



## **RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT: ANALYSIS AND PROFILE OF LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT IN EDINBURGH**

Prepared for City Development Department, City of Edinburgh Council by the  
**Employment Research Institute, Napier University, Edinburgh**  
August 2000

### **A Profile of the Long-term Unemployed in Five Areas of Edinburgh**

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**CONTENTS**

|                                                                                       |      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| <b><u>List of tables and illustrations</u></b>                                        | p. 4 |
| <b><u>Executive Summary</u></b>                                                       | p. 5 |
| <b><u>Summary of Key Recommendations</u></b>                                          | p. 9 |
| <b><u>Background</u></b>                                                              |      |
| Part One: Background and methodology                                                  | p.13 |
| <b><u>Results of the research</u></b>                                                 |      |
| Part Two: The sample in profile                                                       | p.25 |
| Part Three: Previous employment and attachment to the labour market                   | p.34 |
| Part Four: Activity whilst unemployed                                                 | p.39 |
| Part Five: Respondents' employment preferences                                        | p.44 |
| Part Six: Long-term unemployment and barriers to work                                 | p.52 |
| Part Seven: Conclusions, main findings and potential for policy action                | p.63 |
| <b><u>Bibliography</u></b>                                                            | p.73 |
| <b><u>Appendix 1</u></b> : Claimant long-term unemployment in study areas: April 2000 | p.75 |
| <b><u>Appendix 2</u></b> : Questionnaire design used for interviews with client group | p.77 |

## **A Profile of the Long-term Unemployed in Five Areas of Edinburgh**

### **List of tables and illustrations**

|            |                                                                                                                      |      |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| Table 1.1  | Interviews completed, by study area                                                                                  | p.15 |
| Table 2.1  | Respondents' description of current household circumstances                                                          | p.27 |
| Table 2.2  | Economic activity of partners/spouses of respondents                                                                 | p.27 |
| Table 2.3  | Highest formal academic qualifications held by respondents                                                           | p.30 |
| Table 2.4  | Highest formal vocational qualifications held by respondents                                                         | p.31 |
| Table 3.1  | Respondents' length of current unemployment                                                                          | p.34 |
| Table 3.2  | Respondents' length of current unemployment, by age group                                                            | p.35 |
| Table 3.3  | Respondents' most regular occupation when employed                                                                   | p.36 |
| Table 4.1  | Respondents' attitudes to looking for work                                                                           | p.40 |
| Table 4.2  | Methods of looking for work used on a weekly basis by respondents                                                    | p.41 |
| Table 5.1  | Respondents' preferred occupation, by type                                                                           | p.44 |
| Table 5.2  | Respondents willingness to consider undertaking stated forms of working arrangement                                  | p.48 |
| Table 5.3  | 'Would respondents' consider undertaking part-time work?' by unemployment status                                     | p.48 |
| Table 6.1  | 'Greatest barrier to work', as identified by respondents                                                             | p.53 |
| Table 6.2  | Respondents' evaluation of their skills and attributes                                                               | p.54 |
| Table 6.3  | Respondents' perceived prospects of finding work within three months                                                 | p.60 |
| Table 6.4  | Respondents' views as to whether 'Edinburgh's economic boom' will improve their prospects of finding work            | p.60 |
| Figure 2.1 | Long-term unemployed respondents by age group                                                                        | p.26 |
| Figure 2.2 | Respondents' estimated weekly household income                                                                       | p.28 |
| Figure 2.3 | Respondents' housing tenure in comparative perspective                                                               | p.29 |
| Figure 2.4 | Respondents' levels of academic and vocational qualifications compared with total working age population in Scotland | p.32 |
| Figure 3.1 | Respondents' activities immediately prior to unemployment                                                            | p.35 |
| Figure 3.2 | Respondents' descriptions of their working life since school leaving age                                             | p.37 |
| Figure 4.1 | Training and other programmes undertaken by respondents during the period of their current unemployment              | p.39 |
| Figure 4.2 | Average period of time per week spent looking for work by respondents                                                | p.42 |
| Figure 5.1 | Minimum weekly wage (after deductions) acceptable to respondents                                                     | p.47 |
| Figure 5.2 | Minimum weekly wage (after deductions) acceptable to respondents, by most regular former occupation-type             | p.47 |
| Figure 5.3 | Areas where respondents would consider seeking and accepting employment                                              | p.49 |
| Figure 5.4 | Length of travelling time to and from work acceptable to respondents                                                 | p.50 |
| Figure 6.1 | Barriers to employment identified by respondents, related to personal and household circumstances                    | p.57 |
| Figure 6.2 | 'External factors' identified by respondents as barriers to work                                                     | p.58 |

## **A Profile of the Long-term Unemployed in Five Areas of Edinburgh**

### **Executive Summary**

#### ***The sample in profile***

*E.1.1* This report presents the findings of interviews carried out with long-term unemployed individuals (i.e. those unemployed for one year or more) residing in five areas of Edinburgh (North Edinburgh, South Edinburgh, Leith, Wester Hailes, and Craigmillar – each of these areas being affected by particularly high rates of long-term unemployment). 115 people were interviewed of which 81 (70 per cent) were males and 34 (30 per cent) females. A total of 91 respondents (approximately 79 per cent) were registered as unemployed and claiming Job Seeker's Allowance, and 24 (21 per cent) were not. Of the registered unemployed in our sample, 83 per cent were male. This compares with claimant count statistics that indicate that 88 per cent of the registered long-term unemployed in the targeted localities are male. Of our unregistered unemployed respondents, 58 per cent were male and 42 per cent were female. The average age amongst both men and women interviewed for the study was approximately 39 years. The average age of the registered, claimant unemployed was 40.1 years, whilst for unregistered job seekers it was 34.9 years.

*E.2.1* Our long-term unemployed respondents were much more likely to live alone than are members of the general population. 60 per cent of all respondents and 68 per cent of the registered unemployed were single and living alone compared to a figure of 35 per cent amongst Edinburgh's general population. However, only 13 per cent of unregistered respondents were living alone, indicating that the claimant and non-claimant groups within our sample face different social roles and economic challenges. However, in general terms less than one-third of our respondents had caring responsibilities (sole or shared). The long-term unemployed were also much less likely to reside in owner occupied housing, with approximately two-thirds of our sample renting public sector accommodation.

*E.2.2* Approximately 41 per cent of all our respondents and 42 per cent of registered respondents possessed no form of vocational or academic qualification, placing them at a considerable disadvantage in the labour market. (This compares with 17 per cent of the wider Scottish labour force who possess no formal vocational or academic qualification.) Clearly, this reflects the low level of skills possessed by many amongst the long-term unemployed. However, significant numbers within our sample held a range of qualifications, including the more than 9 per cent of respondents who were graduates. Few of our low-skilled respondents fully acknowledged the gaps in their own skills and education, with many unqualified respondents describing their attainment in these areas as at least adequate.

### **Previous employment and attachment to the labour market**

*E.3.1* The average duration of unemployment amongst registered long-term unemployed respondents was 3.9 years. For unregistered job seekers, many of whom had not worked for some time due to family and caring responsibilities, the average current duration of unemployment was 6.5 years. Younger job seekers tended to have been unemployed for shorter time periods, whilst those aged over 45 were much more likely to have been out of work for two years or more.

*E.3.2* By definition, the recent labour market experience of the long-term unemployed tends to be severely limited. However, in seeking to define their own barriers to work, members of our sample were far more likely to emphasise their skills shortages rather than their lack of recent work experience, with less than 15 per cent of respondents viewing their experience as less than adequate. Apparently few were aware of the importance of *recent* and relevant work experience to the recruiting decisions of many employers.

*E.3.3* Many respondents considered themselves to have enjoyed a stable working life – or at least one involving regular periods in work – prior to their current unemployment, apparently reflecting a continuing strong sense of attachment to the labour market. The majority of respondents had previously been most regularly employed within very low-skilled or unskilled occupations.

### **Activity whilst unemployed**

*E.4.1* The long-term unemployed tend to carry out relatively low levels of job seeking activity. Many would clearly benefit from a more structured approach to looking for work. The Employment Service's withdrawal of regularly available 'Job Club' services appears to have been unwelcome, and was described as such by a number of respondents.

*E.4.2* A significant proportion of respondents had received training or other forms of assistance from the Employment Service and other agencies. The majority of participants viewed the experience positively, and the majority of all job seekers would welcome further training opportunities. However, few had firm ideas as to what form that training should take. A small, but not insignificant, proportion of our sample had undertaken part-time work whilst registered as unemployed (12 per cent). A similar proportion of respondents had undertaken some form of undeclared work. However, detailed data as to the extent and nature of undeclared work were not gathered.

### **Respondents' employment preferences**

*E.5.1* Many amongst the long-term unemployed presented relatively modest ambitions regarding their lowest acceptable weekly wages. However, the majority of respondents (56 per cent) would not accept full-time employment paid at less than £175 per week *after deductions*. Whilst not particularly high, this minimum acceptable wage does exclude a number of entry level, low-skilled positions that might otherwise be accessible to the long-term unemployed.

*E.5.2* Our respondents displayed little concern about travelling across the city and indeed the region in order to obtain work. The practicality of these suggestions may be questionable in some cases, but few of our respondents appeared to suffer from feelings of geographical insularity or isolation. The vast majority expressed satisfaction with public transport links, although a substantial minority were concerned about the level of fares.

*E.5.3* However, whilst few amongst the long-term unemployed restrict their job seeking activities on the grounds of geography, there is evidence to suggest that their search for work might be too narrowly focussed according to *job type*. Many respondents were keen to return to areas of employment where previously they had enjoyed personal success, or (as suggested above) to enter more stable and better paid employment. Relatively few respondents specifically targeted the rapidly growing hospitality and service sectors.

### **Long-term unemployment and key barriers to work**

*E.6.1* Many respondents possessed few formal qualifications, but fewer identified this as being a significant barrier to work, or accepted that it reflected a 'skills gap'. Measures are clearly required, first to increase awareness amongst the long-term unemployed of their basic skills needs, and then to address those needs.

*E.6.2* The poor recent work records held by respondents clearly present a major barrier to their successful re-entry to the job market, but relatively few respondents were fully aware of the importance granted to recent and relevant work experience by many employers, and particularly those recruiting to relatively low-skilled, entry-level positions.

*E.6.3* The job search strategies of many amongst the long-term unemployed tend to be rather narrowly focussed in terms of the sectors and occupations that hold their interest and the levels of remuneration that are considered acceptable. Given the development of the hospitality, retail, and service sectors within the Edinburgh economy, long-term unemployed

job seekers would benefit from being more aware of, and positive towards, opportunities within these fields. Furthermore, although many of the long-term unemployed use a range of methods to look for work, they tend to spend relatively few hours per week engaged in job seeking activities. Long-term unemployed job seekers might therefore benefit from more structured counselling, assistance and advice in planning and carrying out effective job search strategies.

*E.6.4* The long-term unemployed face a range of varying and complex barriers to work. However, as profound a problem as any so-called 'real' barrier to work, is the failure of many to fully understand or accept the extent of their own barriers and weaknesses (and indeed the scope of their own opportunities and strengths). Furthermore, many of our respondents exhibited what might be described as a 'static' view of the labour market and their place and role within it. Those who failed to fully acknowledge the negative effects upon their employability of a recent work record dominated by long-term unemployment; those who believed that poor basic skills did not restrict their ability to move within the labour market; those who disputed the expansion in Edinburgh's economy or discounted job opportunities in its growing sectors – for these individuals, learning to adopt a more realistic view of their own circumstances and a more flexible approach to training and employment opportunities is almost as important as further developing their key skills and work experience.

*E.6.5* However, the depth and complexity of the very significant, and often multiple, barriers to work faced by the long-term unemployed should not be under-stated. The long-term job seekers whose interview responses are summarised in this report were often constrained by a web of interlinked problems, related to their personal characteristics and history, their current social and familial circumstances and their relationship with barriers (both real and perceived) within the local economy. Multiple policy responses from a number of agencies at the local and national level are required if the full range of problems identified by this study are to be addressed. Accordingly, it is to the potential for renewed policy action, and the roles of local government and other actors in any reforms to be considered, that we now turn.



## **A Profile of the Long-term Unemployed in Five Areas of Edinburgh**

### **Summary of Key Recommendations**

A full discussion of the main conclusions of this research and issues for potential policy action is provided in Part Seven of this report ('Main findings, conclusions and potential for policy action'). However, the key recommendations contained therein are briefly summarised below.

#### **The long-term unemployed and the skills gap**

- Policy interventions designed to assist the long-term unemployed towards entering work should first provide one-to-one advice and counselling, designed to enable clients to identify gaps in their education, skills and experience. Clients may then be helped to identify and participate in appropriate training and/or other provision.
- Training and education should be linked to the award of recognised qualifications, but should follow a modular structure, enabling individuals to learn at their own pace. Programmes designed to develop clients' basic educational attainment should seek to minimise any sense of stigma attached to participation. Wherever possible the long-term unemployed should be integrated into mainstream education and training provision, although additional support may have to be offered to those faced with particularly severe learning problems. Job-related training provision should, wherever possible and appropriate, seek to integrate participants into 'real life' working environments, and should emphasise the development of basic, practical and transferable work skills.

#### **The long-term unemployed and the 'experience gap'**

- The importance of recent and relevant work experience should be stressed to long-term job seekers through counselling and advice services. It may also be useful to involve employers in a process of information-sharing with job seekers, that might better inform the latter as to the qualities most valued by recruiters. The most job-ready amongst the long-term unemployed should be encouraged to consider the widest possible range of routes back into the active labour market, so that they might renew their experience and revitalise their work records. As suggested above, job-related training should emphasise practical and easily transferable work skills, and should involve real work experience. However, efforts should be made to ensure that a wider range of training provision is available, so that better skilled job seekers are not denied more advanced opportunities.

### **New routes into employment for the long-term unemployed**

- The long-term unemployed would benefit from greater flexibility in the administration of social security payments. An extension of transitional assistance, in terms of the temporary continuation of limited forms of housing-related benefits, and even the provision of 'start up' grants or loans for those entering work and awaiting their first salary payments, should be considered by the appropriate government agencies. In the immediate term, information regarding the transitional assistance currently offered by the government and other agencies should be promoted amongst the long-term unemployed. More specifically, a service advising job seekers of the specific consequences of taking up a particular job opportunity, would clearly assist individuals to make better informed choices about re-entering work.
- Given the importance of recent and relevant work experience for many employers, efforts should be made to convince job seekers of the potential value of accepting entry level positions with advancement prospects and realistic salary levels as a means of finding an initial route back into the active labour market. Furthermore long-term unemployed job seekers should be made aware of, and encouraged to pursue, opportunities within the hospitality and tourism, retail and service sectors. Employers, particularly from the service sector, should be involved alongside other interested parties in efforts to promote opportunities in these areas, and to undermine job seekers' prejudices about career prospects, work duties and levels of pay in this sector of the economy.
- Training provision should reflect the sectoral and occupational demand for labour within the local economy. It might be best if – wherever possible – training was organised to take place in geographically central areas which are accessible by public transport, and where job seekers might reasonably be required to travel in order to find and undertake employment. However, local recruitment and placement networks will remain necessary if participation rates are to be maintained.

### **The long-term unemployed and the search for work**

- The re-establishment of 'Job Club' services, whether run by the Employment Service or local non-governmental providers, would benefit the long-term unemployed. Such a service might provide resources and hands-on support for job seeking (e.g. assistance with writing CVs, covering letters and application forms; help with strategic job search skills; confidence building and interview techniques).

- Initial steps should be taken by the local authority and other interested groups towards the establishment of a project linking the Employment Service's internet services with web-based information on training and employment opportunities already being provided by a number of community groups – with the final objective of a comprehensive website providing access to information on education, training and employment in Edinburgh.

### **The long-term unemployment and labour market geography**

- Given that many amongst the long-term unemployed have reported little real sense of geographical isolation, a review of area-based approaches to the delivery of services may be required. Some services may be more efficiently and effectively provided by specialist workers or bodies rather than being split between five or more area-based agencies. However, even if such a change of emphasis were to be pursued, area-based initiatives would still be required in order to maximise the take-up of opportunities locally and ensure that individual clients were directed towards assistance relevant to their specific needs.
- Services based in more central locations may also prove to be easier to reach for many individuals (as suggested by City Council's data on the geography of unemployment) and would encourage the long-term unemployed to adopt a routine involving travelling regularly outside their area of residence (as they may be required to do if successful in finding work). However, care must be taken to ensure that participation rates are not affected by any change of geographical focus, and additional travel costs would have to be underwritten by service providers. Further research is required in order to establish the most cost-effective and efficient approach to the future development of services.

### **Ageism and other forms of employer discrimination**

- It is to be hoped that demographic pressures will continue to undermine age-based discrimination in the long term, whilst Edinburgh's current high levels of labour demand may provide more immediate opportunities for older job seekers. However, efforts should be made to persuade employers that prejudices regarding the long-term unemployed, older job seekers, and gender roles in employment are redundant and counter-productive given the shortage of labour in a number of important sectors. To this end, there might be value in a strengthening of networks of mutual information sharing, so that employers practising fair recruitment may more effectively communicate opportunities, and more experienced job seekers may access relevant job opportunities and present themselves to at times sceptical potential recruiters.

### **Family responsibilities and childcare provision**

- Whilst the pressures of caring responsibilities and the provision of childcare were relatively marginal issues for the majority of our respondents, for female job seekers and those with families these issues were of far greater – and indeed often crucial – importance. If employment take-up is to be maximised amongst these groups – many of whose members are not registered as unemployed – efforts must be made to ensure that affordable and reliable childcare is available to both claimant and non-claimant job seekers at the local level.
- Training, placement and other service providers seeking to assist the long-term jobless should review their own capacity to provide childcare and other appropriate assistance to those with family responsibilities. The specific needs of such individuals may require the development of more services directed towards particular groups (e.g. single parents), but clearly, there is a need for further research and consideration with regard to these issues.

### **Further research and analysis**

- Further research is required in order to place our current findings in context, by developing a more detailed analysis of the characteristics and experiences of the claimant and non-claimant unemployed, and (where possible) making meaningful comparisons between the long-term jobless, other unemployed groups and the wider labour force. A more thorough analysis is also required of the potential effects of any change to service providers' approaches to delivering programmes for the long-term unemployed. Changes in geographical focus, or moves to concentrate on specific client groups, would inevitably have far-reaching implications for the delivery of services and allocation of resources, and detailed research into the potential benefits and problems of such reforms is essential.
- Indeed, prior to the development of policy responses reflecting the conclusions of any research, current structures and approaches must be given due consideration, and the implications of change must be fully explored. The first stage in this process might be the completion of an 'audit' of existing provision, establishing the extent and nature of the placement, counselling, training and other services currently available. Such an exercise should then be used to produce *accessible* data, informing employers and prospective participants of what is available, and enabling policy makers and service providers to locate gaps in provision, avoid the duplication of effort, communicate examples of best practice, and identify the potential for synergies between key actors and programmes.

# **A Profile of the Long-term Unemployed in Five Areas of Edinburgh**

## **Part One: Background and Methodology**

### *1.1 Introduction: Edinburgh's labour market and the City of Edinburgh Council's approach*

1.1.1 The City of Edinburgh currently boasts a strong and vibrant labour market. Unemployment is widely perceived to be 'under control' in the city, and labour shortages have been reported in a number of sectors, as the local economy's expansion continues. The city's claimant unemployment rate currently stands at 2.6 per cent, well below the Scottish and United Kingdom averages of 4.8 per cent and 3.8 per cent respectively<sup>1</sup>.

