questions about advancement and, generally, were ambiguous or unsure about what they wanted to do in the future. In some cases, they expressed vague ideas about doing something else or getting a 'better job' but seemed to have no idea about how to proceed. They did not, however, rule out the idea of advancement/progression (therefore they are not classified as negative), but it seemed that advancement was not on the agenda for them. In some cases, customers were reluctant to talk about personal advancement and progression at work. Others simply thought that such a discussion was irrelevant to them.

One group of these customers were likely to comment that they had done well to get a job (or if out of work, their aim was to secure a job) and state that they would like to keep the job and maybe get better pay. Another group of customers talked very vaguely about wanting to do something better in the future but struggled to specify what this might be and/or how they might move towards this aspiration. These were most likely to be lone parents who were unwilling to think about their own future until their children were older: They had 'put it on hold'.

Some customers in this group appeared to lack confidence in their abilities. The other main reasons that customers (across the customer groups) gave for their seeming unwillingness to envisage personal advancement were: reluctance to take on extra responsibilities at work; resistance to thinking about the future; or being too old. This is an important category for a post-employment service: It is likely that these customers would not themselves be pro-active in seeking advancement advice, but they might well respond to intensive job coaching.

There was some degree of overlap between this category and deferred attitudes towards advancement. What distinguished these customers from those with a more positive approach to advancement (but in the future) was uncertainty about how to progress. One 48-year-old ND25+ customer had an injury that prevented her from returning to her previous work as a nursing assistant. She was attracted to the idea of advancing in her new job as a receptionist but was unsure how she might achieve this:

*'I'm not even thinking that far ahead. I want to be able to concentrate on what I'm doing now, get that right and then progress. But I don't know what the progressions can be and what they can lead to.'*

(ND+44)

As one care-focused lone parent (who had joined ERA before becoming a lone parent) with a six-month-old baby stated:

*'In the next couple of years, until [child's name] at school, I'm quite happy to do something that just gets you by. As long as I'm not worse off doing it and I can sort out childcare, everything like that. I don't mind just going out to earn a wage. Once she's at school though, I'd want to maybe be getting a career. I'm 31 now; if I don't do something in the next four or five years then I'm not going to have a career. So more long term it's important to get a decent job.'*

(ND+21)

Similarly, a lone parent who was working full time as a receptionist at a surveyors talked about the advantages of the ERA training she was taking, but then she went on to reject the idea of advancement because she did not want added responsibilities:

*'Well without the scheme I wouldn't be learning the Sage [book-keeping software package] obviously, so that will advance my employment prospects in another job....'*

*I don't want the added responsibility to be quite honest, I want a job where I can go, work nine to five, come home and not think about it any more. So really, I'm quite happy just not advancing that much in the employment area.'*

(LP23)

Customers in this group might have been comfortable about some forms of advancement and felt that they would like to advance, but needed to be pressed on this. In some of the interviews, for example, customers stressed that they were not ambitious and did not want to progress, but then went on to say that they would quite like to work for a better company. In some cases (such as the customer mentioned above) they might be undertaking training in order to facilitate such a move.

The ambitions of one distinct group of customers within this group were centred upon the desire for steady employment.

### *Steady employment*

Some customers understood advancement, for themselves, as getting a job, or (for those who had already achieved this) keeping that job, or at least making sure they stayed employed. Retaining employment was therefore the priority for these customers and, at the time of the interview, they were unable or unwilling to see beyond this. They differed from those in the deferred advancement category in that they did not speculate about advancing in the future but, importantly, neither did they deny the possibility of such a step. The most common attitude towards advancement among these customers was the belief that advancement was irrelevant for them. These cases tended to be ND25+ and were associated with an instrumental work orientation of seeing work primarily as a means to an end. Some customers understood advancement solely as getting as much work as they could.

Some of these customers, especially those with little work experience or who had not worked for some time, did not seem to have a clear idea of what they wanted to do. They were content just to be working. Training was sometimes seen as a means to an end (being in employment). Their reasons for wanting training might be to find work or to move to a choice job. In time, with increased skills and experience, they might have a clearer picture of what suited them and what they wanted. For example, one 41-year-old ND25+ customer who worked in the building trade was asked about advancement. He said he would quite like more money and easier work, but mainly he would just like to keep his job:

*'I like my work. I wouldn't like to be back on the dole if that's what you mean.'*

(ND+34)

Such customers thereby appeared to be rejecting advancement in favour of retention. One reason that customers gave for placing a priority on retention was their age. For example, when he was asked about his plans for the future, one customer responded:

*'I'd just like to do this job as long as I can. I'm 56, 57 this Christmas...'*

(ND+16)

It might be expected that an understanding of advancement as steady work is sensitive to change over time, particularly as customers attain work stability. This is particularly the case for lone parents who may experience a great sense of satisfaction in getting a job, and definitely feel they have advanced simply because they are in work. At first they may reject further advancement, but this attitude is subject to change over time. Such customers are likely to move towards a more positive and incremental approach to advancement.

These examples indicate the difficulties that customers may have in applying the concept of employment advancement to their own lives. However, customers who may take pains to describe themselves as not ambitious or not wanting to advance could be helped incrementally. A customer's own understanding of advancement is the starting point. This group stands to gain the most from a scheme such as ERA: They are less likely than those with a 'positive' approach to be pro-active in terms of advancement, but they are *not* indifferent towards personal advancement. Neither have they rejected the idea. The implications of this analysis for post-employment advancement counselling is that advisers could help customers look for 'permanent' work with better conditions and opportunities to advance, but also that they should be prepared for customers to change over time.

### **5.2.3 Indifferent and negative attitudes towards advancement**

Some customers rejected the notion of advancement for themselves; others appeared to be indifferent. Such customers, as well as some who were ambivalent, often did not fully understand what they had signed up for (see Walker *et al.*, 2006 for a fuller discussion of customers' understandings of ERA). In other cases they had

been attracted to the retention bonus rather than the possibility of help with advancement. The main reasons for negative attitudes towards advancement were similar to those categorised above; rejecting responsibility and/or a management position. Within this category, there was a strong theme of not liking managers or supervisors, and not wanting to move in that direction. Other reasons included care orientation, not being ambitious or feeling they were too old to advance. Some expressed a combination of these attitudes.

R: *'I don't like the till at all... too much to do regards to where the cheques are and responsibilities and I'm not at that age where I want that responsibility... I've had enough responsibility; I don't want any more.'*

Q: *'Yeah so in the future is there any way that, you said you wanted to carry on doing the same kind of work, is there any other kind of positions you'd like to move into in the shop or is there any way you'd like to?'*

R: *'No I want stay at the bottom.'*

(LP08)

*'No I wouldn't want to be any higher. I mean it's just, it's more grief at the end of the day.'*

(ND+67)

*'I really just wanted something easy, something that I could go and do and not come home stressed or having to worry about it or anything like that.'*

(ND+21)

Few customers, however, shied entirely away from advancement. This was largely because we identified a broad, multifaceted definition of advancement that included notions of progression, job satisfaction and security, and working more hours. Some customers might reject one form of advancement but might well be interested in another form.

### 5.3 Self-employment

As mentioned previously, becoming self-employed was, in itself, seen as advancement for many customers. The predominant meaning of advancement in self-employment was for their business to go well and expand. This was mainly for financial reasons but also for *'the self-satisfaction of knowing that you can provide for yourself'* (WT10). Some lone parents found self-employment attractive because it would allow them the flexibility of coordinating work hours around care.

There was, however, also a broad range of attitudes towards advancement evident among self-employed customers. This matched those attitudes outlined above for the customer group as a whole. Some self-employed customers, for example, did not see the relevance of advancement for their own circumstances, as in the case of this self-employed 52-year-old cab driver:

*'In what I'm doing? Advancement in taxiing! That takes a bit of thinking about. Eventually so that you don't need to drive and you're getting other people to drive your cars! It's just not feasible.'*

(ND+63)

Others, predominantly unskilled workers in the ND25+ customer group, were concerned that they got enough work to make a reasonable living. They were similar to those who were concerned about gaining and retaining steady work. Customers might be self-employed only because that was a condition of their employment: This applied, for example, to hairdressers and building labourers in the sample. Such customers were not seeking to build up their own business and, at the time of the interview, were more concerned about retention than advancement. We interviewed only a small number of lone parents who were self-employed.

## 5.4 Barriers and bridges to advancement

We also analysed what might limit customers' advancement and what might enable them to advance in work. The explanations were related to customers' orientations towards advancement, and also to their work and care orientations, their work histories, and current employment. The explanations therefore comprised a combination of individual choices, cultural expectations, personal circumstances, and structural factors. It is important to begin to understand these combinations, as these are the issues that any adviser would face when offering post-employment support. The most significant of these were opportunities at work; limits set by caring responsibilities; and the age of the customer, education, training, and self-confidence. It is useful to conceptualise these as barriers to advancement. Customers talked about training and also opportunities available at their workplace as factors that might promote personal advancement.

### 5.4.1 Barriers

#### *Employment*

Some customers had a positive approach to advancement but were clearly employed in jobs that offered few or no opportunities. They tended to work for small employers or they were on temporary contracts (as seen in Box 5.3).

One WTC customer who was categorised as a work-focused carer, for example, stated that it was 'very important' for her to advance, but that there were no opportunities for her to do so in her workplace. She was working as an administrator in local government:

*'That's what I'm trying to do at the moment. I'm trying to look for something at a higher scale. I don't think there's anything within this department; it'd have to be elsewhere.'*

(WT04)

**Box 5.3****Barriers to advancement – temporary jobs: Sally (ND+19)**

*'I never seem to get any further forward on what I want to actually achieve, or what would be a good career move, so I kind of flounder a bit....I feel like I haven't achieved what other people my age have achieved or what I should have achieved since I have abilities...I've just kind of drifted along a bit, fallen into various jobs, not really choosing them.'*

Sally is a single, female ND25+ respondent in her late 20s who desperately wanted to have a 'career' but felt that she was thwarted by the lack of permanent and well-paid job opportunities:

*'[I've been] trying to feel out what would be a good career move for us, try and get a permanent job. [I] kind of end up getting temporary work a lot, and end up thinking it's work, but obviously would be better permanent...there seems to be a fluctuation of temporary and then if it is permanent its part-time permanent.'*

She had worked as a receptionist and in general administration since leaving school in a variety of predominantly temporary jobs, mostly at the minimum wage level, and had experienced no progression. She took her current administrative job despite the low pay because it was a permanent post; however, the company was currently downsizing and she feared she would be soon laid off. She had made attempts to progress in her career by completing a basic accountancy course with an aim of going further, but had found full-time work and studying too tiring and had not enrolled the subsequent year.

Sally felt frustrated that she had not achieved a 'career' which was important to her self-fulfilment and personal goals and could provide financial security and stability:

*'I don't actually own my own home, the way prices are at the moment I'll never own my own home...so I need to get a better career sorted before I get my own home, so I don't have to rely on somebody else.'*

At present she felt like she was 'floundering' and needed some good-quality career advice to help her move on.