1.1.2 However, in a number of areas on the city's periphery, unemployment remains a significant problem. In many of the same areas long-term unemployment rates (defined as unemployment of a duration of at least twelve months) are particularly high. Indeed, in each of the five study areas selected for the research presented in this report, 20-25 per cent of unemployed claimants have been out of work for one year or more (see Appendix 1).

1.1.3 The City of Edinburgh Council has sought to develop policies in response to the tenacity of high rates of localised long-term unemployment, and the wider social problems that both reflect and contribute to the exclusion of individuals and groups from the active labour market. The City's *Access to Employment* initiative represents an important attempt to maximise the benefits accruing from Edinburgh's economic expansion for areas characterised by high long-term unemployment, and for individuals facing significant barriers to work. By seeking to engender a partnership and community-based approach to the development of employment and regeneration initiatives, the City of Edinburgh Council has therefore made clear its commitment to the vision of a city where economic success is shared by residents in every area, and labour market growth is harnessed in order to benefit formerly excluded groups.

1.1.4 However, if *Access to Employment* is to continue to develop innovative solutions to social and labour market exclusion, a fuller understanding must be developed as to *who* the long-term unemployed are, and the barriers to work preventing their active participation in the labour market. The findings detailed and analysed within the pages of this report reveal long-term unemployment to be a complex and multi-dimensional problem. It affects individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, characterised by diverse personal circumstances and labour market experiences. Nevertheless, in analysing the results of a substantial number of

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<sup>1</sup> Source: NOMIS/Employment Service Information Unit, July 2000.

interviews carried out with this client group, the research team have attempted to identify common problems associated with individual and personal barriers, familial and household circumstances and perceptions of the local economy and labour market. In our conclusions (see Part Seven) we seek to draw general lessons from the preceding analysis, and, where practicable and appropriate, make general suggestions as to the direction that possible future policy interventions might take.

## 1.2 Aims of the study and structure of this report

1.2.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the continuing development of the City's *Access to Employment* agenda. The terms of reference governing the research established geographical boundaries based upon the five outlying areas of Edinburgh, which have the city's highest levels of unemployment, namely:

- **North Edinburgh**, including the Pilton, Muirhouse and Granton areas;
- **South Edinburgh**, including the Prestonfield, Kaimes, Inch and Gilmerton areas;
- **Leith**, including the Fort, Lorne and Harbour areas;
- **Wester Hailes**, including the North Hailes and South Hailes areas;
- **Craigmillar**, also including the Niddrie area.

1.2.2 This report itself is divided into seven parts. In Part One, we seek briefly to introduce the subject matter to be discussed (the problem of localised long-term unemployment) and describe the policy context leading to the commissioning of this research. Details are provided regarding the methods of data collection and analysis used during the project (see 1.3, below), whilst in the latter sections of this part of the report (1.4-1.9) we present a discussion of issues arising from a review of existing literature on the subject, which informed the design of our own research. Parts Two to Six of the report present the findings of our own research. There, we first seek to provide a profile of a sample of long-term unemployed individuals drawn from each of the five study areas. Data is presented and analysed regarding their age and gender profile, family and household circumstances, financial status, and educational and skills attainment. We then analyse, in consecutive parts of the report:

- their experience within the labour market and sense of attachment to working life;
- their levels of participation in government and other training provision;
- their attitudes towards looking for work, and the methods used to carry out job searches;
- aspirations with regards to types and forms of work, and pay and conditions sought;
- barriers to work, related to individual characteristics, personal circumstances and external or institutional hurdles.

1.2.3 In analysing the real barriers to work faced by the long-term unemployed, and the problems that they perceive to be of greatest importance, we have sought to establish common factors explaining the exclusion of individuals from activity within the labour market. Accordingly, Part Seven of the report discusses a series of observations summarising the main insights provided by the preceding data analysis, which, it is hoped, will facilitate a better understanding of the problems faced by the long-term unemployed, and accordingly inform the policy process. Indeed, to this end, the report concludes with a summary of main findings and proposed forms of policy intervention.

### 1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The primary data collection phase of the project – and specifically the design of the questionnaire upon which interviews with respondents were based – was informed by an initial review of existing academic and policy-evaluation literature related to long-term unemployment. Whilst there remain relatively few studies dedicated specifically to the subject of long-term unemployment, we were nonetheless able to draw from a range of findings distributed by the relevant central and local government departments and published within academic texts.

1.3.2 The method of primary data collection used during the fieldwork phase of the study involved the completion of 115 structured, face-to-face interviews with long-term unemployed individuals in each of the five study areas. Interviews were considered to be the most appropriate method of data collection given the specific nature of the information that the study sought to gather, and the characteristics of the client group under analysis. The structured nature of the interviews – which closely adhered to a questionnaire previously designed and finalised following consultation with officers based at City Development Department – also permitted the collection of highly specific quantitative information, facilitating the detailed analysis of findings presented below.

**Table 1.1 Interviews completed, by study area**

| <i>Study Area</i>      | <i>Interviews completed<br/>(numbers per area)</i> | <i>Interviews completed by<br/>area (% of total interviews)</i> | <i>Percentage of<br/>total long term<br/>claimant count</i> |
|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Wester Hailes          | 35                                                 | 30                                                              | 28                                                          |
| North Edinburgh        | 31                                                 | 27                                                              | 18                                                          |
| Leith                  | 23                                                 | 20                                                              | 14                                                          |
| South Edinburgh        | 19                                                 | 17                                                              | 14                                                          |
| Craigmillar            | 7                                                  | 6                                                               | 9                                                           |
| <i>All study areas</i> | <i>115</i>                                         | <i>100</i>                                                      | <i>17</i>                                                   |

1.3.3 In order to gain access to the relevant client group, permission was sought from the Employment Service (ES) to approach job seekers visiting ES offices to look for work or 'sign on' as unemployed. No final statistics were compiled as to participation rates amongst those approached by researchers, but in most offices approximately 75 per cent of those approached agreed to take part. Indeed, it should be noted that a degree of 'sample bias' may exist within our study responses, given that we might reasonably infer that those who agreed to participate in our study were amongst the more confident, co-operative and therefore employable members of the client group. We were also keen to address the needs and experiences of those not registered as job seekers with Employment Service, but still considering themselves to be unemployed and seeking work. Accordingly, researchers also approached community training providers operating in each of the five areas. Individuals were approached and interviews were carried out in the following locations:

- Employment Service jobcentre, High Riggs;
- Employment Service jobcentre, Leith;
- Employment Service jobcentre, Loanhead;
- Employment Service jobcentre, Portobello;
- Employment Service jobcentre, Torphichen Street;
- Employment Service jobcentre, Wester Hailes;
- Apex Scotland, Jane Street, Leith;
- Edinburgh Women's Training Centre, Giles Street, Leith;
- The Job Company, Commercial Street, Leith;
- Moving On, Pennywell Gardens, Muirhouse;
- West Edinburgh Action, Hailesland Place, Wester Hailes;
- Worktrack, Castlebrae Business Centre, Craigmillar;
- Worktrack, Southhouse Broadway.

1.3.4 Varying response rates and differing levels of co-operation received from key service providers affected the number of interviews completed in each area. As a result, the Wester Hailes and North Edinburgh areas are over-represented within our sample, with the other three areas relatively under represented. The poorest response rates were achieved in the South Edinburgh and Craigmillar areas. The relatively modest total number of survey responses collected for analysis from all areas reflects the inherent difficulties associated with carrying out research amongst this particular client group, the time scale allocated for the project's fieldwork and the methods of data-collection employed in order to ensure a maximum number of clear and usable responses.



#### 1.4 Studying long-term unemployment: labour markets, employability and barriers to work

1.4.1 The fight against long-term unemployment has, in recent years, become a central theme in the policy agendas of the United Kingdom government, the Scottish Executive, and many local authorities across Scotland. At national government level, minimising the impact of long-term unemployment is seen as a crucial element in the drive for improved economic competitiveness. It is also viewed as an important objective linked to the government's promise to control welfare expenditure. Indeed, the Prime Minister has made clear that a key aim of the his government's first term in office is to "attack unemployment and break the spiral of escalating spending on social security" (Blair 1997).

1.4.2 However, perhaps the first task faced by any researcher examining unemployment is to define the term. There are two common measures of unemployment. The first is derived from the Labour Force Survey which uses the International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition of unemployment. The ILO definition of unemployment includes as unemployed all those who are out of work, have actively sought work in the last four weeks prior to interview and are available to start work within the next fortnight; or are out of work and have accepted a job they are waiting to start in the next fortnight. The second measure is the claimant count, which is taken from the monthly records of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. Claimant count figures are based upon the number of people claiming the Jobseeker's Allowance (or National Insurance credits) at Employment Service offices on a particular day each month. Claimants are required to be out of work, and available for, capable of, and actively seeking employment. The Labour Force Survey and claimant count unemployment rates are complementary: the former gives the proportion of unemployed out of the total number of economically active residents (as defined by the ILO); the latter is an indicator of unemployment in an area relative to the size of its workforce.

1.4.3 One set of arguments seeking to explain the persistence of unemployment have particularly focused upon the labour supply-side (see OECD 1996, and European Commission 1994, for the general context). This supply-side approach – which currently dominates within the UK policy context – is rooted in the argument that inflexible and low-skilled elements within the labour force represent a major constraint on economic efficiency that must be addressed through long term investment in human capital (e.g. DfEE, various).

1.4.4 Recent policy initiatives focussing on improving the personal employability of the unemployed reflect this approach, and an acceptance of the more specific argument that persistently high rates of long term unemployment can give rise to the creation of a pool of permanently excluded individuals, faced with increasingly severe barriers to labour market participation. Given the importance placed upon recent work experience by recruiting

employers, and the currency granted to the idea that individual work habits and job skills deteriorate due to the experience of joblessness, it has been argued that long-term unemployment – if left unchecked – has the potential to result in the emergence of a supposedly ‘unemployable’ group, whose existence maintains an ‘artificially high’ rate of total unemployment within the economy (see, e.g. Balls 1993; Layard 1997).

1.4.5 The positive reflection of this ‘withering flowers’ argument is that effective active labour market measures, aimed at improving the skills of the long term unemployed, have the potential both to positively impact on the employability of individual clients, and ‘permanently ratchet down the rate of unemployment’ in the wider economy (Layard 1997). Accordingly, recent policy measures introduced at the local and national levels targeting the problem of *long-term* unemployment have tended to emphasise supply-side measures, designed to improve the employability of individuals by addressing skills needs, providing work experience and training, and assisting with effective jobsearch activity.

1.4.6 However, some doubt has been expressed as to the suitability of such an approach, when applied alone, particularly given the problem of ‘hidden unemployment’ (or non-registered unemployment amongst those wishing to work but not registered because they are unable to claim benefits or are ‘discouraged workers’). Beatty *et al.* (1997) and Beatty and Fothergill (1998) estimated the ‘real’ unemployment rate (as opposed to the claimant count rate for ‘counties’ in Great Britain in 1997, using the 1991 unemployment rate in the South East as a ‘full employment’ benchmark, in terms of early retirement and sickness rates. They suggest that a male unemployment claimant count rate of 5% suggests a ‘real’ rate of around 7-8%, while for females a rate of 2% suggests a ‘real rate’ of around 6%. At higher levels the spread is much greater and a 7.1% claimant count rate suggests a ‘real’ rate of 14.2%.

1.4.7 This approach can be criticised: the ‘full employment rate’ may vary between places (e.g. as ‘genuine’ sickness increases with long term unemployed); and it assumes that the unemployment rate in the South East *should* be the target for other regions. Furthermore, a cautious approach must to be taken to extrapolating such figures to very small areas. However, in Edinburgh as a whole it is expected that female unemployment may be twice times the claimant figure and male unemployment perhaps 50% greater when account is taken of sickness rates, early retirement etc. It should be noted that these are only guesstimates and further research would be required in order to arrive at a more accurate estimate. Our own study has, however, interviewed a number of unregistered unemployed people who are seeking work, and this sample is predominantly female.

### 1.5 Defining 'Employability'

1.5.1 Increasing the employability of excluded individuals is a key objective of the government's welfare to work policies, and an understanding of the *concept of employability* should underpin any initiative seeking to assist unemployed people to enter the labour market. Attempts to define the concept of employability have tended to focus upon a range of personal and external factors affecting the individual's ability to gain and retain employment, including (Evans, Nathan & Simmonds 1999; Kleinman, West & Sparkes 1998):

- the extent and level of the individual's transferable skills;
- the nature and severity of any personal barriers to work and training;
- the individual's level of motivation to seek work and training;
- the individual's ability to access information about employment and training opportunities, and mobility in pursuing such opportunities;
- the attitudes held by employers towards the unemployed;
- the interaction of the state training and benefits systems;
- and the supply of appropriate jobs in the local economy.

1.5.2 However, whilst employability remains a widely accepted concept in the field of labour market studies, it has continued to be used in a number of contexts and with reference to a range of meanings. Given the concept's increasing central role in the discussion and design of labour market policies, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has recently published a report which seeks to agree a definition of (and framework for) 'employability' (Hillage & Pollard, 1999). There, employability is defined as the ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment and adequately make transitions between roles within the same organisation, obtain new employment if required, and (ideally) secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work. It is suggested that four main components of individual employability can be identified:

- *Employability assets*: including *baseline assets*, such as basic skills and essential personal attributes (e.g. reliability and honesty); *intermediate assets*, such as job-specific, generic or 'key' skills (e.g. communication and problem solving); and *high level assets*, such as those skills that contribute to organisational performance (e.g. team work and commercial awareness).
- *Deployment*: referring to a range of abilities including career management skills (e.g. awareness of one's own abilities and limitations, awareness of opportunities in the labour market, and decision-making and transitional skills); job search skills; and strategic skills (including a realistic approach to the pursuit of job opportunities).
- *Presentation*: defined as the ability to secure an appointment to an appropriate position, once identified. It involves the ability to demonstrate employability assets by presenting

them to the labour market in an accessible way (e.g. through the completion of a CV or participation in an interview).

- *Personal circumstances and the labour market:* Hillage and Pollard accept that the individual's ability to realise the assets and skills discussed above will to some extent depend on external factors, personal circumstances, and the relationship between the two. External conditions such as local labour market demand and employer attitudes will impact upon the availability of suitable opportunities, whilst personal circumstances, such as caring responsibilities, physical health and household status will affect the ability of individuals to seek and benefit from opportunities.

1.5.3 The four key components of employability identified above are clearly inter-linked, and complex relationships undoubtedly exist between the skills and work experience of individuals, their personal circumstances and local labour market conditions. In developing research instruments for this project, the research team were concerned to establish an interview schedule that would address individual levels of employability in a manner that captured that complexity. Clearly the attitudes and practices adopted by recruiting employers are also of considerable importance in affecting the employability of individuals (see, e.g. Tamkin & Hillage 1999). Indeed, employer prejudice, or merely the maintenance of certain 'unhelpful' recruiting practices and working conditions can act as significant barriers to work, barring the progress of unemployed job seekers.

1.5.4 Previously undertaken research attempting to understand and describe the limiting factors affecting the employability of long-term unemployed individuals has tended to focus upon the identification of these and other specific barriers to active participation in the labour market (which in turn provide a negative reflection of the positive components of employability discussed above). A reading of the limited existing literature detailing the barriers to work faced by the long-term unemployed might lead us to conclude that the ability of individuals to gain, retain and move between positions in the labour market was profoundly affected by the interaction between:

- the personal characteristics of those individuals;
- their wider personal and household circumstances, and;
- the external or institutional barriers to work that they might face.

### 1.6 Barriers to work: individual characteristics

1.6.1 Turning first to the individual and personal characteristics of the constituent members of the long-term unemployed client group, it has been suggested that they are often faced with a familiar array of problems, which tend to be interlinked. These can include a lack of recent experience in the labour market, the absence of up-to-date and relevant skills and

qualifications, low educational attainment, and profound social problems (such as homelessness and substance abuse problems) (Bottomley, McKay & Walker 1997; Clasen et al. 1997; Finn et al. 1998).

1.6.2 In many cases, the long-term unemployed tend to be characterised by a work history that features previous periods of unemployment and a generally unstable relationship with the labour market. Bottomley, McKay & Walker (1997: 35) suggest that a study of the general unemployed population indicates that a substantial proportion of claimants (between 40 and 50 per cent) view themselves as having spent most of their working life in 'steady jobs'. However, those experiencing long-term unemployment were much more likely to describe themselves as having been 'in and out of work several times'. Less than 25 per cent of those unemployed for more than four years reported a history of steady employment. Clearly the experience of unemployment may affect how respondents describe their interaction with the labour market, but there nonetheless appears to be a correlation between poorly defined experience of the labour market and an increased susceptibility to long-term unemployment.

1.6.3 McGregor et al. (1998) similarly argue that many long-term unemployed people are hindered by their lack of useful recent work experience. Indeed, it is further suggested that the poor work record exhibited by many of the long-term unemployed is particularly damaging given the importance placed upon relevant experience by recruiting employers within the sectors of the labour market most accessible to that group. For recruiters seeking to make appointments to unskilled, semi-skilled and service based positions, experience, followed by reliability and interpersonal skills, are the most important factors affecting the success or failure of individual candidates (McGregor et al. 1998: 56). As suggested above, in recent years an increasing body of literature has argued that the experience of long-term unemployment in itself further undermines the employability of its victims and results in the erection of further barriers to work, both by rendering out-dated any existing skills and experience held by the unemployed, and by diminishing their confidence in their own ability to gain and retain employment.

1.6.4 Research has suggested that the long-term unemployed tend to believe that the length of their unemployment would act as a deterrent against employers recruiting them, a perception that appears to be confirmed by surveys of recruiters. Indeed, both UK-based and cross-national studies have concluded that employers are particularly reluctant to appoint candidates experiencing long-term unemployment, with many recruiters doubting the physical and mental ability of such individuals to effectively 'hold down' a job. The long-term unemployed are apparently all too aware of the existence of this prejudice (Clasen et al. 1997; Dawes 1993). Clasen et al. (1997) also report an increasing pessimism amongst those aged over 40 years, many of whom appear to believe that the combination of their age and

the length of their unemployment effectively debars them from further labour market activity due to the attitudes of many employers.

### 1.7 Barriers to work: personal and household circumstances

1.7.1 If the interaction of the individual characteristics of the long-term unemployed and employers' attitudes significantly impacts upon the employability of the former group, then so does the relationship between their wider personal circumstances and government policies in the taxation and welfare fields. Previous research has established that many amongst the long-term unemployed have found their job search to be limited by the additional pressures of caring responsibilities or financial commitments (more specifically, debt) (Gardiner 1997; Jarvis 1998).

1.7.2 Local policy actors have regularly argued that the governance of welfare can substantially impact upon disincentives to work. In particular, high marginal tax rates have been viewed as exacerbating the problem of long-term unemployment (Murray 1995; Jarvis 1998). When the transitional costs of starting work and losing passported benefits are taken into account, those claiming income-based benefits have often found themselves to be better off than if they were to accept a low wage job. Claimants seeking employment that will raise their income levels above that of benefit payments must make complex calculations regarding the costs of travel and childcare, and the loss of other allowances and passported benefits.