**Care**

Some respondents saw care responsibility as an objective limit to advancement possibilities, both in the sense of working more hours and also in taking advantage of training opportunities. As the discussion on care orientation (Chapter 3) has shown, care as a barrier is usually a combination of personal characteristics, structural constraints and individual preferences.

### *Work history and orientation*

There was a very strong relationship between customers' having a manual work history, a predominantly instrumental work orientation, and either an ambiguous or indifferent advancement orientation. In most cases these were ND25+ customers who felt that advancement was irrelevant to them. It is important, however, to point out that there were some exceptions to this. One ND25+ customer who had a primary instrumental work orientation spent some time talking about being pleased he had found an 'easy' job that paid reasonably. He was employed as a driver's mate for a waste disposal firm. When probed about advancement, he did have ideas for the future: He wanted to stay in the job he was in and work his way up – first from driver's mate to driver and then to driving larger classes of lorry. This required him first to get a driving licence and then do training for the different classes of licence.

*'[I]f I get my driver's license I can start going out in the transit vans collecting waste, which means more money for me but the same hours, and then maybe getting the company to pay for my seven-and-a-half ton license, more money, same hours, so that's what I'm trying to do at the moment.'*

(ND+12)

### *Financial*

Some lone parents were worried that what they would gain in employment income through working more hours, they might lose from WTC. This applied to WTC customers as well as some New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) customers who had moved into work. It should not be the case, but the concern highlights the need to continue the practice of performing better-off calculations for working customers who are thinking about moving jobs or increasing their hours, and to continue supporting them if they run into difficulties with their tax credits.

### *Age*

One reason given by many customers (predominantly though not exclusively limited to ND25+ customers) for being indifferent to or rejecting advancement was their age:

*'I think at this time in my life now, I'm being 55, I'm just quite happy to do my job. I think if you're looking for maybe a foreman to be ambitious you're looking for someone round about 35ish, 40ish, you know, but I think at my time of life I'm just quite happy to do my job and that's it.'*

(ND+47)

This is again an example of the importance of time, change and a customer's life course. This particular customer indicated that he might well have been interested in advancing had he been 10 or 15 years younger.

### *Confidence and ability*

We have shown how some customers noted how they had gained confidence after starting work. Another way in which confidence was important was that customers often talked about not being confident about advancing. The main reasons for this were limited experience and/or poor qualifications.

For some of these customers, the desire to advance in the future was limited by a self-assessment of what they could realistically aim for. One ND25+ customer, for example (already discussed under the ambivalent advancement group), gave what could be viewed as a realistic assessment of his own limitations:

*'I'm the first to admit if I can't do anything. And I will never go above that. If you understand what I mean. I would never; if I'm not qualified to do anything, I would never cross that line.'*

(ND+35)

In such cases it is difficult for advisers to judge whether or not customers are able to advance but lack confidence in their ability to do so, or whether they have made a realistic assessment of what is possible to attain. In the first case, lack of confidence may be overcome through coaching or training. In the second, the adviser could focus on helping the customer get, and keep, the best possible job under the circumstances.

## **5.4.2 Bridges**

### *Opportunities at work*

Some workplaces offer more opportunities than others for customers to advance. This is, of course, an obvious point, but it does need stating because it poses a dilemma for advisers: Should they try to discourage their customers from accepting employment where opportunities are limited, or be pragmatic and see this as the first stage along a pathway towards better employment conditions? Customers were aware of these differences and often commented on promotion possibilities and the training opportunities available to them. Customers working in the National Health Service (NHS), in housing associations, for large companies and for local authorities, for instance, were more likely to have advancement opportunities.

One ND25+ customer, working in plant care (tending to potted plants in building lobbies), compared his previous employer to where he was working now:

*'Anyway, to get to the point there was no prospects. It was do the two years and go... whereas here I begin as a Junior Interior Plant Technician, the next step is an Advanced Plant Technician, then you become a Senior Technician and then there's even one after that I believe like management or something like a supervisory role and the money gets better, and it all gets better. So there's room for promotion.'*

(ND+46)

### *Training*

Some customers were undertaking training as part of their job rather than as something they had sought in order to advance. However, most customers who were taking advantage of the ERA training opportunities or training opportunities at work were doing so because they wanted to advance. They generally had an incremental approach to advancement and were aware they needed more training to progress. Some workplaces had good training opportunities and customers were often willing to take advantage of these.

One male lone parent customer who was advancement-focused had specifically aimed to work for a particular company, 'the best firm to work for around here', after experiencing poor working conditions. He set about getting the necessary qualification (a license for driving with hazardous chemicals) and at the time of the interview was planning to take advantage of ERA for extra training that would enable him to move into the office at the company at some stage (LP13).

There was, however, potential for tension between retention and advancement. Customers who had a strong focus on training might struggle to work full time. This particularly applied to the lone parent customer groups.

### **5.4.3 Retention and advancement**

The retention bonus is also relevant to advancement because it requires customers to work at least 30 hours a week. One form of advancement, embedded in the design of ERA, was the movement from part-time to full-time work. This was primarily aimed at the lone parent customer groups. However, lone parents who were keen to take up the training opportunities offered by ERA were not always able to combine this with working full-time hours (as in Box 5.4). For these customers, there was a tension between the retention incentive and advancement, and they talked about making the choice between advancing by working full time or working part time, and advancing through training.

One WTC customer (WT32), for example, said that she could not do a training course in conjunction with working 30 hours. This customer preferred to reduce her work to 25 hours in order to attend training one day a week. In such cases, a reduction in hours was not negative, as it related to future advancement. Another example was a 29-year-old lone parent (work-focused carer) who had been in the United Kingdom (UK) since 2002 and had two children, one aged four and one aged four months (LP14). After leaving her last job as a receptionist in the NHS she was not considering any further full-time work because she wanted to concentrate on pursuing her nursing training in order to attain her 'dream job'. In these instances, retention and advancement could be seen as being in tension, particularly in cases where the jobs that customers sought required a significant commitment to training.

**Box 5.4****Advancement and retention tension: Yvonne (WT28)**

*'I think it was the training, it was something different because I was working at [supermarket's name] and it seemed like the right time...plus the store that I was working in was old and closing down. They were opening a new store so there was opportunity there to work more hours.'* *'What I'm doing is I have stopped doing the self-employment thing now to concentrate on the course I'm doing.'*

Yvonne, age 47, returned to work after the breakdown of her marriage 15 years ago. She re-entered part time and had been employed at the same supermarket chain ever since. She had received WTC (previously Family Credit) for the duration. One of her two teenage children still lived with her.

Yvonne was attracted to ERA because she was interested in working more hours, anticipating a drop in Child Benefit after her eldest child left school. She was also interested in the training that was offered to working lone parents. After starting the programme, she increased her hours at the supermarket from 16 to 24. She was also interested in applying her previous training in complementary therapies and took on some extra work, self-employed, as a therapist in order to qualify for the ERA retention bonus. While juggling the two jobs she decided that she would like to expand her therapy business towards a goal of working full time. To do this she needed training in a broader range of therapies. But she felt she could not sustain the same working hours and pursue her studies at the same time, and decided to put her therapy business on hold. At the time of interview she was working 26 hours at the supermarket and was studying body massage.

Now that she was able to combine her work with her studies, Yvonne estimated she was halfway towards achieving her goal. She expressed a positive outlook on advancement:

*'[M]ore interesting, more fulfilling, more pay in the job you want to do; more flexible, more, just what you want to do I suppose.'*

## 5.5 How could a post-employment service help customers advance?

The qualitative interviews with customers have highlighted a number of important issues that can improve our understanding of how customers may be helped to advance in work. Here we begin by commenting on issues that emerged across the customer groups, and that might be expected to be relevant to any post-employment service. We finish by discussing different attitudes and understandings of advancement among the customer groups in this study.

*Advancement means different things to different people, but most customers would like to advance in some way*

The analysis of the different views on advancement has shown that a 'one size fits all approach' would not be appropriate. Any advancement service would need to be tailored to customers' individual needs, and advisers should tap into why and how customers might want to advance, exploring personal motivations with them. This type of counselling is demanding and skilled. A customer might advance by taking what might seem to be a small step, such as taking on a little extra responsibility.

*Attitudes towards advancement are likely to change*

This is a key finding in this research and will be explored further in a number of longitudinal interviews with customers. Support staff would need to be aware that a number of factors influence customers' views on advancement, including their personal circumstances, their caring responsibilities and orientation, employment history, work orientation, qualifications and level of confidence. These are subject to change and, in turn, may change customers' attitudes towards own potential advancement. For example, customers gain in confidence after they have been working for a while and are then more likely to view advancement positively. Advisers may need to allow customers a little time to settle into work before they are ready to think about advancing. In general, advisers need to develop an ongoing and long-term relationship with their customers.

*Customers are likely to progress at different speeds, and may have both short and long-term advancement aims*

The interviews have shown that some customers who want ultimately to advance might seek to delay it. This is most common in the lone parent target groups. Advisers would need to be prepared to work with customers at their own pace, though still encouraging them, and also be prepared for changes in the customers' lives that could alter their attitudes towards advancement. Other customers will have an incremental approach to advancement and, in some cases, will want to concentrate on training and acquiring new skills for possible future advancement. Advisers would need to be aware of this, take advantage of any training opportunities available and not look for a 'quick fix'.

*Customers may be ambivalent about the relevance of advancement for themselves*

We have shown that some customers were unsure about what they hoped for the future and did not see the relevance of advancement. In such cases it was likely that they were making decisions on the basis of incomplete information. Individuals may not be aware that advancement in some way may help them escape or avoid the low pay/no pay cycle. In these cases, post-employment advisers should be ready to explain to customers how much better off in a variety of ways they might be if they advanced in the future. This could be accomplished by discussing with the customer

what is most important to them and working out how their goals might be achieved. This might involve, for example, an adviser helping someone in a temporary post into permanent employment through extra training. Helping customers into a 'good' first job would also be key here. Customers who are unsure and ambivalent about what direction to take are likely to benefit from job coaching.

#### *Training in order to advance may make full-time work difficult to retain*

In the case of ERA customers, difficult choices sometimes had to be made. Advancement to full-time work (and eligibility for the retention bonus) sometimes conflicted with the time needed to undertake training in order to pursue advancement (which was also rewarded through the training bonus). The research has shown that some customers, particularly lone parents, are not prepared to work full time as well as undertake training if this means more time away from their children. One measure of advancement, embedded in the design of ERA, is a movement from part-time to full-time work, if part-time work is involuntary rather than actively selected (Morris *et al.*, 2004).

This research has shown that some customers may make a decision to work part time in the full knowledge that it may initially delay advancement. There is therefore a need to help those who want to move into full-time work, but also to try to help part-time workers advance without increasing their hours. Any post-employment service would need to be aware of part-time jobs that offered the potential for advancement and training. It is clear that some customers choose to undertake training and forego the retention bonus, and this is an indication of the value they attach to training while in work in order to improve their future employment prospects.