1.7.3 Although the British government has recently introduced a series of reforms to the income tax and welfare benefits system designed to 'make work pay', it has been argued that these 'benefit trap' issues remain an issue of considerable concern for many long-term unemployed job seekers. The relatively large numbers of homeowners amongst our long-term unemployed population further complicates and intensifies the importance of job seekers' decisions regarding which opportunities to pursue and accept (McKay, Walker & Youngs 1997; Clasen et al. 1997).

1.7.4 Previous research has also pointed to a range of other circumstantial barriers as being potentially problematic for many of the long-term unemployed, including difficulties associated with ill health or disability, the financial costs and availability of childcare, and broader family and caring responsibilities (particularly amongst female job seekers) (e.g. Shaw et al. 1996). However, a number of analysts have also focussed on barriers to work associated with the social and economic infrastructure and labour market conditions within localities where long-term unemployment tends to be concentrated.

## 1.8 External barriers, local labour markets and spatial mismatch

1.8.1 A number of analysts have pointed to the lack of job opportunities within localities suffering from problems associated with area-based forms of social exclusion. Indeed, supply-side policies such as the New Deal have been criticised for their failure to take account of local demand-side conditions (Fine, 1998; Turok and Webster, 1998; Peck, 1999). Different localities are undoubtedly distinguished by different flows of employed and unemployed people in and out of the labour market and work (or 'labour market flow regimes'), reflecting both the underlying economic and industrial conditions and the characteristics of the local economy (Martin and Sunley, 1999).

1.8.2 These conditions and characteristics are in turn influenced by both labour supply and local employer demand factors. Accordingly, the skills levels within the local labour force, the types of opportunities that are available, and the role of employers in setting rates of pay and conditions all significantly impact upon the ability of residents in high-unemployment localities to find appropriate work (though it should be noted that in the case of Edinburgh the level of labour demand is particularly high, providing the opportunity to influence employers towards recruiting the long-term unemployed) (Adams, Greig and McQuaid, 2000).

1.8.3 As we suggest above, conventional models of 'mismatch unemployment' usually rest upon the concept of 'structural mismatch', which tends to highlight supply-side factors such as skill shortages, wage demands in specific markets, inter-regional spatial mismatch and the search channels used by job seekers (Layard et al., 1991). However, a number of analysts have stressed the importance of forms of spatial mismatch specifically linked to geographical immobility within local labour markets (such as the Edinburgh Travel-to-Work area) (Holzer, 1991; Stewart et al., 1998; Ong and Blumenberg, 1998)<sup>2</sup>. Individuals from excluded or peripheral areas tend, it is argued, not to take up employment opportunities outwith their immediate localities, further limiting their job prospects (Webster 1999). Indeed, the reluctance of unemployed people to travel in order to pursue work has been identified as a crucial factor limiting the success of their job search (Bottomley, McKay & Walker 1997).

1.8.4 However, McGregor et al's (1995) study of barriers to work faced by those experiencing long-term unemployment in Wester Hailes – a study area within our own research – found that most respondents displayed willingness to travel beyond their immediate area of residence in order to secure employment. Indeed, there was little evidence to be found that labour market insularity – in the sense of a psychological aversion to travel

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<sup>2</sup> The term 'mismatch' is traditionally used to describe a structural or skills mismatch of labour force skills and employer requirements across or between labour markets, for example a simultaneous surplus of job seekers with steel working skills and excess demand for those with information technology skills. However, there may also be an asymmetry between the requirements of employers and job seekers *within* labour markets (frictional mismatch).

beyond one's own locality – was a significant barrier for long-term unemployed people in that area.

1.8.5 Other studies have found that whilst the long-term unemployed demonstrated a willingness to travel to work, employers often used local residence as a means of screening out candidates, based on the view that those resident near the place of work would be less prone to lateness and absenteeism (McGregor et al. 1998). The vast majority of employers expressed no concerns when asked directly about standard of applicant from regeneration areas or other 'excluded' localities. However, many employers explained high unemployment in such areas by referring to the weak work ethic of residents. Accordingly, the concern expressed by many amongst the long-term unemployed residing in certain urban areas that they fall victim to so-called 'postcodeism', or area-based discrimination, may be seen as having some validity (Finn et al. 1998).

### 1.9 Studying long-term unemployment and barriers to work: conclusions

1.9.1 The above discussion details only a few of the manifold arguments made in an attempt to explain, and thus point towards solutions to, the problem of long-term unemployment. As suggested above, the so-called employability of individuals can be defined with reference to a complex combination of personal assets (and how they are deployed within the local economy and presented to employers), individual circumstances and labour market conditions. Thus, the extent to which individual skills and assets translate into personal progress in the labour market depends largely upon a range of other factors, including the familial, social and economic micro-context within which job seekers make choices about work, and wider economic conditions and level of demand within relevant labour markets.

1.9.2 In designing the research presented below, the authors sought to gather information regarding the personal characteristics of the individuals who were approached, their wider personal and household circumstances, and the external or institutional barriers to work – both real and perceived – that they might face. Only by seeking to identify and understand each of these elements, and the nature of their mutual interaction, were we then able to arrive at a meaningful analysis of the long-term unemployed within our study areas and the barriers contributing to their continued exclusion from active participation in the labour market.



## **Part Two: The sample in profile**

### **2.1 Benefit status, gender, age and ethnicity**

2.1.1 The vast majority of all our respondents (approximately 79 per cent) were registered as unemployed and actively seeking work with the Employment Service. Whereas males dominated this group of interviewees (accounting for 84 per cent of who were registered as unemployed), the opposite was true amongst the smaller, non-registered group of job seekers, 79 per cent of whom were female.

2.1.2 Given the relatively low numbers of females *registered* as long-term unemployed in the study areas (accounting for less than 12 per cent of the 'one year plus' claimant count), we were concerned to interview a disproportionately large number of women – both registered job seekers and others – in order to identify the full range the full range barriers to work faced by that client group. This has been achieved by approaching a number of specialist training providers addressing the needs of women returners to the labour market. As a result, women have thus far accounted for approximately 30 per cent of those interviewed.

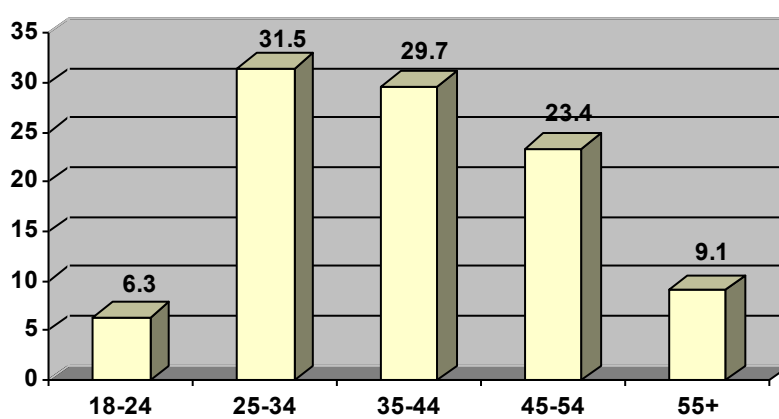
2.1.3 As to the ethnic composition of our sample, it tends to reflect the *relatively* homogenous racial make up of the relevant areas of Edinburgh (and indeed the majority of urban conurbations in Central Scotland). The vast majority of our respondents may be classified as being from a 'White, UK' background, though many preferred to refer to themselves as 'White, Scottish'. Of the four respondents who were not included in this category, one classified himself as 'White, Irish', another as 'South American', a third as 'Asian, UK', and a fourth as 'Asian, Indonesian'.

2.1.4 The average age of our sample was 39.1 years (39.49 for males, 38.23 for females), with the majority of our respondents aged 35 years or more. The average age of unregistered, non-claimant respondents was considerably lower than that of those registered as unemployed with the Employment Service (34.9 years compared to 40.0 years). This was due to the relatively large proportion of unregistered job seekers within the 25-34 year-old age group (26 per cent), which perhaps in turn reflects that this particular age group captures a number of young people living with their parents, lone parents (many of whom claim Income Support rather than Jobseeker's Allowance), and married people dependent on their partner's income.

2.1.5 There was a relatively even distribution of respondents within age groups ranging between the ages of 25 and 55 years. Whilst 31.5 per cent of our client group were aged

between 25 and 34, 28.7 per cent were 35 to 44, and 23.4 per cent were between 45 and 54. The more than half of our sample group who are aged between 35 and 54 still have the potential for a long and full working life ahead of them, but it should be noted that many of those within this age group have already begun to believe – perhaps with some justification – that employers would prefer to recruit younger candidates, whom they (the employers) perceive as more easily trainable and less demanding in terms of remuneration and working conditions. Indeed, age and age discrimination emerge as major issues from our discussion of the barriers named by the long-term unemployed as preventing their re-integration into the labour market.

**Figure 2.1 Long-term unemployed respondents by age group (% of total responses)**



### 2.3 Household circumstances

2.3.1 The majority of those long-term unemployed individuals interviewed thus far live alone, and tend to reside in rented accommodation. It would also appear that the long-term unemployed are much more likely to reside in single person households than other groups within the economy. Most recently available Census data suggests that approximately 35 per cent of all Edinburgh's households were occupied by single people (Census of Population 1991, General Register Office for Scotland.). This compares with a current figure of over 56 per cent amongst our sample group (see table 2.1, below). The figure was even higher amongst registered, claimant job seekers (68 per cent). Indeed 95 per cent of respondents residing in single person accommodation were registered as unemployed and claiming Job Seeker's Allowance. Approximately 22 per cent of respondents reported having either sole or shared responsibilities for caring for children or other family members. Almost half of those with such caring responsibilities were lone parents (10.6 per cent of the total sample).

**Table 2.1 Respondents' description of current household circumstances (% of total responses)**

| <i>Household Type</i>                  | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Single, living alone                   | 56.6                             |
| Single, living in shared accommodation | 3.6                              |
| Living with partner, and children      | 11.5                             |
| Living with partner, no children       | 6.2                              |
| Lone parent                            | 10.6                             |
| Living with parents or other family    | 11.5                             |
| <i>Total</i>                           | <i>100</i>                       |

2.3.2 However, the current concern within government and amongst policy analysts regarding the continuing existence of so-called 'workless households' led us to inquire further as to the current employment status of the partners and spouses of the 17.7 per cent of our respondents who did report cohabiting relationships (see table 2.2, below). More than one fifth of cohabiting respondents reported that their partners were employed on a full time basis. Almost a quarter of partners were not economically active and were dependent on the respondent's income, whilst 43 per cent were registered as unemployed or were unable to work due to ill health or disability, and 5 per cent were retired. Accordingly, for three-quarters of cohabiting respondents (however only approximately 13 per cent of the total sample), the 'workless household' is very much a reality.

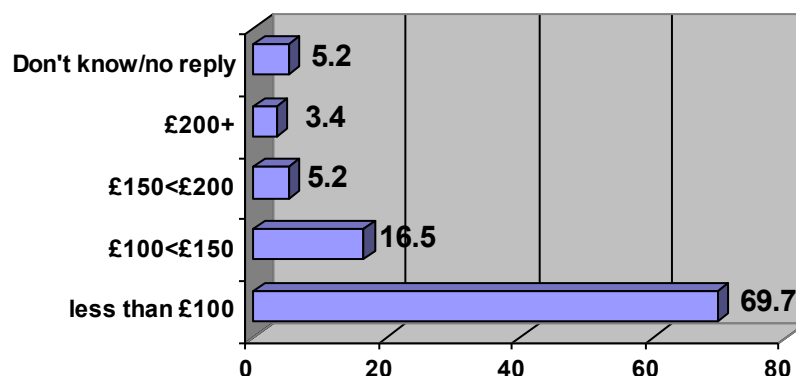
**Table 2.2 Economic activity of partners/spouses of respondents (% of total responses)**

| <i>Reported activity</i>                 | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Employed full time                       | 23                               |
| Employed part time                       | 5                                |
| Unemployed and actively seeking work     | 24                               |
| Unemployed due to ill health/disability  | 19                               |
| Not employed and dependent on respondent | 24                               |
| Retired                                  | 5                                |
| <i>Total</i>                             | <i>100</i>                       |

2.3.3 Given the absence of alternative sources of finance through paid employment, it is unsurprising that the vast majority of our respondents reported modest weekly household income levels, with more than 69 per cent receiving less than £100 cash income per week, and more than 86 per cent living on a cash income of less than £150. For most of our respondents (78 per cent), Jobseeker's Allowance payments provided their primary source of

income. A further 17 per cent relied upon Income Support or other benefits, with the remainder dependent on income provided by their partners, families or other sources.

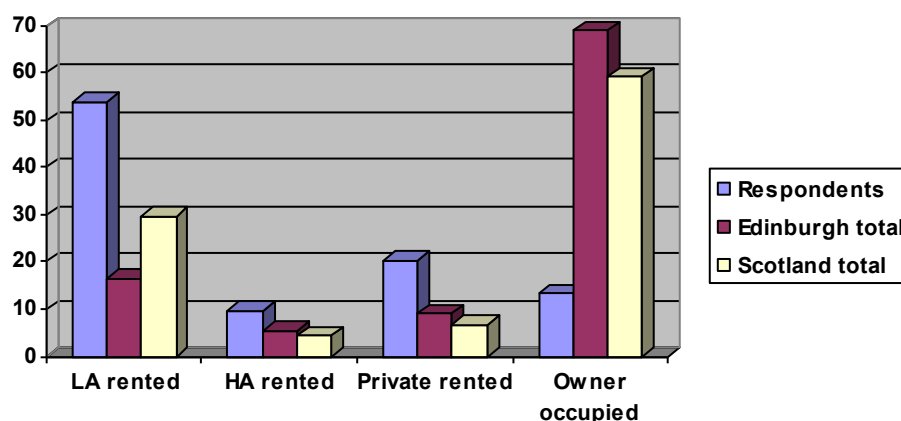
**Figure 2.2 Respondents' estimated weekly household income (% of total responses)**



2.3.4 Turning to the matter of respondents' housing arrangements, the majority of our sample – perhaps predictably – reside in rented public sector accommodation, be it local authority owned (54.0 per cent) or housing association properties (9.7 per cent). However, it should also be noted that a significant minority of respondents were currently owner occupiers (13.3 per cent). It might be argued that the responsibilities associated with mortgage payments have a direct bearing on the ability of this group to pursue employment in what tends to be viewed as the low-wage sectors of the economy, or to accept positions on a temporary or fixed-term basis. However, on closer analysis it would appear that more than half of those residing in owner occupied accommodation were younger job seekers living with their parents or wider family, or married people with working spouses. This finding both accounts for the lack of correlation between wage ambitions and residential housing tenure (see Part 5, section 2, below), and reinforces the argument made above: that the long-term unemployed client group includes very few individuals for whom home ownership has proved to be a viable financial option.

2.3.5 Indeed, a comparison with housing tenure data relating to all residents of Edinburgh, and in other areas of Scotland reveals the extent to which, in general terms, the long-term unemployed remain excluded from the economic 'mainstream'. Whereas owner occupation continues to expand across the country (59.2 per cent) and particularly within Edinburgh (69 per cent), the majority of our sample remain dependent upon the accommodation provided through public authorities. It should also be noted that approximately 2.7 per cent of respondents refused to provide details of their housing arrangement, or were of no fixed abode.

**Figure 2.3 Respondents' housing tenure in comparative perspective  
(% of total responses)**



Notes: Edinburgh statistics for 1997, Scotland statistics for 1998. Sources: City of Edinburgh Council, City Development and Housing Departments; Scottish Abstract of Statistics 26, SODD Housing Statistics Unit.

## 2.4 Academic qualifications and skills attainment

2.4.1 For many employers, the ability of candidates to display recently obtained and relevant qualifications is a key issue in the recruitment of new staff. In examining the academic and vocational qualifications obtained by long-term unemployed people, we might expect to find a client group unable to point to formal documentation attesting to their skills and knowledge. For many of our respondents this was indeed the case. However, again, simplistic assumptions regarding the backgrounds and abilities of the long-term unemployed are likely to be proved mistaken. Whilst many of our respondents had been largely unsuccessful in their efforts to secure formal qualifications, some others were able made substantial progress towards a wide range of academic and vocational awards.

2.4.2 Over 68 per cent of our respondents left school at or below the age of 16 years, and perhaps unsurprisingly, a large proportion of interviewees possessed few or no formal academic qualifications upon leaving full time education. Indeed, 63 per cent of all respondents reported no academic awards, or had failed to achieve 'pass' grades at SCE Standard or Ordinary Grade or GCSE level. Clearly, these individuals may face disadvantage within the labour market. Furthermore, although only approximately 8 per cent of respondents reported having literacy or numeracy problems (see figure 6.2), the above findings perhaps hint that a larger proportion of the long-term unemployed may face such severe educational problems.

2.4.3 However, it should also be noted that approximately 10 per cent of those interviewed were qualified to degree level or equivalent. In Part Five of this report we suggest that – for a

number of reasons – the minimum ‘take home’ wage being sought by many amongst the long-term unemployed might be seen as being marginally too high. There, we argue that job seekers might gain longer-term benefits, if they widened their job search in the immediate term to include lower paid, entry-level positions. This general point can also be made in the particular case of long-term unemployed graduates. Understandably, the majority of our respondents who were educated to this level were seeking work in skilled, professional and managerial positions, with salaries reflecting that status. Accordingly, for 50 per cent of graduates, a weekly wage of more than £250, after deductions, was a pre-requisite for any job that they would be willing to consider. Indeed, 20 per cent of graduates would not accept a weekly take home wage of less than £300. For these job seekers, as with many of the less well qualified members of our sample, there might be some value in expanding the scope of their job search to include more modestly paid opportunities and entry-level positions that might act as a ‘first step on the employment ladder’.

**Table 2.3 Highest formal academic qualifications held by respondents (% of total responses)**

| <i>Form/level of academic qualification achieved</i> | <i>Percentage of total respondents</i> |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| None                                                 | 57.4                                   |
| SCE S/O Grades 4-7; GCSE equivalent                  | 5.2                                    |
| SCE S/O Grades 1-3; GCSE equivalent                  | 16.5                                   |
| SCE Higher Grades; A, S, AS Levels                   | 11.3                                   |
| Degree or equivalent                                 | 9.6                                    |
| <i>Total</i>                                         | <i>100</i>                             |

## 2.5 Vocational and work-based qualifications

2.5.1 Similarly, and of equal concern, our sample of long-term unemployed individuals tended to report relatively low levels of attainment in terms of vocational skills and qualifications. Again, the majority of respondents (60 per cent) had gained no formal qualifications. However, substantial numbers had achieved *at least* basic level Scottish Vocational Qualifications (13.9 per cent at levels 1-2, and 6.1 per cent at levels 3-4), whilst many respondents reported possessing a range of ‘other’ qualifications. Several individuals (approximately 6 per cent of the total sample) has gained ‘City and Guilds’ qualifications at some level, whilst a similar proportion possessed Scotvec certificates across a range of subjects and skill levels. However, we should again note that long-term unemployment has not left the better qualified untouched, with more than 6 per cent of respondents possessing Higher National Diploma or professional level qualifications.