#### *Customers working part time often do not think they are able to advance*

Any post-employment service would need to be aware of employers that offer good advancement opportunities for part-time workers. Post-employment advisers would also need to take care with job placements and coach their customers to take advantage of the opportunities available. They should also try to ensure that customers who are aiming to work full time do find full-time work. In cases where customers feel they would like to advance but are being held back because they work part time, it would be important for any post-employment service to keep in touch with the customers, help them prepare for future advancement, but also perhaps assist them to look for part-time openings at a higher grade.

#### *Customers may need to move jobs in order to advance*

Advancement in work is delineated by the place of employment. Some customers had found work where there were opportunities for advancement, but others who wanted to advance could not do so at their current workplace. The ability to advance in terms of extra hours, improving pay, gaining promotion and/or more responsibilities may not be possible in particular workplaces. This research echoes the findings of a

large study in the United States (Anderson *et al.*, 2005) that concluded that customers may need to move jobs in order to advance. Such customers are likely to benefit from a post-employment service that would help them do this. They are also likely to benefit from the practice of advisers' performing 'better-off' calculations for working customers who are thinking about moving jobs or increasing their hours.

As noted earlier, it was not easy to classify customers into distinct categories. Customers at different stages in their lives had different and changing attitudes towards advancement. It is likely, therefore, that as customers move along the life course, their ideas about advancement will also change.

## 5.6 Advancement and the ERA customer groups

Attitudes and views on advancement within the customer groups showed strong patterns, but also, importantly, exceptions to these patterns. This means that advancement is difficult to implement and that care needs to be taken not to stereotype particular customers. Because there are a variety of views and interpretations about advancement across customer groups, a post-employment service cannot 'sell' the same outcomes to everyone. Advisers would need to tailor goals to customers' perspectives; but they would also need to be prepared to challenge some of those perspectives and help people see how they might have broader choices than they realise. This may involve, for example, advising a customer to move into a more secure part-time job or part-time work that also involves training. A post-employment service should itself have long-term, as well as short-term, objectives for its customers.

### *New Deal 25 Plus group*

Many customers in the ND25+ group were more likely than those in the other two groups to feel that advancement was about getting and keeping a steady job. They had a strong work ethic, could not see the significance of improving their skills, and were more likely to be ambiguous or indifferent towards advancement. However, within the same category there were customers who were keen to retrain and move into 'better' work.

Some of those who were ambivalent or indifferent towards advancement felt that they were reaching the ends of their working lives and that it was time to slow down. Others often had a view of advancement as moving into management or retraining for work that was 'above their station' and decided that this was not for them. They were likely to be receptive to the idea of employment advancement facilitated by training, meaning incremental steps towards a full-time, permanent, well-paid, secure job. Unfortunately, for many customers who were bounded by the labour market in their areas and were struggling with agency work and/or short-term contracts, this seemed beyond their grasp. They were deterred by what they thought were the objective difficulties of the local labour market. A post-employment service that could intervene might make a difference for these customers. There

were also customers within this group who were positive towards advancement and were taking steps to improve their employment prospects. Some of these customers had decided to become self-employed and were positive towards the promise of support in this process.

### *New Deal for Lone Parents group*

Lone parents interviewed for this research were more likely than ND25+ customers to have a subjective understanding of advancement in which they placed a priority on their quality of life over and above employment. Their paramount concern was considering what might be of value to their children. Once again, however, advancement was different for different people. Some lone parents, for example, were motivated by a desire to provide for their children financially and others saw themselves as role models. Others felt that they should limit their ambitions at work in favour of spending the maximum amount of time available with their children: These customers were likely to be more interested in advancement as their children got older. This, however, was not the only consideration. Lone parents who had similar characteristics made different choices. We have analysed the influence of work and caring orientations on these choices: Those lone parents who had a work-focused orientation were more likely than those who were care-focused to have a positive approach to advancement. This included lone parents with preschool children. In addition, care-focused lone parents were more likely to defer advancement or limit their ambitions.

It also appears that some lone parents made a positive choice to undertake training and forego the retention bonus in order to advance in the future. Even though these choices may take time to bear fruit, these customers were willing to forego possible immediate financial benefits in favour of uncertain long-term gains. Post-employment support for such customers would require helping them with their longer-term visions and facilitating a programme of training.

### *Working Tax Credit group*

There were evident similarities between the attitudes of WTC customers and NDLP customers in their attitudes towards advancement. This is not surprising as both groups comprise lone parents who are attempting to combine work with their caring responsibilities. We have outlined the importance of changing attitudes as customers settle into employment, and WTC customers are more likely to be further along this road than someone who has just joined the NDLP. However, there was a significant overlap: Some WTC customers were being recruited just as they moved into their first job; some NDLP customers had a long work history and may have been joining the NDLP between jobs. With this proviso in mind, the main differences between the two lone parent groups were work experience, work orientation and care orientation. WTC customers were more likely to have settled into work, have arrived at a satisfactory balance between work and caring and felt ready to advance.

Customers in the WTC group were also different from those in the other two groups in that they needed to be more pro-active to join ERA. This consideration is important to take into account when considering their attitudes towards advancement. Many had been attracted to ERA because of the training opportunities: Most of these customers came into ERA with a positive attitude towards advancement and some ideas about what they wanted to do. They simply wanted to immediately take advantage of the available help and were less likely to defer advancement than many in the NDLP customer group.

Other WTC customers who were attracted by the training, however, were more uncertain, and some of these were categorised as having an ambiguous/ambivalent attitude towards advancement. They expressed the desire to do something different, preferably 'better', but they were often unsure what they wanted to do and/or how to proceed. Such customers would be more difficult to work with. There was also a number of WTC customers who were attracted to ERA because they wanted help in moving to another job. In some cases, they were interested in less demanding work (in terms of hours or responsibility) and placed a priority on work that would allow them to create what they considered a better work-family balance.



## 6 Conclusion

The Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme is a long-term project. It is important, therefore, to emphasise once more that this report is not an assessment of the effects of ERA upon its customers. Rather, it is an account of where customers felt they stood in the early period of the ERA programme in relation to the core ideas that drive the project – how they managed their ‘barriers to work’, what they understood of the problems they faced in maintaining themselves in paid work and how they saw their ambitions for the future. We spoke to ERA customers who were now in work, to some who had found work and lost it, and to others who were yet to find a job. The research covered a great range of topics, any one of which has an established literature. Yet, speaking as we were to two very specialised groups of new and returning workers, some pertinent findings emerged in the detail.

### 6.1 Lone parent customers

Most of the lone parents in this sample were at some point on a journey between a long spell on benefit and establishing themselves securely as working people, even if some had made small beginnings simply by joining the New Deal. The relatively small group of Working Tax Credit (WTC) customers were generally further along this journey, but there was significant overlap with lone parents who had joined ERA during a brief period of unemployment. For ERA, the goal of this journey would see them established as full-time workers as their children finally grew up and left them (financially if not circumstantially). Like anyone on a journey, respondents could tell very different stories at different points of this transition. Support staff would be expected to move with their customers through these experiences and be prepared for views and behaviour to change as time goes on.

Some lone parents defined a ‘good’ employer as one who had an understanding of, and flexible approach to, hours and duties. Under such favourable employment conditions, lone parents could begin to develop the confidence they needed to remain in their jobs and begin to think about advancement. It is true, on the other hand, that a growth of confidence could take two forms. One position favoured

typically a firm-minded selection of a very even work-life balance, one that sometimes favoured care over work. The other involved more the kind of employed growth and advancement intended by ERA, where customers discovered that work they might have thought was beyond reach could be understood and done well. The first position was not necessarily a negative one since these lone parents were often more willing to admit training opportunities alongside care and work, which ERA could encourage and fund. It was likely to be the full-time workers, those who were combining work and care, who could not see a way to add training to their lives.

Although the qualitative interviews picked their way carefully through lone parents' practical circumstances, their work histories, their present capacities for work and all their traditional barriers and constraints, what emerged strongly was the strength of the role still played by their attitudes. These were not lone parents who were out of work, on benefits and far from the labour market. Most were at least part of the way towards the ERA-constructed goal of full-time, well-paid, permanent work. These lone parents held different views on their caring responsibilities and there were some examples of lone parents with preschool children who worked full time. Those who had made a clear-minded decision to keep their working hours well below 30 hours a week, however, were reluctant to say that extra money might make a difference in their decision. This may be seen partly as a socially acceptable response to questions on finance. But the evidence suggests that their reasons for maintaining a shorter working week were complex and culturally grounded in their basic attitude towards what a working mother in their position ought to be doing. Normative values of this strength are not easily set aside.

## 6.2 New Deal 25 Plus customers

New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) customers also appear to be positioned along a journey similar to that described for lone parents. Too often though, their movement has been in the wrong direction. Whereas for lone parents, part-time work or temporary contracts, for example, might be early signs of movement towards the labour market, a similar history among ND25+ customers more likely signalled their faltering progress in work. They began with lower job-entry rates than those of lone parents. Those who got work (the self-employed apart) tended often to move into areas of employment that were not conducive to retention, let alone advancement, such as temporary contract work often paying the minimum wage. On the other hand, many customers and ERA staff may see acceptance of such work as a realistic response, both to customers' labour market positions and poor local prospects in their line of work. In some cases, it seemed unavoidable.

Workers who had spent typically two or three years unemployed and seeking employment welcomed any work that at least arrested this decline. They were often resigned for the time being to work they found uncongenial because the wage was the central value – to earn enough to 'get by' while maintaining a respectable identity as a worker. In this respect they were neither 'social' nor 'intrinsic' workers

but had an 'instrumental' view. It was among these customers that retention and advancement might merge into one single aim of getting and keeping any paid job. For those who begin to flourish in work, this view, and thus their support needs, may change. Other ND25+ customers were able to think positively about advancement from an earlier stage.

### 6.3 Looking forward

ERA was designed to offer a bespoke approach, tailored to customers' individual retention and advancement needs. The results of this study reinforce the importance of this. This individualised approach is a basic requirement for a well-designed employment service. The research has also highlighted the importance of finding the right kind of job for an individual to retain and advance in work. In this process, learning about each individual's work and care orientations would help target a better retention and advancement intervention. As we have shown, customers who have different orientations may respond very differently to retention problems and require individually targeted support. We have also shown that advancement means very different things to different customers, even among those whose interests and abilities seem very similar. Some customers said that advancement meant simply surviving in low-paid work when survival had been so difficult in the past; to others it meant starting their own business within a specific time frame; to others it meant finding work that they enjoyed or that they hoped set a responsible example to their growing children, and so on. To most respondents, it also meant better wages, security and conditions of service, as ERA intended, but often this was expressed in highly individual ways.

For many others, though, advancement meant *something* but they were not quite sure what. With respect to advancement, ERA customers come in three broad strata. Those with a positive approach may well do equally well with or without ERA. They have their equivalents in the control group. Both ERA programme and control groups also contain a stratum of advancement-resistant people who will not do very well, with or without ERA. They are unlikely to get a job, or if they do, they will do no more than take home the minimum wage for a few hours work a week. Between them are an 'ambivalent', middle stratum of people who may respond well to the kind of advice and incentives ERA has to offer, provided of course that they are put in the way of such help. The important point is that any reticence and lack of engagement with advancement in work is rooted in their attitudes and values as well as the constraints of their material and economic circumstances. Future reports will investigate how well the ERA programme was able to offer such a bespoke approach and how ERA customers responded.