**Table 2.4 Highest formal vocational qualifications held by respondents (% of total responses)**

| <i>Form/level of vocational qualification achieved</i> | <i>Percentage of total respondents</i> |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| None                                                   | 60.0                                   |
| SVQ/NVQ 1-2, or equivalent                             | 13.9                                   |
| SVQ/NVQ 3-4, or equivalent                             | 6.1                                    |
| RSA or other acknowledged clerical qualification       | 3.5                                    |
| HNC/BTEC                                               | 2.6                                    |
| HND                                                    | 3.5                                    |
| Teaching, nursing, other professional certificate      | 2.6                                    |
| Other                                                  | 7.8                                    |
| <i>Total</i>                                           | <i>100</i>                             |

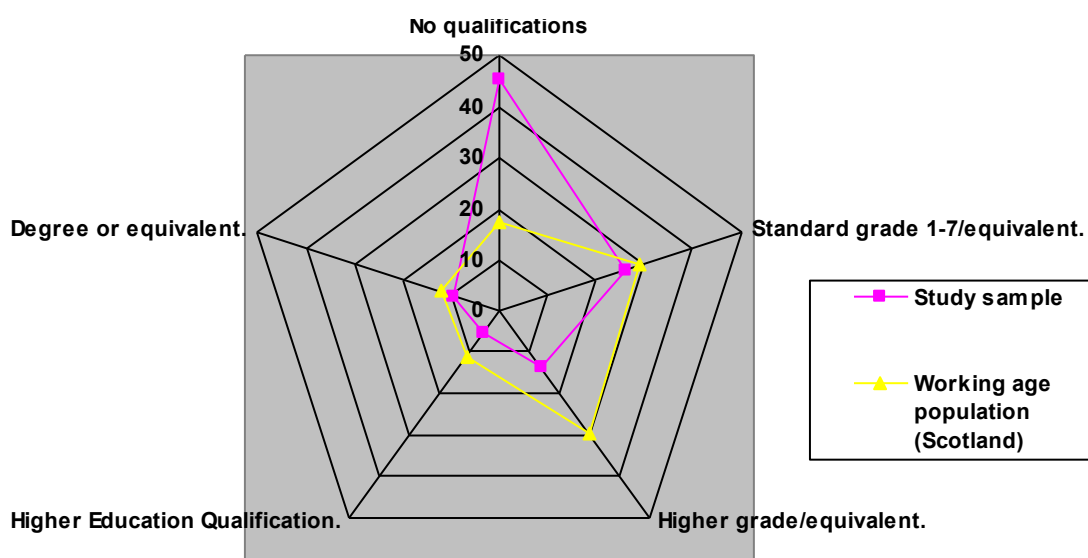
2.5.2 Comparing our respondents' apparent vocational skills and educational attainment as detailed above, we find that 40.9 per cent of our sample possessed neither vocational awards nor academic qualifications. However, it should also be noted that 14 per cent of those reporting no formal vocational qualifications were nonetheless qualified to A level, SCE Higher or degree level in terms of their academic attainment. Once again, a complex picture emerges of a client group containing many individuals with very low levels of formal skills attainment, but others able to demonstrate significant academic achievements or a range of vocational skills.

2.5.3 However, using alternative categorisations (those adopted by the Office for National Statistics) in order to cross-match academic and vocational qualifications, we find that only 13.9 per cent of our respondents are qualified to the generalised level defined by government as 'SCE Higher Grade or equivalent'. This compares with a figure of 29.9 per cent amongst the general Scottish working age population (1998 figures)<sup>3</sup>. More disturbingly, whereas only 17.1 per cent of the wider Scottish labour force reported holding no formal academic or vocational qualifications at all, 45.2 per cent of our sample would fall into that category, if Office for National Statistics (ONS) criteria were to be applied (these criteria do not recognise the 'other' vocational qualifications named by some respondents, resulting in an increase from the initial figure of 40.9 per cent for 'unqualified' respondents stated above). As figure 2.4, below, illustrates, whilst some individuals within our sample mirror the levels of achievement attained throughout the Scottish workforce, for many there exists an all-too-clear skills gap.

<sup>3</sup> i.e. including GSVQ, RSA advanced diploma, SVQ level 3; Source: Scottish Abstract of Statistics 26 (Scottish Office: 1998).

2.5.4 An analysis of the formal skills and educational attainment of our sample highlights the low (or indeed non-existent) levels of qualification achieved by a great many of the long-term unemployed. If long-term unemployed individuals are to progress towards stable employment within sectors where formal evidence of skills attainment is particularly valued, clearly the lack of qualifications amongst large numbers of the client group must be addressed. Whilst practical experience and a good work record are emphasised as *the* crucial hiring criteria by many employers (and particularly those recruiting for unskilled positions), the ability to present evidence of academic or work-based qualifications can provide both the currently employed – and job seekers – with the flexibility and mobility required to access more rewarding or stable forms of participation in the labour market.

**Figure 2.4 Respondents' levels of academic and vocational qualifications (summarised) compared with total working age population in Scotland**



Notes: 'No qualifications' includes those naming vocational qualifications not recognised in the Labour Force Survey. 'Standard grade 1-7 or equivalent' includes GSVQ, RSA diploma level and SVQ 1-2. 'Higher grade or equivalent' includes GSVQ advanced, RSA advanced diploma, SVQ level 3. 'Higher Education qualification' includes HND, HNC, SVQ 4 and professional qualifications.

2.5.5 Finally, the significant proportions amongst our sample reporting the possession of relatively *high* levels of formal qualification would appear to indicate that the dynamics of long-term unemployment can also draw the well-educated and professionally qualified towards prolonged periods of joblessness. Clearly, the multi-dimensional problems associated with explanations of long-term unemployment – and addressed at some length in the 'barriers to work' section of this report, below – can affect job seekers from a range of backgrounds, and act to prevent their prompt re-entry into the labour market. However, as is suggested below, it may be that the job search strategies utilised by the long-term unemployed – whether from an educated and qualified background or not – may tend to militate against their nonetheless genuinely desired progress towards active employment.



## 2.6 Profiling the long-term unemployed: our sample

2.6.1 The largely descriptive data detailed above merely provides the context for the analysis to follow below. The profile information provided above will assist us to arrive at explanations for, and solutions to, the barriers and problems described below. It also begins to help us to identify the complexity of the problem under analysis. The long-term unemployed are at once both a homogenous, and a strikingly diverse group. A reading of claimant count statistics suggests that the vast majority of the client group are male, although our research has included a substantial minority of unregistered unemployed women who consider themselves to be able bodied and actively seeking work.

2.6.2 Perhaps the perception of the 'typical' long-term unemployed person is one of a male in his thirties or forties who lives alone, but there remains a substantial proportion of lone parents and 'workless' family members within our sample, who, we will argue, face their own peculiar combinations of barriers to labour market participation. Similarly, long-term unemployment touches those yet to turn twenty years of age and those aged over sixty. Members of our sample of the long-term unemployed are most likely to reside in public sector rented accommodation, but include in their number a significant minority of home owners. Long-term unemployment is much more likely to affect those with few or no formal academic qualifications, but can also claim those with higher-than-average work-based skills or the university educated.

2.6.3 Long-term unemployment is clearly a complex problem, requiring complex and exacting policy responses. Only by providing a range of tailored solutions can policy actors hope to address the individual, practical needs of long-term unemployed individuals, whilst improving their employability and assisting their re-integration into the labour market. However, in order to develop appropriately-designed policy solutions we must first gain a fuller understanding of the dynamic interaction of economic conditions, individual characteristics, personal circumstances and institutional barriers to work, that together prevent those experiencing long-term unemployment from actively participating in the labour market.

## **Part Three: Previous employment and attachment to the labour market**

### **3.1 Duration of unemployment**

3.1.1 By definition, the subjects of this study have been out of work for prolonged periods of time. More than 25 per cent of interviewees had been unemployed for between two and three years, with almost another fifth of our sample reporting unemployment of between three and five years duration. The relatively large numbers of respondents reporting very long periods of unemployment reflects the research team's interest in the barriers to work faced by both the 'claimant' the 'non-claimant' unemployed. Without the guidance of the Jobseeker's Allowance's definition of 'unemployed and actively seeking work', unregistered respondents were merely asked about how long they had *considered* themselves to be unemployed. Accordingly, whereas the average duration of unemployment experienced by registered respondents was 3.9 years, amongst their unregistered counterparts it was 5.8 years. However, table 3.1, below, also indicates that over 28 per cent of respondents had been unemployed for less than two years, and the majority of those individuals had worked within the previous eighteen months.

**Table 3.1 Respondents' length of current unemployment**

| <i>Length of current period of unemployment</i> | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 < 1.5 years                                   | 19.8                             |
| 1.5 < 2 years                                   | 8.3                              |
| 2 < 3 years                                     | 25.2                             |
| 3 < 5 years                                     | 18.0                             |
| 5 < 10 years                                    | 16.2                             |
| More than 10 years                              | 12.5                             |
| <i>Total</i>                                    | <i>100</i>                       |

3.1.2 A more detailed examination of the age profile of respondents using summarised versions of the above categories (see table 3.2, below) reveals that younger job seekers dominate amongst those unemployed for less than two years. People below the age of 35 account for 56.7 per cent of this group, and 63.6 per cent of those unemployed for less than eighteen months. Amongst the group unemployed for between two and five years, our respondents were fairly evenly distributed throughout middle age groups, with relatively little representation for those aged younger than 25 (2.0 per cent) or 55 and older (6.3 per cent). However, amongst the more than a quarter of our total sample out of work for more than five years, the older age groups dominated. Two-thirds of this group were aged between 35 and 54, and a further 16.7 per cent were over 55.

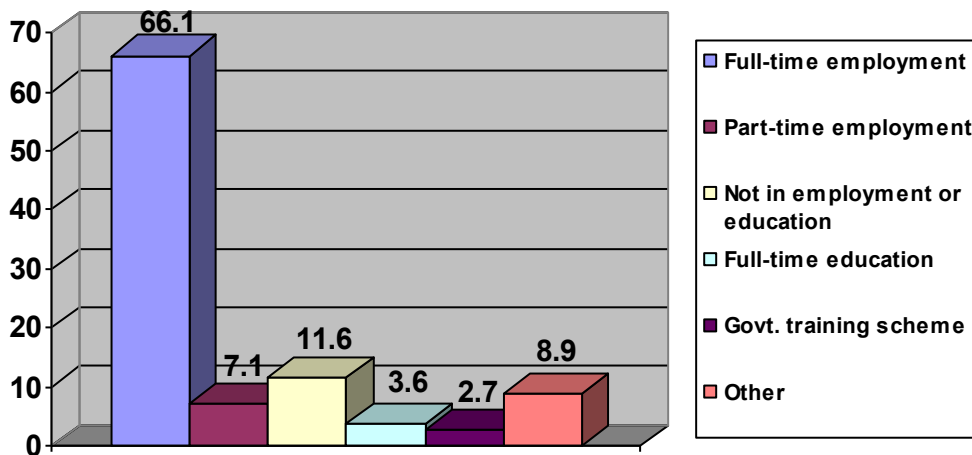
**Table 3.2 Respondents' length of current unemployment, by age group**

| Age group of respondents | Length of current period of unemployment<br>(percentage of respondents within age group) |             |            |              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
|                          | 1 < 2 years                                                                              | 2 < 5 years | 5 years +  | Total sample |
| 18 – 24                  | 13.4                                                                                     | 2.0         | 3.3        | 6.3          |
| 25 – 34                  | 43.3                                                                                     | 33.3        | 20.0       | 31.5         |
| 35 – 44                  | 23.3                                                                                     | 31.3        | 30.0       | 29.7         |
| 45 – 54                  | 13.3                                                                                     | 27.1        | 30.0       | 23.4         |
| 55 +                     | 6.7                                                                                      | 6.3         | 16.7       | 9.1          |
| <i>Total</i>             | <i>100</i>                                                                               | <i>100</i>  | <i>100</i> | <i>100</i>   |

**3.2 Respondents' activities immediately prior to unemployment**

3.2.1 The majority of our respondents (66.1 per cent) cited full-time employment as their main activity prior to their current period of joblessness, with a further 7.1 per cent involved in part-time work. Those not employed during the period immediately preceding their current job seeking status tended to be engaged in full-time education or training (6.3 per cent in total), or a range of 'other' activities, the most common of these involving family and caring responsibilities. These findings indicate that, for the members of our sample, full-time employment was the norm in the time period immediately before their experience of long-term unemployment. Further discussion with our respondents' regarding their more general relationship with the labour market reinforces the view of a group of individuals for whom long-term unemployment is a comparatively new, and understandably perplexing experience.

**Figure 3.1 Respondents' activities immediately prior to unemployment (% of total responses)**



### 3.3 Past experiences of the labour market

3.3.1 It has been argued above that the long-term unemployed are a far from homogenous group, and that their skills, experiences, and backgrounds differ markedly. This view is further borne out by the range of answers provided by our interviewees when asked to describe the type of employment or occupation that they had most regularly been engaged in during their working lives (see table 3.3, below). Given the skills profile of many of our respondents as described in section two, it was perhaps predictable that large proportions were most often involved in manual, domestic or service-based work. However, many others preferred to describe themselves as having been engaged in professional, associate-professional or managerial positions. Only 51.5 per cent described their regular unemployment, in general terms, as low skilled or unskilled.

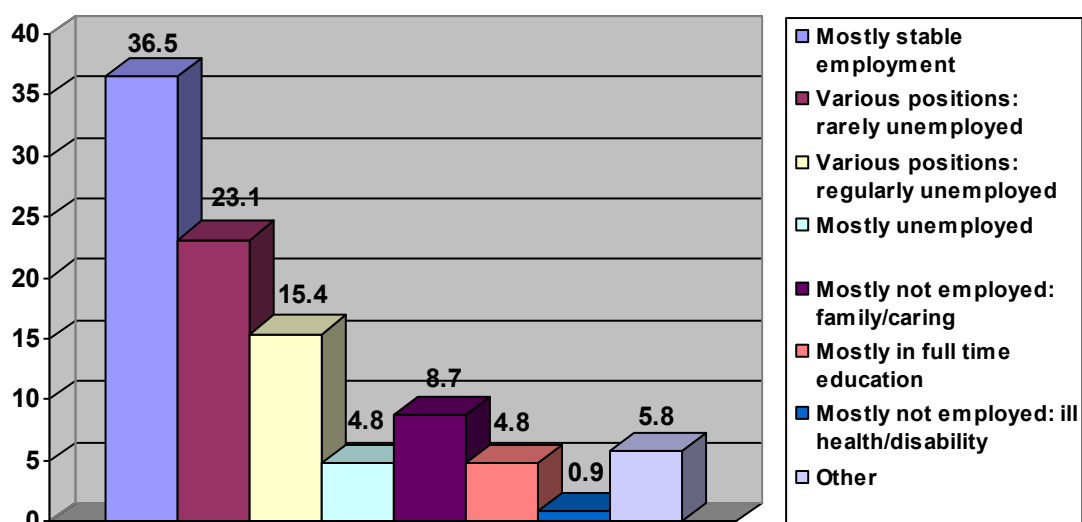
**Table 3.3 Respondents' most regular occupation when employed (% of total responses)**

| <b>Respondents' occupational skills level</b> | <b>Percentage of total responses</b> | <b>Respondents' regular occupation by type (percentage of total responses)</b> |            |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Low skilled or unskilled</b>               | <b>51.5</b>                          | Unskilled manual work                                                          | 27.2       |
|                                               |                                      | Catering/domestic                                                              | 12.6       |
|                                               |                                      | Personal and protective services                                               | 4.9        |
|                                               |                                      | Retail                                                                         | 6.8        |
| <b>Skilled or semi-skilled</b>                | <b>36.0</b>                          | Skilled/semi-skilled manual work                                               | 12.6       |
|                                               |                                      | Clerical and administrative                                                    | 10.7       |
|                                               |                                      | Associate professional/technical                                               | 7.8        |
|                                               |                                      | Care work                                                                      | 3.9        |
|                                               |                                      | Other                                                                          | 1.0        |
| <b>Highly skilled</b>                         | <b>6.8</b>                           | Managerial and professional                                                    | 6.8        |
| <b>None/no comment</b>                        |                                      |                                                                                | <b>5.7</b> |
| <b>Total</b>                                  |                                      |                                                                                | <b>100</b> |

3.3.2 Respondents were also asked in broader terms about their attachment to the labour market during the period of their 'working life' (i.e. since school leaving age). A wide and varied range of responses was gathered. However, in summarising respondents' answers into categories facilitating comparative analysis, we found that approximately 36 per cent of those interviewed broadly characterised their working life as being dominated by steady employment. The sense of association with a 'stable working life' was mostly keenly felt by older respondents, with almost half of those describing a working life characterised by mostly stable employment aged between 45 and 54 years.

3.3.3 A further 23 per cent of respondents indicated that they had moved between a number of jobs, but with only occasional and short periods of unemployment. Only 5 per cent of our sample described a working life characterised 'mostly by unemployment' whilst being regularly available for work. However, when added to those who had experienced regular changes in position separated by a number of periods without work, over one fifth of respondents reported a work history blighted by prolonged and recurring unemployment.

**Figure 3.2 Respondents' descriptions of their 'working life', since school leaving age (percentage of total responses)**



### 3.4 Long-term unemployment and labour market attachment

3.4.1 Our findings regarding the labour market attachment of the long-term unemployed give reason for both optimism and concern. However, it might be argued that the most important lesson to be drawn from the above findings reflects the idea that many long-term unemployed people continue to view themselves as having strong attachments to the labour market. Despite prolonged periods of recent unemployment, many of our sample group characterised their relationship with the labour market as one involving, for the most part, stable and regular employment. This finding, combined with indicators suggesting that a significant proportion of the long-term unemployed have at least worked within the past 1-2 years, points to the possible existence of a pool of potentially employable individuals within a client group which admittedly faces severe barriers to work.

3.4.2 Nonetheless, whilst the feeling of attachment to the labour market expressed by many long-term unemployed individuals reflects a positive experience of 'working life', members of this client group should be aware of the damaging perception created by

prolonged periods of unemployment. That many of the long-term unemployed still view themselves as 'workers' is clearly a positive factor contributing to their future potential employability. However, many employers are more likely to focus on their lack of recent and relevant work experience rather than their more distant past employment history. As we argue further in Part Six of this report, below, many of our long-term unemployed respondents would undoubtedly benefit from guidance increasing their awareness of the attributes valued by employers, and from encouragement to develop their 'work experience profile' and renew their job-oriented skills.

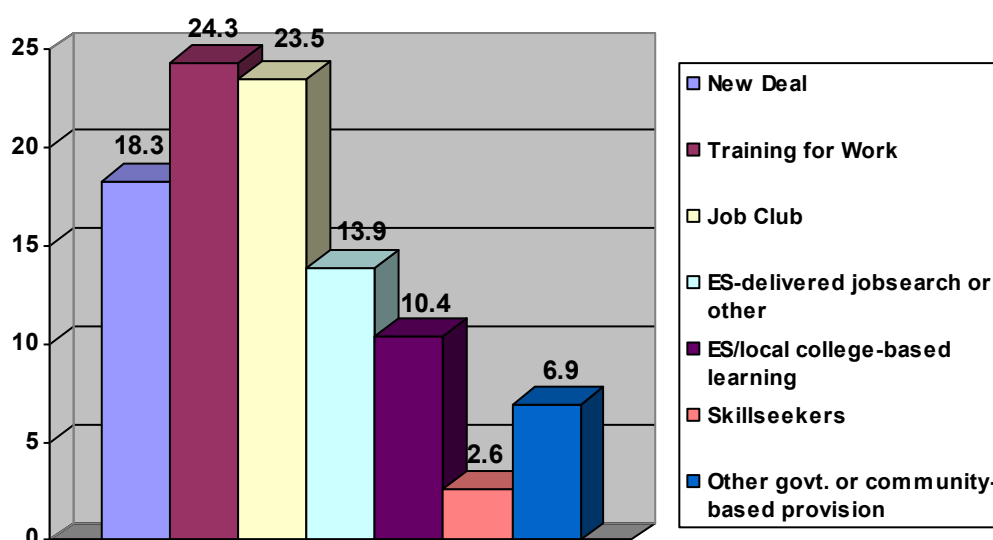
## **Part Four: Activity whilst unemployed**

### **4.1 Part-time work and training**

4.1.1 Despite the apparently strong feelings of attachment to the labour market expressed by respondents, a relatively limited number involved themselves in even marginal labour market activity whilst unemployed. The regulations governing the Jobseeker's Allowance permit part-time work to be undertaken for up to sixteen hours per week, but only 12 per cent of respondents had declared any such work during their entire period of unemployment. However, when asked if they had undertaken undeclared work whilst signing on as unemployed, 12 per cent acknowledged their participation in this form of activity (approximately one-third of whom had also done 'official' part-time work). A further 6 per cent of respondents answered that they were 'not prepared to say' whether they had undertaken undeclared work.