# Appendix A

## Interview Topic Guide

### **ERA COHORT2, WAVE 1, TOPIC GUIDE: PROGRAMME CUSTOMERS**

#### **Notes to interviewers**

Explanations/rationales for each section are noted in italics.

Anything in bold should be asked as it is.

Areas/issues to be covered in each section are listed as prompts.

Probes should be used where necessary and as appropriate.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My name is [...] and I work for the Policy Studies Institute, which is an independent research organisation (not part of the government in any way). The Department for Work and Pensions has asked us to look at customer experiences of ERA – the Employment Retention and Advancement scheme.

We would like to hear about your experiences of ERA and of using the services of Jobcentre Plus. The information you give us is very important in improving these sorts of services. I'll be asking you about:

- Your situation at the moment and your past experiences of work
- What you want to do work-wise
- What you think about services provided by Jobcentre Plus

The interview is quite informal and should last about an hour. Because people's experiences are so different, some of these questions may seem more relevant to you than others, so please feel free to say more on these. Also please feel free to say if you prefer not to answer a question. Anything you tell me is confidential and will

not affect your benefits. Neither the Department for Work and Pensions nor Jobcentre Plus will be told the names or addresses of anyone we have talked to.

At the end of the interview I will give you £20 as a thank-you for making the time to take part. This is a gift and does not affect your benefits or tax.

Do you have any questions before I start?

May I please have your permission to tape the interview, as we are very interested in the detail of what people say, and it's very difficult to take full notes?

## Section One

### **Current context and where to go from here**

What is customer doing at the moment and where do they actually want to be? Life plans.

NB: Throughout this section we are looking/probing for what is important to the customer.

*Items 1 and 2 might very well blend into one. The ordering of past and present would be up to the interviewer's discretion.*

### **Can you tell me a bit about yourself – what you are doing right now, anything that you can think of?**

Areas to be covered:

What is happening in your life right now? **Current situation** with regards to:

Work

Unpaid work/caring responsibilities

Family

Training/education

Personal (*give some examples — voluntary activity, leisure, health, etc.*)

### **Is there anything that is making life difficult at the moment?**

**Can you tell me a bit what has happened in the past — things like places you have lived, where you were brought up, your education, and any work you may have had in the past?**

Areas to be covered:

Past situation **with regards to:**

Work history (part time/full time, types, duration)

Unpaid work/caring responsibilities

Training/education

Family

Significant life events

*Try and get an approximate idea of how much time spent in work and how much out of work, what different kinds of jobs been in, whether have 'advanced' at all, whether have undertaken training for purposes of work advancement and why, etc. The important point here is for this to be customer-led – what has been important to them without us asking them too many questions.*

***NB. If there is a history of short-term jobs should probe on reasons for this (exploring retention issues)***

**What are your plans for the future?**

Unpaid work/caring responsibilities

Family

Training/education

Personal

Work (*Do not probe at this point, try to keep general as is focus of **question 5.***)

**Is there anything that you think is likely to stop you from achieving your plans?**

## Section Two

**Work orientation.**

*The questions below are trying to get at issues of retention (but use different terminology in interview) — retrospective and contemporary views on job retention/stability. Try not to discuss ERA support on this at this stage.*

**If in work: Can you tell me about your job?**

*Get detailed information: hours, permanence, distance from home, wages, additional perks provided by employer (subsidised canteen, on-site nursery, attitude to flexible working hours, pensions, trade unions) etc.*

**If in work: How is your work going?**

Do you like your work?

Is it what you hoped for?

What do you like/ don't you like?

Any concerns about work (or at home that is making work difficult)?

Near future

More distant future

How balance work with other responsibilities?

If they have caring responsibilities: how do you manage at work if your children (or other) are ill?

How long do you think you'll stay in the job and why?

**Is there anything that could be better at work?**

*(Allow their own thoughts on what would improve things for them, work-wise, before mentioning advancement as an issue; then we can come back to whatever they say here when we specifically talk about advancement.)*

**[If in work] What impact has work had on your life?**

*[If relevant, probe on children's reactions/feelings, any problems with childcare/ transition to childcare? What are their views on mothers having their children taken care of by others? — If they had any concerns about how work would affect their children, were these warranted?*

*How do you think you've changed as a person over the past year?*

*How do your family and friends feel about you working?*

*NB: Next we are looking for the customer's views and aspirations regarding employment, and also how other issues (such as family and caring responsibilities) may impact upon these. So we need lots of probing in this section: Why? What might make a difference, etc. etc.)*

**[May refer to current work situation] What sort of employment are you hoping for in the future?**

Long term/short term

Relationship between work plans and other plans

Education/training aims/plans

Impact on family life

ideal number of hours? — now and in the future

**What would be your ‘ideal job’, ‘dream job’? What do you intend to do to get your ‘dream job’?**

*If different from above, probe on how realistic is the dream job.*

**Do you think there is anything holding you back from getting this sort of work?**

*May have been covered under previous question but try more probing: discuss short, medium term, as well as ‘ideal’ job.*

Caring responsibilities? Especially children — How would working more hours affect family life?