4.1.2 A more substantial proportion of interviewees had pursued some form of training during the period of their unemployment, including the near on fifth of our sample who had participated in some aspect of the New Deal. A quarter of respondents had been involved in the Training for Work programme, whilst a similar proportion had attended Job Clubs during their period of operation (indeed, a number of respondents expressed regret at the removal of this service from local job centres).

**Figure 4.1 Training and other programmes undertaken by respondents during the period of their current unemployment (% of total responses)**



4.1.3 Amongst those respondents who had undertaken any of the above mentioned forms of training and assistance, 60 per cent believed that their employment prospects had improved as a direct result of their participation. A further 69 per cent of all respondents expressed the belief that some form of training would improve their overall job prospects. However, respondents were less clear as to what form any training should take. Many simply suggested that training should be closely linked to practical employment skills. Others (amounting to 18 per cent of all those indicating an interest in further assistance) thought that some form of training in information technology would be helpful, although again the form that this should take was usually expressed in only the vaguest terms.

#### 4.2 Looking for work

4.2.1 The vast majority of those interviewed thus far have characterised themselves as actively seeking work, and have satisfied the definition of job seeking preferred by the Employment Service: that of having taken measures to locate work within the last seven days. Over 80 per cent of our respondents suggested that they had looked for work within that time period, with a further 12 per cent stating that though their job search had been less diligent, they remained willing to pursue and accept appropriate opportunities. Those who admitted that they were not seeking employment were – for the most part – older job seekers who suggested that age and health problems precluded a more active approach towards finding work, an argument that had not as yet been fully accepted by the Employment Service in many cases.

**Table 4.1 Respondents' attitudes to looking for work (% of total responses)**

| <i>Summary of suggested attitude to job search</i>                            | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| "I am actively seeking work, and have looked for work in the last seven days" | 82                               |
| "I am actively seeking work, and have looked for work in the last four weeks" | 5                                |
| "I want to work, but I have not looked for work in the last four weeks"       | 7                                |
| "I am not actively seeking work"                                              | 6                                |
| <i>Total</i>                                                                  | <i>100</i>                       |

#### 4.3 Job search tools and commitment to looking for work

4.3.1 Respondents referred to a range of job search methodologies and tools when asked about how they looked for employment. When asked about the method they most often used to search for work, the overwhelming majority of interviewees mentioned a combination of visiting their local job centre and using Edinburgh-based newspapers. In addition, many interviewees named 'word of mouth' or personal contacts as important sources of job-related



information. When shown a range of pre-specified job search methods and asked to identify those that they had used on a regular basis (i.e. on average at least once per week), the vast majority of respondents again named local newspapers and job centre vacancies sections as their main sources of job search intelligence.

4.3.2 Perhaps the most interesting results presented in table 4.2, below, point firstly to the flaws that continue to characterise one of the more 'traditional' methods of assisting the unemployed in their search for work, and secondly, to the gradual increase in access to alternative job search methods associated with the use of new technologies. It is perhaps notable that whilst over 70 per cent of our respondents were willing to visit Employment Service (ES) job centres on a weekly basis to search their 'vacancy boards' for suitable opportunities, less than 40 per cent thought it useful to *speak* to the Service's staff and ask for their advice and assistance. Clearly despite the ES's development into a more user-friendly service in recent years, some clients remain unconvinced of the effectiveness of the staff assigned to help them.

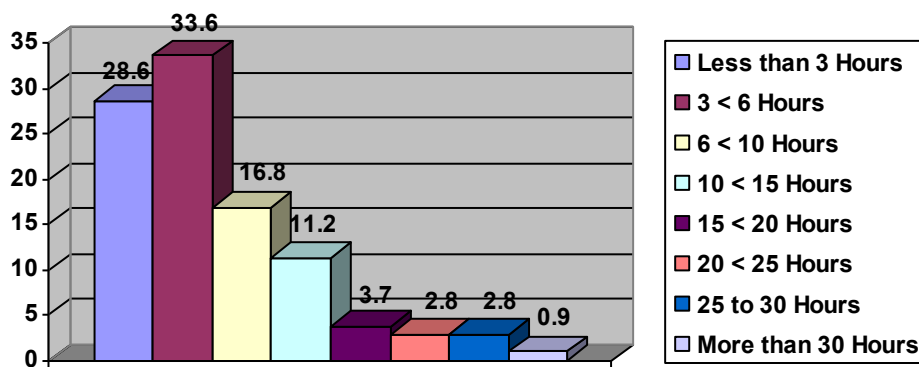
4.3.3 A largely unrelated point centres on the still small, but by no means negligible, proportion of long-term unemployed job seekers who use the internet on a weekly basis to search for employment. Over 12 per cent of those questioned employed this method of looking for work on a weekly basis (whilst more than 25 per cent had used the internet as a job search tool at some time). Furthermore, there is considerable potential to encourage the further use of on-line job seeking – over 18 per cent of our interviewees reported having access at home to a personal computer linked to the internet. However, for others, even the most basic communication and job search tools were beyond their means. Over one-third of our respondents (33.9 per cent) did not have access to a telephone at home.

**Table 4.2 Methods of looking for work used on a weekly basis by respondents  
(% of total responses)**

| <i>Method of jobsearch</i>   | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Local press                  | 87                               |
| Job centre vacancy boards    | 70                               |
| National press               | 52                               |
| Personal contacts            | 50                               |
| Job centre staff             | 39                               |
| Community notice boards      | 25                               |
| Direct approach to employers | 18                               |
| Community organisations      | 15                               |
| Private employment agencies  | 13                               |
| Internet                     | 12                               |
| Local libraries              | 9                                |

4.3.4 However, optimism regarding the apparently extensive use of both innovative and existing job seeking methods by our long-term unemployed respondents should be limited. For many of our interviewees, these activities were constrained to relatively tight time frames. Almost 30 per cent of our sample spent less than three hours carrying out job seeking activities in a typical week, and more than 60 per cent were actively seeking work for less than six hours (see figure 4.2, below). Whilst it might be argued that excessively prolonged job search activity will reap diminishing returns for participants, it is nonetheless notable that many of those aspiring to undertake full time work currently undertake little structured daily activity in pursuit of that end. Clearly, for many of our respondents the search for work is far from a full time job in itself.

**Figure 4.2 Average period of time per week spent looking for work by respondents (% of total)**



#### 4.4 Long-term unemployment and work-focused activity

4.4.1 The long-term unemployed individuals interviewed as part of this study perceive themselves, for the most part, to be taking active measures to re-enter the labour market. For many respondents this reflects the reality of their behaviour. Approaching one fifth of our sample have undertaken part-time work whilst unemployed, on an official or unofficial basis. Given the understandable reluctance of respondents to admit to fraudulent activity, it might be suggested that the numbers with experience of 'working and claiming' are potentially much higher. Indeed, there is considerable and current interest in the extent of this form of benefit fraud and its impact on official rates of unemployment. However, our study can offer no in-depth evidence as to the scale of undeclared working. Respondents may well be honestly reporting very minor examples of illegal practice, perpetrated more often in an attempt to 'make ends meet' than with the intention of 'beating the system'. A more generous system of earnings disregards under the Jobseeker's Allowance would perhaps prove to be an effective

solution, contributing to the elimination of petty fraud and enabling job seekers to maintain links with the labour market through freer participation in part-time work.

4.4.2 Many of the long-term unemployed have accepted that they require assistance if they are to make the transition from welfare to work. However, our research into their attitudes towards training reveals what might be termed as a sense of 'willingness in search of guidance'. The majority of our respondents expressed a willingness to pursue training. Few, however, had any clear idea as to the form of training that would prove most beneficial to them. There would be clear benefits in an attempt by all interested agencies to develop a coherent mechanism for identifying the skills needs of the long-term unemployed and matching individuals' needs to local training provision. Progress towards meaningful collaboration in this field might then result in job seekers receiving more effective guidance and being directed into appropriate training programmes tailored to meet their specific needs as individuals or members of excluded groups.

## **Part Five: Respondents' employment preferences**

### **5.1 Occupational preferences**

5.1.1 Interviewees tended to be forthright when discussing their preferred occupation (see table 5.1, below). When questioned as to which type of employment they would prefer to be involved in, comparatively few respondents provided what might be called the 'default answer' of 'anything'. Rather, most interviewees were candid about the type of work they wished to be employed in, and a diverse range of 'primary targets' for their jobsearch efforts emerged. However, respondents were again less clear as to the skills requirements and practical implications of their proposed career choices.

**Table 5.1 Respondents' preferred occupation, by type (% of all responses)**

| <b><i>Preferred occupation's skills level</i></b> | <b><i>Percentage of total responses</i></b> | <b><i>Respondents' preferred type of work or occupation (% of total responses)</i></b> |            |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b><i>Low skilled or unskilled</i></b>            | <b>35.1</b>                                 | Unskilled manual work                                                                  | 11.7       |
|                                                   |                                             | Retail                                                                                 | 7.2        |
|                                                   |                                             | Personal and protective services                                                       | 6.3        |
|                                                   |                                             | Catering/domestic                                                                      | 6.3        |
|                                                   |                                             | Driving                                                                                | 3.6        |
| <b><i>Skilled or semi-skilled</i></b>             | <b>48.6</b>                                 | Associate professional/technical                                                       | 13.5       |
|                                                   |                                             | Clerical and administrative                                                            | 13.5       |
|                                                   |                                             | Skilled/semi-skilled manual work                                                       | 8.1        |
|                                                   |                                             | Craft and related                                                                      | 7.2        |
|                                                   |                                             | Care work                                                                              | 6.3        |
| <b><i>Highly skilled</i></b>                      | <b>3.7</b>                                  | Managerial and professional                                                            | 3.7        |
| <b><i>"Anything"</i></b>                          |                                             |                                                                                        | 7.2        |
| <b><i>"None"</i></b>                              |                                             |                                                                                        | 5.4        |
| <b><i>Total</i></b>                               |                                             |                                                                                        | <b>100</b> |

5.1.2 A comparison with the previous occupation-types of respondents, identified in table 3.3, indicates a general inclination amongst our sample towards seeking work in more skilled (and therefore presumably better paid) positions. Approximately 30 per cent of respondents who characterised their most regular form of previous employment as very low skilled or unskilled, suggested that they would now prefer to work in more skilled positions. Many of those previously involved in low skilled or unskilled manual work wished to find employment in

trade-based positions within the same sector, whilst others hoped to build alternative careers after developing new skills. For example, amongst the 13.5 per cent of all respondents who wished to work in what might be defined as 'associate professional and technical posts' (only 6.8 per cent of respondents had previously worked in such positions) many mentioned the specific field of computing as their future career goal. Whilst, as we have argued above, some respondents may not be fully aware of the high level of skills required to pursue such a career, there is no reason to doubt the integrity of the answers provided, or the genuineness of respondents' ambitions<sup>4</sup>.

5.1.3 Nevertheless, many other respondents expressed a keen interest in returning to precisely their former field of employment. The *majority* of formerly low skilled or unskilled workers (54 per cent) named similar forms of work as their main job search target. However, it is perhaps most notable that the service and retail sectors – increasingly important within the Edinburgh economy – were not particularly popular destinations amongst our respondents. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the many were male and had previously been employed in more traditional work forms and industries.

5.1.4 The small numbers of former managers and professionals within our sample displayed a degree of flexibility in their selection of job search targets. Less than one-third restricted their job seeking activities to management level or professional positions. Finally, it should be noted that a significant minority of all respondents (12.6 per cent) provided no indication as to their future career targets, with 7.2 per cent suggesting that they would accept 'anything', and a further 5.4 per cent stating that they were not actively seeking offers of employment in any area (usually due to a preference to undertake education or training, or existing barriers such as caring responsibilities). Of those who provided the 'default answer' of 'anything', the vast majority had previously been engaged in very low-skilled or unskilled work. Indeed, approximately 12 per cent of all those formerly employed in such positions suggested that they would consider any type of work.

## 5.2 Flexibility regarding remuneration and working conditions

5.2.1 The concerns of long-term unemployed job seekers regarding their ability to secure adequate remuneration in order to meet the 'costs of starting work' are more fully explored in part six of this report. However, it is perhaps worthwhile to note at this stage that when asked to evaluate the extent to which external barriers limited their ability to pursue and gain

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that Standard Occupation Codes were not used when classifying the work histories and preferences of respondents. Respondents were asked 'open' questions regarding their occupations and answers were summarised in a manner that sought to enable comparative analysis, whilst also providing detailed description.

employment, almost 57 per cent of respondents identified a lack of adequately paid opportunities as a relevant factor.

5.2.2 There is conflicting evidence as to whether the long-term unemployed are ‘pricing’ themselves out of the labour market due to the maintenance of an excessive reservation wage (i.e. a wage below which they would be unwilling to work, see figure 5.1, below). When asked to specify the lowest acceptable ‘take home’ weekly wage at which they would consider undertaking full time work, the majority of respondents (63 per cent) named a figure below £200. Indeed, almost one fifth of our sample were willing to work full time in return for an income of less than £150 per week. However, it is important to recall that many members of this client group are looking for employment within relatively low-skilled and traditionally low paid positions, and it might be argued that the those seeking a weekly income *after deductions* of more than £200 (36.9 per cent), or even between £175 and £200 (19.4 per cent), are excluding a significant number of entry-level opportunities within the local labour market.

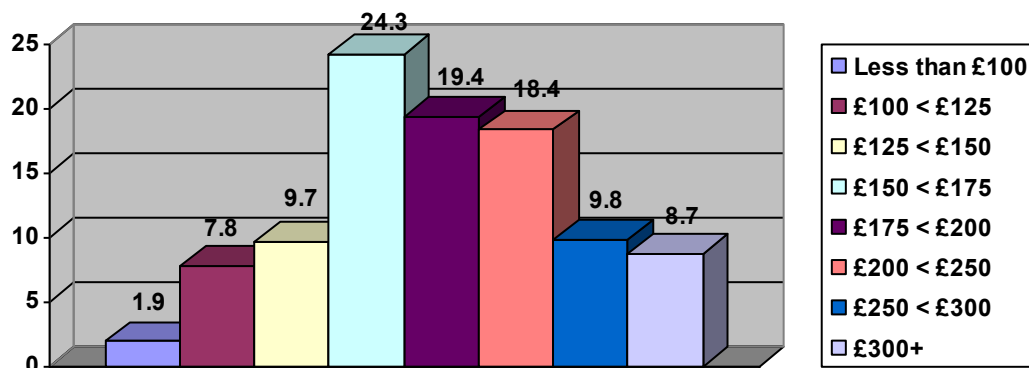
5.2.3 Nevertheless, we must also remember that the personal circumstances of individuals can have a profound effect on their ability to move within the labour market. Given the not insignificant numbers of people living in owner occupied housing within our sample, and the expense entailed in securing accommodation in the Edinburgh area, it might be argued that the wage demands of many of our long-term unemployed respondents may be set at a necessarily high level.

5.2.4 Yet we can offer little evidence to support this specific argument. Approximately two-fifths of our *registered unemployed* respondents who were tenants in either the public sector or private sector (both 39 per cent) sought remuneration in excess of £200 per week. This contrasted with only 25 per cent of those resident in owner occupied accommodation and registered as unemployed who demanded a similar minimum weekly wage level. The explanation for this apparent anomaly lies in the economic status and age of many of our respondents. Over one-third of our respondents resident in owner-occupied accommodation lived with their parents or extended family, perhaps implying that these individuals did not hold primary householder responsibilities. Of those living alone in owner occupied housing (i.e. those who were householders), well over half were over the age of 45, and *may* therefore have become free of mortgage responsibilities.

5.2.5 In more general terms, the age of our interviewees did not tend to particularly influence the levels of pay they demand in return for full time work. The average age of those who would accept wages of less than £125 per week was significantly lower than that of those demanding greater remuneration. However, the average ages of respondents seeking weekly payments ranging from £125 to over £300 were generally similar (e.g. 40.5 years for those

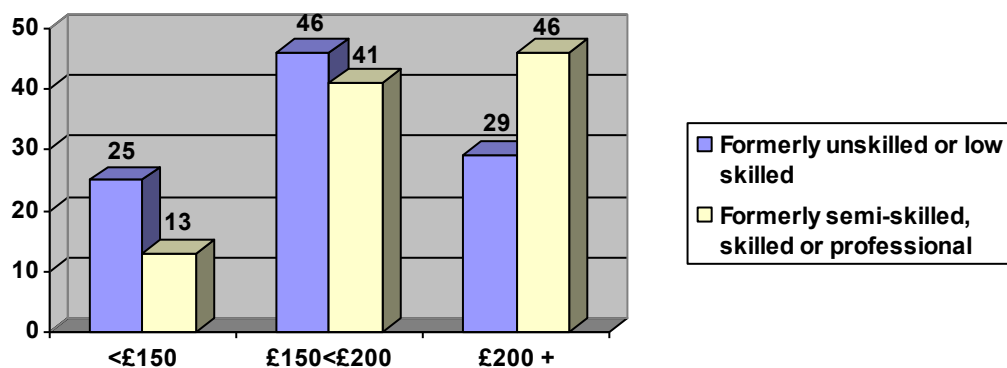
seeking £125<£150; 40.1 years for those seeking £250<£300 per week). Thus, while the age profiles of our respondents do not explain their different reservation wages, they perhaps serve to remind us that amongst a client group whose *average* age is over 39 years, relatively substantial salary demands should not be considered to be particularly surprising.

**Figure 5.1 Minimum weekly wage (after deductions) acceptable to respondents (% of all responses)**



5.2.6 Interviewees were not asked to specify their previous salary levels. Given the very considerable periods of unemployment experienced by many respondents, this question was of limited relevance, and produced few definite or accurate responses during pilot interviews. However, the levels of pay sought by respondents' was apparently related to their prior work experience, and therefore we might infer to previously received remuneration. Whilst only 30 per cent of those whose most regular former occupation was low skilled or unskilled (as described in table 5.1 above) sought a take home weekly wage of £200 or more, 47.5 per cent of those previously engaged in what we have described as semi-skilled, skilled or professional forms of work wished to receive at least that sum (see figure 5.2, below).

**Figure 5.2 Minimum weekly wage (after deductions) acceptable to respondents, by most regular former occupation-type (% of all responses)**



5.2.7 Our interviewees tended to be more flexible when asked to consider different forms of working arrangements. The majority of respondents were willing to consider job opportunities that involved night work, weekend shifts and variable hours. Despite the concerns regularly expressed by respondents regarding the financial consequences associated with losing benefits (see part six, below), 60 per cent also expressed a willingness to consider temporary contract work.

**Table 5.2 Respondents willingness to consider undertaking stated forms of working arrangement (% of total responses)**

| <u>Form of work</u>                | <u>Respondents' attitudes to form of work (percentage)</u> |                              |             |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------|
|                                    | <u>'Yes'</u>                                               | <u>'Possible/don't know'</u> | <u>'No'</u> |
| Part-time                          | 55                                                         | 17                           | 28          |
| Temporary/fixed term contract work | 60                                                         | 16                           | 24          |
| Night work                         | 55                                                         | 14                           | 31          |
| Weekend work                       | 61                                                         | 14                           | 25          |
| Variable hours                     | 73                                                         | 14                           | 13          |
| Long hours (40 hrs + per week)     | 69                                                         | 16                           | 14          |

5.2.8 A further 55 per cent of our sample suggested that they would consider part-time employment, though many acknowledged that a complex calculation regarding hours of work and rates of pay would have to be made in order to establish if accepting any such position was a practical reality. Indeed, it should also be noted that whilst the vast majority of the unregistered unemployed were willing to undertake part-time employment, registered job seekers (and therefore JSA claimants) were far more circumspect (see table 5.3, below). Approximately 7 per cent of our respondents expressed a *preference* for part-time employment. This suggests that whereas part-time employment might be an attractive option for job seekers supported by others, for those dependent on income-based and passported benefits the security and remuneration offered by full-time positions is often viewed as a necessity, thus limiting the scope of their search for work.

**Table 5.3 'Would respondents' consider undertaking part-time work?', by 'unemployment status' (% of total responses)**

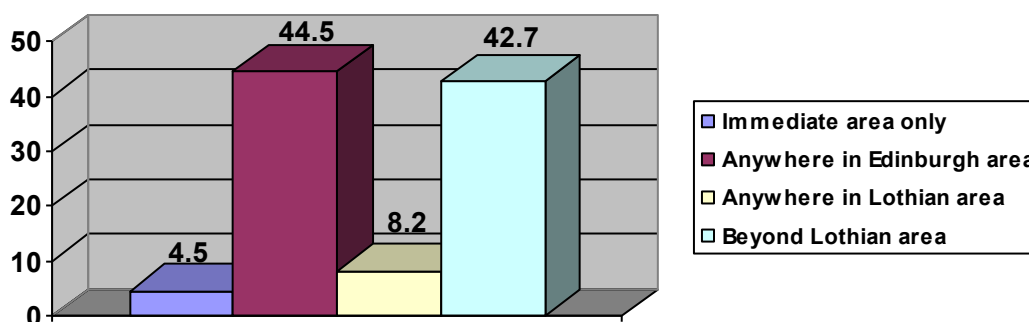
| <u>Responses</u>      | <u>Percentage of registered and non-registered respondents</u> |                                     |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                       | <u>Registered as unemployed</u>                                | <u>Not registered as unemployed</u> |
| "Yes"                 | 49.3                                                           | 87.5                                |
| "No"                  | 31.5                                                           | 6.25                                |
| "Possibly/don't know" | 19.2                                                           | 6.25                                |



### 5.3 Respondents' attitudes to travelling to work

5.3.1 Part One of this report discussed the current debate surrounding the concept of insularity, and its central idea that those experiencing long-term unemployment and living in economically and geographically peripheral localities are more likely to limit their search for work – for practical, social and psychological reasons – to their immediate area of residence, resulting in 'spatial mismatch'. We suggested there that some evidence existed calling into question the accuracy of this view of the long-term unemployed and their relationship with the labour market. Interviews carried out with our sample of the long-term unemployed tend to reinforce this argument. When asked about which geographical areas they would be willing to travel to in order to undertake work, less than 5 per cent of our respondents indicated a strong desire to work only within their immediate locality (see figure 5.3, below). Large numbers amongst our sample expressed a willingness to travel anywhere in Edinburgh (44.5 per cent), or the Lothian area or beyond (50.9 per cent in total) to find employment.

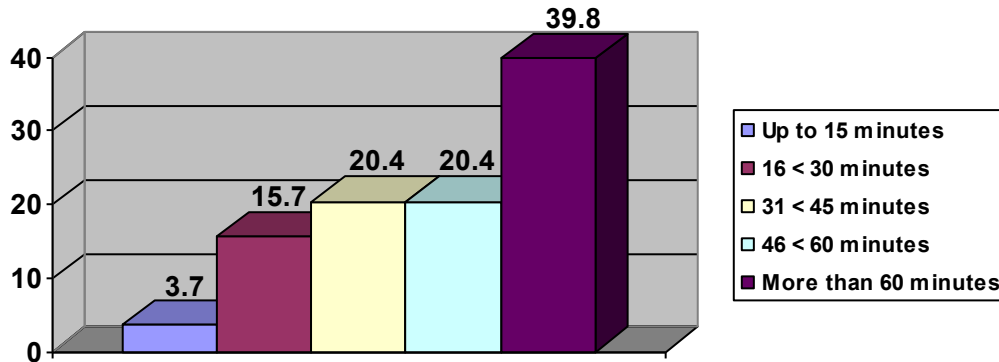
**Figure 5.3 Areas where respondents would consider seeking and accepting employment (% of total responses)**



5.3.2 Respondents were also asked about the length of time that they would be willing to spend travelling to and from a position of full-time employment (see figure 5.4). Again, very few sought to limit their activities to the immediate locality (here defined as 'within 15 minutes'). Approximately 4 per cent of our sample provided this response, compared to the almost 41 per cent (in total) who expressed a willingness to travel for between thirty minutes and one hour, and the 39.8 per cent who said that they would be willing to travel for more than one hour. In reality, for many respondents opportunities to travel long distances in order to pursue and undertake work are strictly limited. Only 16 per cent reported having access to private transport, and when faced with the predictable difficulties associated with the cost, time and effort involved in commuting substantial distances on a daily basis, it might be argued that many respondents would be more reluctant to take up opportunities in areas far from their homes. However, there is no reason to suggest that these findings do not reflect a

genuine willingness amongst long-term unemployed job seekers to pursue opportunities outwith their immediate area of residence.

**Figure 5.4 Length of travelling time to and from work acceptable to respondents (% of total)**



5.3.3 The portrait of a group of individuals suffering from a form of psychological insularity, trapped in peripheral and impoverished urban areas, holding parochial and insular views regarding the labour market is not reflected in the ideas and attitudes of our sample group. Even if we were to assume that the majority of interviewees expressed a genuine willingness to travel within Edinburgh, if not (as many claimed) beyond that area, then we can conclude that these individuals have the means and the inclination to access what is, undeniably, a vibrant and extensive labour market offering a large number and wide range of job opportunities. Our attention must then, surely, turn to the personal, practical and institutional barriers faced by the long-term unemployed that apparently prevent them from exploiting these opportunities to re-enter the labour market.

5.4 Employment preferences and barriers to work: conclusions

5.4.1 The extent to which the long-term unemployed contribute to their own continued exclusion from the active labour market is a matter of considerable debate amongst researchers and policy makers alike. Our own research suggests that whilst many long-term unemployed job seekers have set very modest reservation wages at which they would be willing to accept work, others amongst their group tend to be rather more demanding, to the point that a range of low-skilled, entry level positions would be excluded from their job search.

5.4.2 Similarly, there is some evidence to suggest that the *type of work* being sought by members of our sample tends to restrict the opportunities available to them. For some of our respondents, previously engaged in low skilled or unskilled work, positions offering better pay

(and, it might be suggested, greater stability) are the focus of their job search. Relatively few of our respondents, when asked to identify the type of work that they wished to undertake, named easily accessible, entry-level jobs within the most rapidly growing sectors of the economy (e.g. personal services; leisure and hospitality).

5.4.3 However, further analysis suggests that once again our respondents seemed to exhibit a sense of willingness to work, but required guidance as to how best to target and access opportunities. The flexible attitudes expressed with regards to hours and conditions of work, and crucially, our respondents' willingness to travel beyond their own areas of residence in order to secure and undertake employment, indicate that the sense of isolation and exclusion often attributed to the long-term unemployed has not yet ensnared many amongst our sample. Whilst the very real barriers to work faced by our respondents – and discussed in Part Six of this report – remain, their answers at the very least reflect a readiness to accept 'appropriate' opportunities should they arise. There would be benefits in policy makers and employers seeking to develop strategies linking the most employable of our long-term job seekers with the many opportunities within the growing sectors of the Edinburgh economy, perhaps having first reassured those job seekers of the value of work and appropriateness of those opportunities.

## **Part Six: Long-term unemployment and barriers to work**

### **6.1 Defining barriers to work**

6.1.1 In the introductory section of this report, the relationship between personal employability and the labour market was fully discussed. There, it was concluded that the ability of individuals to gain, retain and move between positions in the labour market was profoundly affected by the interaction between the personal characteristics of those individuals, their wider personal and household circumstances, and the external or institutional barriers to work that they might face. It is essential that policy makers, service providers, and the long-term unemployed themselves gain an understanding of the interaction of these factors, and their influence on the ability of individuals to obtain employment, if effective mechanisms facilitating the reintegration of these job seekers into the labour market are to be further developed. Our interviews sought to develop an understanding of the real and *perceived* barriers of long-term unemployed respondents across these three interlinked dynamics.

### **6.2 Respondents' perceived 'greatest barrier to work'**

6.2.1 The first question we posed to respondents required them to identify the single greatest barrier preventing their active participation in the labour market. Problems associated with respondents' specific and individual characteristics, their personal circumstances and their relationship with the labour market were represented amongst the wide range of answers provided (see table 6.1, below). Nonetheless, a significant proportion of our respondents could provide no explanation as to their lack of success in the labour market.

6.2.2 For the majority of our sample, personal history or characteristics were the key factors hampering their progress in the labour market. A lack of appropriate skills or qualifications was identified by 11.8 per cent of respondents as the greatest challenge that they faced, compared to less than 6 per cent who pointed to an absence of relevant work experience. A lack of confidence and health problems were also mentioned by significant minorities (both 7.3 per cent). Clearly a combination of personal and family circumstances and a lack of institutional support were considered to be of greater importance by the 10 per cent (approx.) of respondents who identified childcare issues as most affecting their ability to find and retain work. External factors – and specifically local labour market conditions – were also mentioned by a further 16 per cent of respondents (combining those expressing concern about the availability of opportunities and those dissatisfied with proposed wage levels).

6.2.3 The problem most regularly referred to by respondents asked to name their most significant barrier to work was that of age. For 17.3 per cent of respondents their age, combined with prejudicial assumptions made by employers about persons of their age, had resulted in their exclusion from the labour market. All of those who identified age as their greatest barrier to work were over 45 years old, and a third were over 55. The prominence of age as a factor amongst these results therefore reflects the manner in which it represents a dominant concern for middle aged job seekers. Clearly this group does face a degree of prejudice in the labour market, which perhaps may only be addressed through a process of mutually inclusive education and information-sharing involving both employers and more mature job seekers.

**Table 6.1 'Greatest barrier to work', as identified by respondents (% of total responses)**

| <i>Stated barrier to work</i>               | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Age                                         | 17.3                             |
| Lack of relevant skills or qualifications   | 11.8                             |
| Lack of appropriate job opportunities       | 11.8                             |
| Employer attitudes towards the unemployed   | 9.1                              |
| Health problems                             | 7.3                              |
| Lack of confidence or motivation            | 7.3                              |
| Lack of relevant work experience            | 5.5                              |
| Absence of affordable or reliable childcare | 9.9                              |
| Lack of adequately paid job opportunities   | 3.6                              |
| Concerns regarding the loss of benefits     | 1.9                              |
| Other/don't know                            | 14.5                             |
| <i>Total</i>                                | <i>100</i>                       |

6.2.4 The sheer variety of potential factors named by respondents when asked to identify a single and crucial barrier to work indicates the diverse nature of the problem of long-term unemployment (other key barriers mentioned by respondents ranged from substance addiction to employer prejudice on the basis of former trade union activism). Moreover, the problem is a complex and multi-dimensional one, so that in reality those excluded from the labour market for prolonged periods tend to face a range of inter-related personal and other problems. Accordingly, in order to develop solutions and services addressing the needs of long-term unemployed individuals, it is first necessary to understand *both* the real and the perceived barriers to work faced by members of that client group, and their awareness of and attitudes towards those barriers. In order to manage a detailed discussion of these issues it might be useful to return to the three categories discussed above: individual characteristics; personal circumstances; and, institutional barriers.

### 6.3 Individual characteristics: skills needs

6.3.1 In profiling our sample of long-term unemployed respondents in part two of this report, we identified a number of potentially crucial features within the educational and skills profiles of many members of that client group that might act as significant barriers to their progress in the labour market. However, when our interviewees were asked to rate their own skills, abilities and attributes, only a minority tended to identify and accept these personal limitations (see table 6.2).

6.3.2 Clearly the low educational and skills attainment of many of the long-term unemployed has the potential to represent a significant brake on their progress towards securing employment. Almost 60 per cent of our sample possessed no formal academic qualifications, and more than 60 per cent no vocational qualifications. A significant minority of our respondents were willing to 'own up' to the problems associated with their lack of skills and qualifications. For approximately 12 per cent of respondents it was perceived to be the most important single barrier to their success in the job market (see section 6.1 above). Similarly, over 36 per cent of interviewees evaluated their own formal qualifications as 'not adequate' (table 6.2). However, the majority preferred to describe their formal qualifications record as good or adequate. Furthermore, less than 9 per cent were willing to describe their literacy and numeracy skills as less than adequate and only one respondent identified literacy problems as the most important barrier to work that he/she faced. However, given the recent publication of a National Skills Taskforce (2000) report estimating that one-fifth of British adults (in total) suffer from literacy problems, it is perhaps not credible that our respondents' confidence in their own skills is reflected by reality.

**Table 6.2 Respondents' evaluation of their skills and attributes (% of total responses)**

| <i>Personal attribute/skill</i> | <i>Respondents' evaluation of own attainment (%)</i> |                 |                     |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
|                                 | <i>Good</i>                                          | <i>Adequate</i> | <i>Not adequate</i> |
| Formal qualifications           | 30.9                                                 | 32.7            | 36.4                |
| Relevant work experience        | 62.7                                                 | 22.8            | 14.5                |
| Job related skills              | 62.4                                                 | 25.7            | 11.9                |
| Presentation skills             | 57.3                                                 | 30.9            | 11.8                |
| Reliability                     | 78.2                                                 | 16.3            | 5.5                 |
| Motivation and enthusiasm       | 71.8                                                 | 23.6            | 4.6                 |
| Self-confidence                 | 57.3                                                 | 28.2            | 14.5                |
| Literacy and numeracy           | 61.8                                                 | 30.0            | 8.2                 |

6.3.3 Similarly, although the majority of our sample could point to no formal vocational qualifications attesting to their job-related skills, less than 12 per cent believed that their attainment in this area was less than adequate. It might, of course, be argued that the full range of skills held by individuals is rarely demonstrable through the attainment of formal qualifications, and that many jobs require few qualifications. Nonetheless, there is clear evidence to suggest that those who possess formal qualifications demonstrating their work skills tend to exhibit a far greater degree of flexibility and mobility within the labour market. Furthermore, it might be suggested that the lack of concern expressed by many respondents regarding their qualifications and work experience reflects a more general failure to fully acknowledge the barriers to work that they face.

6.3.4 Indeed, it is fair to conclude that alongside low levels of basic educational attainment and underdeveloped work skills, many amongst the long-term unemployed face a further barrier to work: that embodied in their failure to acknowledge and address these problems. It would appear that from an analysis of the above data we can now better explain the conundrum faced by many individuals amongst our sample of the long-term unemployed. There is a limited acknowledgement – but by no means a widespread acceptance – of the need to further develop and renew skills. (As we suggest in Part Four of this report, there is also a more generalised acceptance amongst respondents of the value of training.) However, as there remains a perceived stigma attached to many forms of very basic skills training (e.g. in literacy and numeracy), many members of our study group appeared reluctant to fully, or specifically, identify the extent of their needs in this area. Accordingly, it would appear that many amongst the long-term unemployed require a combination of different forms of assistance – first, to enable them to identify and accept their personal skills gap, and then to arrive at specific ways of addressing these problems through accessing further training or other provision.

#### 6.4 Individual characteristics: work experience and attachment to the labour market

6.4.1 Our interviews revealed a similar failure amongst respondents to broach the subject of work experience and the damaging effects of long-term unemployment. Indeed here the problem would appear to be more profound. Less than 6 per cent of respondents – all of whom had been unemployed for at least one year – identified a lack of relevant work experience as their most fundamental barrier to work (see table 6.1). Table 6.2 reveals that less than 15 per cent of respondents believed their work experience to be less than adequate. Perhaps this is unsurprising given our earlier findings, which identified that the majority of our study group perceived themselves as having a stable, or at the very least a healthy relationship with the labour market. There we argued that this finding could be viewed as a positive reflection of the strong attachment to the labour market sensed by the long-term

unemployed: despite their recent ill fortune, many of our clients clearly still *perceived* themselves to be workers.

6.4.2 An unfortunate corollary of this continued sense of attachment to their working lives is that many members of our study group have tended to underestimate the value of *recent* and relevant work experience, and to overlook the damaging effect on their work record of a prolonged and continuing period of unemployment. As we argued earlier in this report, many of the long-term unemployed – due to their skills levels or merely the length of their inactivity – may have to accept low skilled positions in the first instance. Employers seeking to recruit individuals to such positions value recent and relevant work experience, and evidence of a sound work record, above all else. We might therefore conclude that an important step for many long-term unemployed individuals must be to acknowledge the importance of work experience and the need to take action to develop – if at all possible – a record demonstrating a recent period of effective work performance within a paid position.

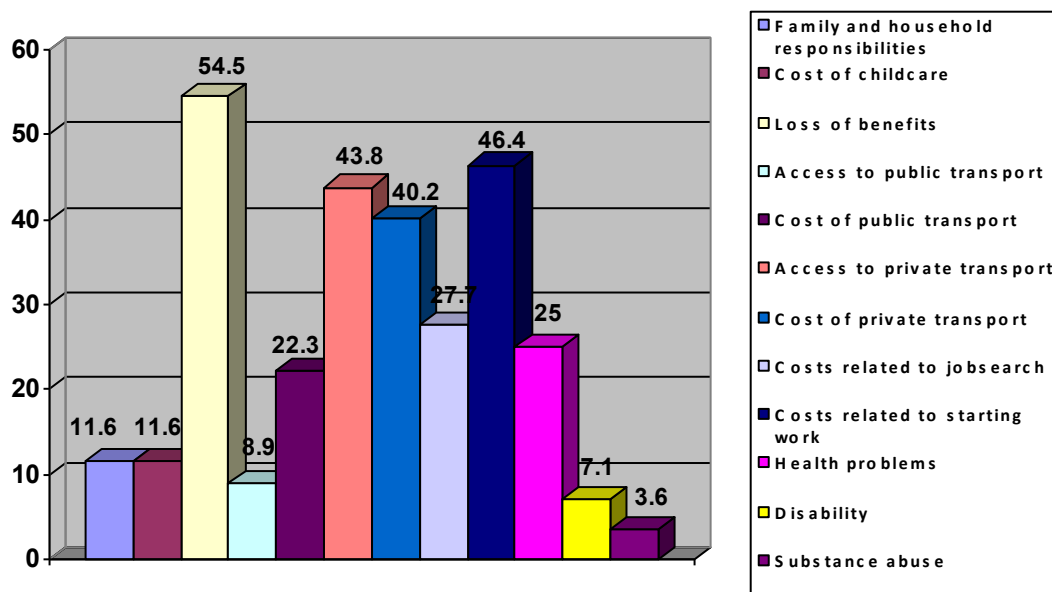
### 6.5 Personal circumstances

6.5.1 However, employment-focussed policy responses and individuals taking direct action cannot alone address the multi-dimensional problems faced by many long-term unemployed job seekers. Interviewees were also asked to identify whether a series of potential barriers related to their personal and household circumstances were of relevance in explaining their continued exclusion from the labour market (see figure 6.1, below). Whilst many respondents identified strongly with problems stemming from the interaction of their personal circumstances and existing government institutions and policies (and therefore open to reform or policy action), others pointed to a range of more fundamental elements within their personal circumstances (e.g. health problems) which may prove more difficult to respond to through policy intervention.