Health

Work plans

**How do you feel about working?**

***(Try to find out whether they want to work at all and, if so, the value they place on work – i.e. How important is work to you? How they felt when they weren’t working)***

**Advancement issues.**

*Advancement — exploratory work looking at what this means to customers and what they hope to achieve, etc. (compare ERA/control). Try not to discuss ERA support on this at this stage.*

**This is a bit of a different question: What would it mean to you to advance at work?**

What about — better job? pay rises? improving skills? more hours? job fulfilment? Holiday time? Flexibility? Additional perks provided by employer?

*NB. Be very careful here not to lead the customer. — We are interested in their understanding of advancement NOT ours.*

**How important is it to you to advance in your work?**

**If in work:**

**Do you feel you have advanced in your current job?**

If yes, how so? Why/ why not? Could you advance? Why/ why not? What form would it take?

## Section Three

Views on ERA and JC support.

*Understandings and expectations about ERA — What do they think they will get out of ERA, how can it help them, etc.*

### **First, can you tell me about your experiences with the Job Centre?**

What types of benefits and for how long?

If WTC (formerly Family Credit) for how long? *[For lone parents, establish length of time working and receiving WTC/Family Credit]*

**Some time ago you would have been told about a new project — the Employment Retention and Advancement programme? project (ERA) — Can you tell me what you were told then (whatever you can remember)? *May use leaflet as reminder here, but only after they've given an unprompted reply.***

*What we want to get here is what they thought of ERA initially and how that has changed — so we don't need to push for lots of information on exactly what they were told, but just how they describe it.*

### **How did you think ERA might help you?**

Connect to aspirations above

Probe on hopes and expectations when joined, and current views.

*(e.g., may ask: Is that what you thought then or what you think now?)*

Has your view on ERA changed?

How does ERA compare with any experiences of New Deal? (if not covered previously)

CONTROL GROUP CUSTOMERS ONLY.

**What sort of contact have you had with JC advisers? And what happened/s when you speak with your adviser?**

*This question is about type, frequency, duration, location of meetings/ phone calls, how easy/difficult it has been to make contact, etc And what is discussed.*

What do/did you discuss?

Example of specific help

What about any agreed actions (action plan)

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**MISS OUT SECTION 4 FOR CONTROL GROUP**

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**Section Four**

Adviser support pre- and post-employment.

**Now I would like to talk to you about how your Jobcentre Personal Adviser might have helped you with any the things that we have been talking about.**

**What sort of contact have you had with your adviser? And what happened/s when you speak with your adviser?**

*Refer back to work history since random assignment and ask customer to walk you through it.*

*This question is about type, frequency, duration, location of meetings/ phone calls, how easy/difficult it has been to make contact, etc. And what is discussed.*

Means of contact

Who initiates

Difference between pre and post employment (not WTC)

Talk through different periods of employment/unemployment

Are you happy with this level of contact?

What do/did you discuss?

Example of specific help

What about any agreed actions? (Action Plan)

**How does the support you receive now compare to the support you received at other times?**

How do they feel about the contacts with adviser? Any help wanted but not getting?

How did adviser help with finding work? (*We are looking for indications of job search strategy.*)

**Have any emergency payments been made by the Job Centre?**

**Has there been any support/discussion of training?**

**Is training discussed? What do they feel about this? Have they undertaken any training? Have they any plans for training? Any barriers to training?**

**Have there been any retention payments?**

What planning to spend the money on?

What do they think will happen when the payments finish?

**Did you talk about whether it would be a good idea for you to work 30 or more hours?** (If relevant) probe here for their views and feelings on this issue and connect to what they may have told us earlier about caring responsibilities. If increased hours to 30+, may also ask: **How are you finding working more hours?**

**Going back to what you told me before about how your job is going, can you tell me whether you have discussed these issues with your adviser? (We are trying to work out if adviser has helped at all with retention in current job — refer to any issues raised earlier and word question appropriately.)**

What has helped/not helped? How useful has the contact been?

Could anything have been done differently

Refer to any difficulties and ask whether adviser has helped, or if they could have done more (NB: *Find out whether they asked for help/expected help*)

**Do you feel your adviser has helped you advance (improve position) at work?** (Find own wording according to language used by customer.)

Refer back to what said earlier about what advancement meant to them.

Pay

Additional perks provided by employer

Improving skills/training

More hours

Job fulfilment

**Has adviser had any contact with employer?**

**What do you think about the idea of staying in contact with your adviser once you start a job?**

What sorts of things do they think adviser could help with?

**Does your employer know that you are taking part in the ERA programme? If yes, would you mind if we interviewed them?**

*Reassure customer that we will be asking their employer what they think about the ERA programme and will not talk to their employer about them. We will not even mention them by name. We will not interview employer without this consent.*

Going back to what you said about your 'ideal job', (if different from current job), have you talked to your adviser about this?

Do you think your adviser is helping you achieve this goal?

**How do you get on with your adviser?**

*Probe on whether adviser is helpful, and how; and whether they like their adviser and if so, why (and vice versa).*

**Have they had more than one adviser? If so, what do they think about that?**

Section Five

**What have you done personally (without anyone's help) to get work and advance in your job?**

**CONTROL GROUP CUSTOMERS ONLY.**

**Have you had any help in retaining work and advancing at work? (use appropriate language)**

In-work training

Other agencies

Any other support (e.g. families and friends)

What has helped, not helped?

**What do you think about the idea of receiving help after you have a job?**

With advancing in work?

With keeping a job?

**One last question:**

**Picture yourself in the future. What do you think you'll be doing one year from now?**

prompt on work

two years?

five years?

**Then briefly explain what happens next.**

We will want to interview some people again in a year's time, because we're interested in the changes that people go through in settling into work. We are not sure who will be selected but if you are chosen, are you still happy for us to contact you again? (We will pay you another £20 when we interview you the next time.)

**Thank you!!**

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