6.5.2 The marginal costs associated with starting work have long been identified as a major barrier to job entry for the long-term unemployed. Our interviews appear to confirm that this remains the case. The most regularly identified barriers to work amongst those suggested to respondents were ‘problems associated with losing benefits’ (54.5 per cent) and ‘costs associated with starting work’ (46.4 per cent). Whilst central government has recently introduced a number of reforms to the tax and benefit system designed to remove so-called ‘benefit traps’, there remain inflexible elements within the social security system (such as the waiting times required prior to the payment of passported benefits), which continue to cause concern amongst unemployed individuals considering a return to work. The loss of the protection from major expenses (such as local authority taxation) provided by passported benefits clearly remains a matter of some worry for prospective job seekers.



**Figure 6.1 Barriers to employment identified by respondents, related to personal and household circumstances (% of total responses)**



6.5.3 Transport issues were a matter of less concern for many of our respondents, though it was perhaps predictable that substantial minorities believed that their inability to access private transport was a factor limiting their ability to pursue and gain employment. Perhaps more notable, however, is the confirmation that less than 10 per cent of our sample identified access to public transport as being problematic. This ‘vote of confidence’ for Edinburgh’s public transport network would again appear to contradict the argument that there exists a peculiarly isolated and insular group of long-term unemployed individuals residing in peripheral areas of the city. Rather, our respondents appeared both aware and appreciative of local transport links within the city. However, it should also be noted that a larger proportion of respondents (22 per cent) expressed concern regarding the cost of using public transport.

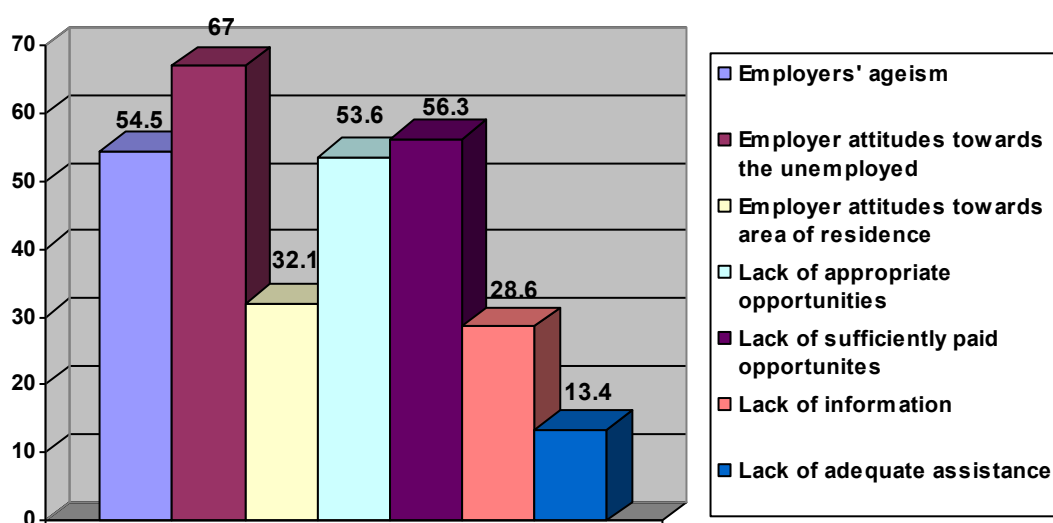
6.5.4 Relatively few respondents stressed their caring roles, or problems in accessing childcare as significant personal barriers to work (both 11.6 per cent). However, this merely reflects that few of our respondents’ domestic circumstances involved such pressures. For those who did have caring responsibilities the cost and availability of childcare was of particular concern (and was identified as a barrier to work by over half of respondents with children). It is also notable that these concerns had far greater currency amongst female respondents, with 52.4 per cent citing their caring role and 23 per cent naming childcare costs as representing barriers to work. Similarly, of the 10 per cent of our total respondents who named a lack of affordable, reliable childcare as their single greatest barrier to work, all were women.

6.5.5 Finally, it is notable that over a quarter of our respondents cited some form of health problem – though often fairly minor in nature – as hampering their pursuit of employment. As we reported earlier, for 7.7 per cent of respondents ill health represented the most important factor preventing their employment. When questioned further on this subject, 9.2 per cent of respondents reported suffering from a chronic or long term illness. A significant proportion of respondents were troubled by some form of disability. Although less than 2 per cent were registered disabled, 8.3 per cent ‘considered themselves to be disabled’, and, as reported in figure 6.1 above, 7.3 per cent perceived disability to be amongst their barriers to work.

### 6.6 External and institutional barriers

6.6.1 Finally, we turn to our respondents’ perceptions of the external and institutional barriers preventing them from accessing the labour market, including employer attitudes, government policies and procedures, and the state of the local economy (see figure 6.2, below). For a limited but still significant minority of respondents (17.3 per cent), age was the single greatest barrier to work that they faced. For many more (54.5 per cent) age discrimination is perceived as contributing to some extent to their continued unemployment. More than half of those citing the effects of ageism as a perceived barrier to work were aged 45 years or older. However, a further 30 per cent were in the 35-44 age group, with 13 per cent between 25 and 34 years old. Amongst all age groups there appears to be an accepted view that many employers prefer to appoint school leavers or other young persons to entry level positions in an attempt to minimise wage costs and, it is perceived, absenteeism.

**Figure 6.2 ‘External factors’ identified by respondents as barriers to work**  
(% of all responses)



6.6.2 Respondents' perceptions as to the existence of so-called 'postcodeism' – employer discrimination on the grounds of area of residence – appeared to differ significantly between study areas. In total, 32 per cent of respondents identified this form of discrimination as a relevant problem, but residents of Wester Hailes were much more likely to perceive area-based discrimination as an issue of importance (50 per cent), compared to those hailing from the North Edinburgh or Leith areas (35 per cent and 23 per cent respectively). Sample numbers from the other study areas were considered to small to be useful for comparative purposes. Nonetheless, if residents of Wester Hailes do perceive themselves to be particularly discriminated against, then the reasons behind this attitude may be a worthy subject for further research.

6.6.3 However, when presented with a range of potential 'external' barriers to work, respondents most clearly identified with factors related to differing forms of lack of opportunity within the local economy. The most regularly identified external or institutional brakes on job seekers' progress in the labour market were 'a lack of adequately paid opportunities' (named by 56.3 per cent), closely followed by 'a lack of appropriate or obtainable opportunities' (53.6 per cent). Given the manner in which the vast majority of respondents identified the Edinburgh economy (at a minimum) as an acceptable geographical focus for their job search, we must then consider why they remain unable to identify appropriate opportunities within this clearly very healthy labour market. An inability to access information about employment opportunities may offer one explanation. However, the majority of respondents suggested that they visited Employment Service job centres on a weekly basis, and only a relatively limited – though not entirely insignificant – proportion (28.6 per cent) identified inadequate access to information as a relevant barrier to employment. Even fewer respondents (13.4 per cent) expressed dissatisfaction about the job search assistance provided by the Employment Service.

6.6.4 Rather, we might infer that many members of our sample group, whilst satisfied with the sources of information from which they receive notice of job opportunities, are not satisfied with the opportunities that are available. These important findings support the arguments outlined earlier in this report, that for many of the long-term unemployed, their attitude regarding the *type of work* that they consider to be acceptable acts as a significant – but largely unidentified – personal barrier to employment. As we conclude in Part Seven of this report, the boundaries placed upon their job search by the long term unemployed tend to apply to sectors of the economy rather than geographical areas. It is this form of sectoral prejudice against certain types of work that contributes to the barriers excluding the long-term unemployed from the active labour market. A obvious conclusion to follow from this finding might be that the long-term unemployed would benefit from efforts to increase their awareness of the potential benefits in pursuing opportunities in types of work and sectors of the economy from which they currently withhold their interest.

## 6.7 'What are the chances?' – Overcoming barriers to work

6.7.1 On balance, the majority of our respondents who expressed a clear opinion remained optimistic regarding their job prospects. When asked to rate their prospects of locating employment within the following three months, almost half of our sample suggested that they were 'very good' (13.4 per cent) or 'fairly good' (36.6 per cent). This was, to an extent, balanced by a total of almost 35 per cent who described their prospects as 'fairly poor' or 'very poor'. A further 15.2 per cent 'did not know'.

**Table 6.3 Respondents' perceived prospects of finding work within three months (% of total responses)**

| <i>Perceived prospects of finding work</i> | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| "Very good"                                | 13.4                             |
| "Fairly good"                              | 36.6                             |
| "Fairly poor"                              | 22.3                             |
| "Very poor"                                | 12.5                             |
| "Don't know"                               | 15.2                             |
| <i>Total</i>                               | <i>100</i>                       |

6.7.2 However, the majority of long-term unemployed job seekers believed that Edinburgh's recent economic success would continue to leave them in its wake. Asked if Edinburgh's economic 'boom' would improve their job prospects, 55.3 per cent of respondents answered 'no' (with many amongst them questioning the existence of the phenomenon). Nevertheless, there is perhaps encouragement for the relevant local authorities in the opinions expressed by 17.6 per cent of our sample, who foresaw positive personal benefits following from the boom. A further 16.5 per cent believed that their employment prospects might 'possibly' be improved as a result of the economic growth within the city.

**Table 6.4 Respondents' views as to whether 'Edinburgh's economic boom' will improve their prospects of finding work (% of total responses)**

| <i>Attitude regarding benefits of 'boom'</i> | <i>Percentage of respondents</i> |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| "It will improve my job prospects"           | 17.6                             |
| "It might possibly improve my job prospects" | 16.5                             |
| "It will not improve my job prospects"       | 55.3                             |
| "Don't know"                                 | 10.6                             |
| <i>Total</i>                                 | <i>100</i>                       |

6.7.3 The discrepancy between these two measures of respondents' optimism can be explained in a number of ways. Given their residence in areas of relative deprivation and high unemployment, respondents might be less aware of the recent expansion of Edinburgh's economy, but still broadly optimistic regarding their own employment prospects. However, this would appear not to fit in with the willingness expressed by many to look for work across Edinburgh and Lothian. For some more intransigent members of our sample group, a refusal to acknowledge the 'boom' may well reflect an attempt to blame external conditions and 'reject ownership' of their own problem: i.e. that of long-term unemployment.

6.7.4 Perhaps it is most likely, however, that our respondents' scepticism again reflects a generally inflexible and static view of the labour market and their role within it. As we have argued above, and conclude below, many of our respondents exhibit a willingness to work but a lack of awareness of, or interest in, the growing sectors of the Edinburgh economy and the types of job that they would find easiest to access. It appears that for many amongst the long-term unemployed, their search for work is an intensely personal project, which sadly fails to acknowledge the realities of the local economy and labour market. This can lead to a failure to exploit appropriate opportunities, or (as table 6.4 suggests) an inability to even identify the opportunities that are available.

### 6.8 Long-term unemployment and barriers to work: conclusions

6.8.1 Our sample of long-term unemployed individuals face a series of severe barriers to active participation in the labour market. For significant numbers of our respondents their personal characteristics (in terms of educational and skills attainment) and work record clearly represent important barriers to work. An apparent further problem relates to the lack of awareness displayed by many respondents of their relatively poor skills and, even more importantly, the satisfaction expressed by many with their work experience, despite their prolonged period of recent unemployment.

6.8.2 Policy measures that might benefit the long-term unemployed must therefore address both the employability and skills needs of job seekers and, first, their awareness of those needs. Only by helping members of this group to identify the gaps that exist in their own basic skills can we then hope to direct them towards appropriate training or other provision. For the more 'job ready' of the long-term unemployed, career guidance should remind them of the crucial importance of recent and relevant work experience to the recruiting decisions of employers, and policy interventions should emphasise practical and (if possible) 'on-the-job' training.

6.8.3 The majority of our respondents expressed concern regarding the impact that the loss of welfare benefits would have on their incomes, whilst a similar proportion were dissatisfied by the levels of remuneration offered by many jobs within the local economy. Only national government can take appropriate actions to continue the process of modernisation within our social security system, ensuring that the flexibility that characterises today's labour market is reflected within the regulations governing payments to the unemployed. However, many of our respondents may be assisted by the provision of a greater amount of easily accessible information about the tax and benefits systems. This would enable them to make better informed choices in their pursuit of appropriate job opportunities, and may result in them considering a wider range of possible routes into the active labour market.

6.8.4 Similarly, by informing the long-term unemployed as to the potential benefits associated with areas of employment about which many seem wary, it might be possible to widen the frame of reference used by job seekers when looking for work. Our findings point to a client group less bound by any form of geographical insularity, than by a restrictive approach to the sectors of the economy within which they are willing to seek employment. By encouraging all job seekers to consider a wider range of entry-level positions and to include within their job search posts located within the rapidly growing service, hospitality and retail sectors of the Edinburgh economy, policy makers may be able to encourage many long-term unemployed individuals to take appropriate actions that will facilitate their own access to employment.

## **Part Seven: Main findings, conclusions and potential for policy action**

### **7.1 Long-term unemployment in five areas of Edinburgh**

7.1.1 A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis. The research presented therein provides a detailed analysis of a limited sample of the long-term unemployed in five areas of the city. It raises a number of issues regarding the barriers to work faced by these job seekers, relating to their individual characteristics, their personal and household circumstances, and their perceptions of the institutional and economic conditions affecting their relationship with the labour market. Further research is required in order to place our current findings in context, by developing a more detailed comparative analysis of the characteristics and experiences of the claimant and non-claimant unemployed, and (where possible) making meaningful comparisons between the long-term jobless, other unemployed groups and the wider labour force. Nevertheless, we are able to draw a number of preliminary conclusions from the research as it currently stands.

### **7.2 The long-term unemployed and the skills gap**

7.2.1 Over 60 per cent of our long-term unemployed respondents possessed no formal academic qualifications, or had failed to achieve pass rates at SCE Standard grade (or equivalent). A similar proportion had no formal vocational qualifications, and well over 40 per cent of our sample possessed neither academic, nor vocational qualifications. When compared with levels of educational and skills attainment in the wider Scottish economy, it is apparent that the skills gap experienced by many long-term unemployed individuals will present a significant barrier to their progress in the labour market. Whilst many employers recruiting to low-skilled, service-focussed or entry-level positions prioritise other attributes above the possession of qualifications, those with no qualifications tend to find their movement within the labour market severely restricted. Furthermore, for some respondents, their failure to obtain formal qualifications will reflect a more basic lack of educational attainment, further restricting their opportunities for advancement towards more skilled and better paid positions within the labour market.

7.2.2 Yet the majority of those with no formal qualifications nonetheless described their attainment in this area as good or at least adequate. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents expressed confidence in their job related skills. Whilst a significant minority accepted that their academic and vocational qualifications were not adequate, less than 10 per cent admitted to poor literacy and/or numeracy skills – a surprisingly low figure given the scale of the problem amongst the general population. This last finding perhaps reflects an

element of sample bias that, to some extent, affects many of the conclusions to be drawn from our research (e.g. in this case, it is fair to assume that more articulate and literate individuals would be more likely to agree to participate in our interviews). However, it remains clear that the difference between the job seekers' perceptions of 'what is acceptable' in terms of skill levels and employers' expectations may represent a further barrier to work in itself.

7.2.3 Furthermore, these findings clearly highlight the reluctance of many amongst the long-term unemployed to acknowledge basic gaps in their skills and knowledge, perhaps due to the stigma attached to low levels of basic educational and skills attainment. However, the long-term unemployed exhibit a willingness to undertake training towards employment. The majority of those who had previously attended government training programmes viewed the experience in a positive manner, and a majority of all job seekers believed that further training would be of benefit. These job seekers demonstrate what might be termed as a sense of willingness in search of guidance: whilst many were enthusiastic about the possibilities of training, their understanding of their skills needs was often at best vague, and few had any real notion as to what form any training would most usefully take.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b><i>The long-term unemployed and the skills gap: potential for policy action</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Policy interventions designed to assist the long-term unemployed towards entering work should first provide advice and counselling, enabling clients to acknowledge their skills needs, and then to identify and participate in appropriate training and/or other provision.</li><li>• Programmes designed to develop clients' basic educational attainment should seek to minimise any sense of stigma attached to participation. Recent initiatives promoted by central government have linked basic training and education (for example, in literacy skills) to less 'stigmatised' forms of instruction in computing and other fields. The adoption of such innovative approaches at the local level might prove to be of considerable value.</li><li>• Training and education should be linked to the award of recognised qualifications, but should follow a modular structure, enabling individuals to learn at their own pace. Wherever possible the long-term unemployed should be integrated into mainstream education and training provision, although additional support may have to be offered to those faced with particularly severe learning problems.</li><li>• Job-oriented training provision should, where possible and appropriate, seek to integrate participants into 'real life' working environments, and should emphasise the development of basic, practical work skills (see 7.3, below).</li></ul> |
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### 7.3 The long-term unemployed and the experience gap

7.3.1 By definition, the recent labour market experience of the long-term unemployed tends to be severely limited. However, the majority of respondents described their working life in



terms suggesting that they retained a strong sense of attachment to the labour market, and a self-image grounded in their former work-based activities. The downside of this largely positive psychological feature is that many long-term job seekers tended to undervalue the usefulness of recent and relevant work experience. Less than 15 per cent of respondents considered their work experience to be less than adequate, despite the fact that all of our respondents had not undertaken full-time work in the past 12 months. Respondents were apparently unaware that the recent work record of candidates is a crucial factor affecting employers' recruiting decisions, and this lack of awareness may be viewed as feeding into the rather restrictive attitudes towards looking for work expressed by many respondents (see 7.4).

***The long-term unemployed and the experience gap: potential for policy action***

- Given their lack of recent experience and (in many cases) skills, the long-term unemployed are mostly likely to find work in relatively low skilled positions, in the first instance. Employers recruiting to low-skilled, entry-level positions have tended to place a great emphasis upon applicants' work records, and it is therefore essential that the importance of recent and relevant work experience is stressed to job seekers. It may be useful to involve employers in a process of information-sharing with job seekers, that might better inform the latter as to the qualities most valued by recruiters. The most job-ready amongst the long-term unemployed should be encouraged to consider the widest possible range of routes back into the active labour market, so that they might renew their experience and work record.
- Job-related training should emphasise basic and practical (but transferable) work skills, and should involve work with employers in 'real life' working environments. As discussed in section 7.4, below, there is evidence to suggest that training which offers participants useful work experience, realistic remuneration and individual support (e.g. through intermediate labour market programmes) can significantly improve the employability of even the very long-term unemployed.

***7.4 Opening new routes into employment for the long-term unemployed***

7.4.1 Many long-term unemployed job seekers expressed a desire, or need, to earn salaries that are rarely payable in the kind of entry-level positions that they are most likely to be appointed to, given their lack of recent experience and skills. This finding might be viewed as reflecting first, respondents' concerns regarding the withdrawal of passported benefits and the transitional costs involved in starting work, and second, the job types and forms of work being sought by job seekers.

7.4.2 The former point relates to the frequently raised criticism of national social security arrangements, which suggests that the United Kingdom possesses a flexible labour market,

but an inflexible benefits system (see Part One of this report). Many of our respondents expressed concern regarding the withdrawal of passported benefits (assisting them with rent and Council Tax payments), and the potential for bureaucratic delays in reclaiming these benefits should their employment prove to be short-lived. Others simply believed that, given the low wage levels paid in many positions, they remained 'better off on benefit'.

7.4.3 However, the levels of remuneration sought by our respondents also reflect a certain lack of flexibility exhibited by some job seekers in their own approach to looking for work. Indeed, there is strong evidence to suggest that the job search strategies employed by many amongst the long-term unemployed might be too narrowly focussed according to *job type*. Many respondents were keen to return to areas of employment where previously they had enjoyed personal success, whilst others were determined to 'move up the ladder' within the labour market by gaining better paid and more secure employment. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of our sample were males, many of whom were not enthusiastic about pursuing work in the hospitality and service sectors – sectors that are growing rapidly within Edinburgh and many other local economies. The restrictive approach to looking for work employed by many of our respondents might therefore be viewed as a considerable barrier to their progress within the active labour market in its own right.

***New routes into employment for the long-term unemployed: potential for policy action***

- Whilst the current government has introduced a range of measures seeking to eliminate benefit traps, greater flexibility (particularly in the administration of passported benefits) would free job seekers to pursue a wider range of opportunities. In particular, there may be a case for the extension of transitional assistance, in terms of the temporary continuation of limited forms of housing-related benefits, and even the provision of 'start up' grants or loans for those entering work and awaiting their first salary payments.
- In the meantime, information regarding the transitional assistance currently offered by the government and others, and recent initiatives designed to 'make work pay' (such as the Working Families Tax Credit and the Minimum Wage), should be promoted amongst the long-term unemployed. An easily accessible service advising job seekers of the specific consequences of taking up a particular job opportunity, would clearly assist individuals to make better informed choices about re-entering work.
- A more flexible system of earnings disregards under the Job Seeker's Allowance would also benefit the long-term unemployed. Allowing job seekers to retain a greater proportion of income from part-time earnings would encourage further participation in this form of work (at present JSA claimants' benefit payments are reduced in accordance with any part-time earnings over £5 for single people and £10 for couples). Such a reform would encourage more job seekers to work part-time, thus retaining links with the active labour market. It would also discourage petty benefit fraud amongst those currently undertaking undeclared work in an effort to 'make ends meet'.

### ***New routes into employment for the long-term unemployed: potential for policy action***

- Given the importance of recent and relevant work experience for employers, efforts should be made to convince job seekers of the potential value of accepting entry level positions with advancement prospects and realistic salary expectations as a means of finding a route back into the active labour market. Furthermore long-term unemployed job seekers should be made aware of, and encouraged to pursue, opportunities within the growing hospitality, tourism, retail and service sectors.
- Employers, particularly from the service sector, should be involved alongside other interested parties in efforts to promote opportunities in these areas of the economy. More accessible and accurate information about pay and conditions, job roles and career prospects in these sectors might encourage job seekers to put aside past prejudices and consider such new occupations as alternative routes into employment. Similarly, employers must be encouraged to consider without prejudice applications from long-term unemployed males and older job seekers for service-focussed positions more traditionally associated with female or younger workers.
- Training provision should reflect the sectoral and occupational demand for labour within the local economy. It should take place in geographically central areas which are accessible by public transport, and where job seekers might reasonably be required to travel to in order to find and undertake employment. The most effective form of training from the job seeker's view point may well also address their concerns about maintaining an acceptable standard of living. Locally run programmes that offer real work experience, whilst paying 'rate-for-the-job' allowances have proved to be successful in the past and have provided the basis for the design of the New Deal for Young People's employment option. However, it is clear that more detailed consideration is required prior to any attempt to develop new and effective approaches to delivering training for the long-term unemployed. Further discussions on this matter should involve the local authority, the Employment Service, area-based training and placement agencies and other providers.

### ***7.5 The search for work***

7.5.1 The long-term unemployed tend to carry out relatively low levels of job seeking activity. Many would clearly benefit from a more structured environment and the provision of extra resources facilitating their job search. To this end, the demise of the Employment Service's 'Job Clubs' appears to have been unhelpful, and was specifically mentioned by a number of job seekers as being a matter of regret.

7.5.2 A wide range of methods were employed by respondents whilst looking for work, though the vast majority used job centre vacancy boards and local newspapers as their main

sources of employment information. The reluctance of many to approach the Employment Service's staff for advice, even when using other job centre resources, indicates that the ES must continue to work towards the development of a more 'user friendly' approach and image. In the meantime, it might indicate that there is a continuing need for alternative forms or sources of job search advice and counselling to be provided by non-governmental agencies.

7.5.3 Finally, it should be noted that more than one-quarter of respondents had used the internet in order to search for work (12 per cent used this method on at least a weekly basis). Approximately 18 per cent of our sample had access to the internet at home. Given this fact, and the already extensive use of new communications technology by the local authority, community groups and other organisations in Edinburgh, the internet may have the potential to provide an important means of disseminating information about employment and training opportunities in the near future.

***The long-term unemployed and the search for work: potential for policy action***

- The re-establishment of 'Job Club' services, whether run by the Employment Service or local non-governmental providers, would benefit the long-term unemployed. Whilst similar provision is available to those with particular problems through the ES, a more generalised network of assistance for all long-term job seekers is apparently required.
- The service would provide resources and hands-on support for job searching (e.g. assistance with writing CVs, covering letters and application forms; help with strategic job search skills; confidence building and interview techniques). A general city-wide service might be complimented by more targeted forms of support established through collaboration with local area agencies, voluntary bodies (e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureaux) and organisations catering for special interest groups such as single parents. In order to maximise attendance, services should initially be based in job seekers' immediate locality, but should share information – and welcome clients – from across the city.
- Initial steps should be taken by the local authority and other interested groups towards the establishment of a project linking the Employment Service's internet services with web-based information on training and employment opportunities already being provided by a number of community groups. The City Council might be an appropriate co-ordinating body for these activities, with their key objective being a comprehensive website providing access to information on education, training and employment in Edinburgh and beyond.

***7.6 A problem of geography?***

7.6.1 Whilst significant numbers amongst the long-term unemployed restrict their search for work according to job type, very few limit their job seeking activities on the grounds of geography. Indeed, respondents displayed little concern about the prospect of travelling

across the city and even the region in order to obtain work. The practicality of these suggestions may be questionable in some cases, but importantly these findings confirm that only a small minority of job seekers were particularly concerned to stay within their specific, immediate locality. The vast majority also expressed satisfaction with public transport links, although a substantial minority were concerned about the level of fare charges.

7.6.2 Thus, few of our respondents appeared to suffer from feelings of geographical insularity or psychological isolation. The restrictions placed by our respondents on *where* they looked for work tended to be sectoral rather than area-based, and economic rather than geographical. As we have suggested above, if many amongst the long-term unemployed can be convinced of the value of broadening their job search to encompass types of occupation previously excluded from their frame of reference, there is hope that they might be able to access the opportunities that are undoubtedly available within the city's centre and elsewhere.

***The long-term unemployed and labour market geography: potential for policy action***

- Given that many amongst the long-term unemployed have reported no real sense of geographical isolation, a review of area-based approaches to the delivery of services may be required. Some services may be more efficiently and effectively provided by specialist workers or bodies rather than being split between five or more area-based agencies. A city-wide approach would also prevent certain long-term unemployed individuals from 'falling through the cracks' because they do not live in a priority-partnership area.
- Services based in more central locations may also prove to be easier to reach for many individuals (as suggested by City Council data on the geography of the unemployed) and would encourage the long-term unemployed to adopt a routine involving travelling regularly outside their area of residence (as they may be required to do if successful in finding work). However, care must be taken to ensure that participation rates are not affected by any change of geographical focus, and additional travel costs would have to be underwritten by service providers. Clearly, further research is required in order to fully explore the potential benefits and problems associated with a city-wide-focussed approach to delivering services for the long-term unemployed.

***7.7 Long-term unemployment: a complex and multi-dimensional problem***

7.7.1 Working with long-term unemployed respondents in five particularly affected areas of Edinburgh, we have identified a wide range of personal, circumstantial and institutional barriers – both real and perceived – blocking individuals' routes back into active participation in the labour market. Many of these barriers have been discussed in sections 7.1 to 7.6 above. However, we should not ignore others. For job seekers with family responsibilities, the availability of reliable and affordable childcare was a significant issue (and one which must be

examined at local authority and Scottish Executive level if we are to arrive at appropriate policy responses assisting both those parents in work and those seeking employment). Others amongst our sample group were concerned that their opportunities were being restricted by employer discrimination against the unemployed or on the grounds of their area of residence, whilst a significant proportion cited their age and the ageism practised by recruiters as important barriers preventing their entry into work.

7.7.2 Indeed, many of our respondents suggested that their age – combined with the attitudes of employers towards older job seekers – was the *crucial* factor contributing to their continued isolation from the active labour market. Even amongst respondents aged in their thirties, significant numbers expressed the concern that employers preferred younger people, who were more ‘flexible’ in terms of acceptable levels of pay and conditions. The demographic pressures inflicted by our ageing population will, it is hoped, continue to undermine ageism in the long term, and Edinburgh’s current high levels of labour demand may provide more immediate opportunities for older job seekers. In the medium term, there might be value in efforts to strengthen networks of mutual information sharing, so that employers practising fair recruitment may effectively communicate opportunities, and older job seekers may access relevant job details and present themselves to both open-minded and more sceptical employers.

### 7.8 Concluding remarks and issues for further research

7.8.1 It is clear that the majority of long-term unemployed people face very significant, and often multiple, barriers to work. Accordingly, multiple policy responses from a range of agencies – local and national, governmental and non-governmental – are required if the full range of problems identified by this study are to be addressed. Nevertheless, we can identify a number of key issues. Many of the long-term unemployed are profoundly disadvantaged in terms of educational and skills attainment. Many more are impeded by a lack of recent and relevant work experience. Furthermore, for a significant number of long-term job seekers, the narrowness of their job search strategies and their attitudes towards certain types of work represent barriers in themselves. Yet the majority of our respondents expressed a strong sense of attachment to the world of work and an enthusiasm for training and personal development.

7.8.2 Policy interventions – whether designed and implemented at the local or national level – must seek to offer *tailored* and *individually relevant* assistance, thus enabling the long-term unemployed to identify and address their personal developmental and skills needs, target appropriate education, training and employment opportunities and, for the job ready, make the successful transition from unemployment (and often welfare dependency) into work.

7.8.3 Further research is required in order to place the above findings in context. Those registered as unemployed and claiming benefits clearly face different pressures from unregistered job seekers, many of whom – whilst still keen to work – have access to other sources of financial support. Furthermore, many of the barriers to work discussed above may also affect those who find themselves unemployed for shorter (but perhaps more frequent) periods of time, so that we may have much to learn from comparing the experiences of the long-term unemployed, other excluded groups and the general labour force.

7.8.4 Most importantly, prior to the development of policy responses reflecting the conclusions of any research, current structures and approaches must be given due consideration, and the implications of change must be fully explored. The first stage in this process might be the completion of a thorough-going ‘audit’ of existing provision in the local area. By establishing the extent and nature of the placement, counselling, training and other forms of provision currently available, we can address gaps within the existing range of services and identify the potential for synergies between service providers and programmes aimed at the long-term unemployed.

7.8.5 Such an exercise (involving local authorities, educational institutions, voluntary sector bodies, independent service providers, and government departments and agencies), might facilitate the development of a more consistent and coherent approach to policy making, or at the very least help to avoid the duplication of efforts and the unnecessary waste of resources. The same organisations should be fully consulted during the subsequent implementation of any new policy initiatives, as should employers’ representatives. Indeed, the participation and co-operation of employers will be vital to the success of any initiative designed to assist the long-term unemployed to find work. Employers must be persuaded to take an active role in the design and delivery of training. Even more importantly they must be convinced that old attitudes towards the unemployed, older job seekers, and gender roles in employment are redundant within a local economy whose continued expansion is threatened by a shortage of labour in a number of important sectors.

7.8.6 Long-term unemployment remains a complex and multi-dimensional problem. However, it is to be hoped that the findings presented in the preceding report, and the conclusions and points for discussion briefly mentioned above, will provide legislators, policy makers and service providers with some fresh insight into the combination of challenges facing the long-term unemployed. Only by continuing to search for the fullest possible understanding of these challenges can key actors hope to arrive at appropriate policy interventions addressing the needs and problems of this group. In providing an analysis of long-term unemployment in five areas of Edinburgh, this report seeks to offer a minor contribution towards that understanding.





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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Unemployment and long-term unemployment in the study areas**

#### **Claimant long-term unemployment (numbers registered as unemployed with the Employment Service for 12 months or more), April 2000**

(Note: Fieldwork research was carried out between April 20<sup>th</sup> and May 25<sup>th</sup> 2000.)

Source: Office for National Statistics/Employment Service Information Service

#### **North Edinburgh study area**

|                                                 | Pilton | Muirhouse | Granton | North Edinburgh |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------|-----------|---------|-----------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 40     | 75        | 40      | 155             |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 27%    | 19%       | 20%     | 24%             |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 5      | 10        | 7       | 22              |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 19%    | 19%       | 14%     | 17%             |
|                                                 |        |           |         |                 |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 45     | 85        | 47      | 177             |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 25%    | 25%       | 19%     | 23%             |

#### **Leith study area**

|                                                 | Fort | Lorne | Harbour | Leith study area |
|-------------------------------------------------|------|-------|---------|------------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 50   | 37    | 63      | 150              |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 30%  | 22%   | 28%     | 26%              |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 10   | 2     | 10      | 22               |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 21%  | 4%    | 15%     | 13%              |
|                                                 |      |       |         |                  |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 60   | 39    | 73      | 172              |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 28%  | 18%   | 25%     | 24%              |

#### **South Edinburgh study area**

|                                                 | Prestonfield | Kaimes | Inch | Gilmerton | South Edinburgh |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|------|-----------|-----------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 9            | 41     | 44   | 27        | 121             |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 20%          | 25%    | 24%  | 22%       | 23%             |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 2            | 7      | 5    | 2         | 16              |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 15%          | 23%    | 13%  | 7%        | 15%             |
|                                                 |              |        |      |           |                 |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 11           | 48     | 49   | 29        | 137             |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 19%          | 25%    | 22%  | 19%       | 22%             |

### **Wester Hailes study area**

|                                                 | North Hailes | South Hailes | <b>Wester Hailes study area</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 55           | 55           | 110                             |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 27%          | 24%          | 25%                             |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 3            | 10           | 13                              |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 6%           | 17%          | 11%                             |
|                                                 |              |              |                                 |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 58           | 65           | 123                             |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 23%          | 22%          | 22%                             |

### **Craigmillar study area**

|                                                 | Craigmillar | Niddrie | <b>Craigmillar study area</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------|---------|-------------------------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 38          | 35      | 73                            |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 22%         | 26%     | 24%                           |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 6           | 1       | 7                             |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 14%         | 4%      | 10%                           |
|                                                 |             |         |                               |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 44          | 36      | 80                            |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 21%         | 22%     | 21%                           |

### **Total: all study areas**

|                                                 | <b>All Study Areas</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Long-term unemployment (number of males)        | 609                    |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (males)   | 25%                    |
| Long-term unemployment (number of females)      | 80                     |
| Long-term unemp. % total unemployment (females) | 14%                    |
|                                                 |                        |
| Total long-term unemp. (number of persons)      | 689                    |
| Total long-term unemp. (% total unemployment)   | 23%                    |

## **APPENDIX 2**

**Questionnaire design used as the basis for interviews carried with long-term unemployed respondents in study areas**

**Part One: Assess Suitability for Questionnaire**

**1.1 For how long have you currently been unemployed?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Part Two: Household Circumstances**

**2.1 In which area of Edinburgh do you live?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2.2 What is your postcode?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2.3 For how long have you lived at your current address?** \_\_\_\_\_

**2.4 Which of the following best describes your current accommodation?**

- Rented from Council
- Rented from Housing Association
- Rented: private sector (furnished)
- Rented: private sector (unfurnished)
- Owner occupied
- Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**2.5 Which of the following best describes your household?**

- Single person, living alone
- Single, living in shared accommodation
- Living with spouse/permanent partner without children
- Living with spouse/permanent partner with children
- Lone parent
- Living with parent(s)/other family members
- Other (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

**2.6 If you have children who live with you what are their ages:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**2.7 Do you have responsibilities for caring for adults in your household, if so please provide brief details:**

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**2.8 If you are living with a spouse/permanent partner, are they:**

- |                                                                              |                                                                 |                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Employed (full time) <input type="checkbox"/>                                | Employed (part time) <input type="checkbox"/>                   | Registered unemployed <input type="checkbox"/>                        |
| Undertaking government or other training programmes <input type="checkbox"/> | Not employed due to illness/disability <input type="checkbox"/> | Not employed, and dependent upon your income <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                              | Retired <input type="checkbox"/>                                | Other (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>                         |

**2.9 Which benefits are you currently receiving?**

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**2.10 Please estimate your average total net (take home) household income per week:**

- |                                         |                                    |                                         |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| less than £100 <input type="checkbox"/> | £100<£150 <input type="checkbox"/> | £150<£200 <input type="checkbox"/>      |
| £200<£250 <input type="checkbox"/>      | £250<£300 <input type="checkbox"/> | More than £300 <input type="checkbox"/> |

### Part Three: Experience of the Labour Market

**3.1 What were you doing immediately before your current period of unemployment? (please tick all the boxes that apply):**

- |                                                                   |                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Full time employment (35 hrs+) <input type="checkbox"/>           | Full time education <input type="checkbox"/>              |
| Part time employment <input type="checkbox"/>                     | Government/other training scheme <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Not in employment, education or training <input type="checkbox"/> | Other..... <input type="checkbox"/>                       |

**3.2 If you were working before your current period of unemployment, in which industry or type of business were you most regularly employed? \_\_\_\_\_**

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**3.3 How would describe your working life since leaving school?**

e.g. Have you spent most of your time in stable employment?;  
Or have you moved between a number of short-term jobs?;  
Have you been unemployed on a number of previous occasions?;  
Or have you spent long periods caring for your family or claiming other benefits?

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**3.4 For what reason did you leave your last employment?**

Redundancy  Family/caring responsibilities  Ill health   
Dismissal  End of temporary/casual employment  Retirement   
Other (please state): \_\_\_\_\_

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**3.5 Under the Jobseekers Allowance rules you are permitted to undertake part time work for up to sixteen hours per week. Have you done any part time work (less than 16 hours) whilst signing on during your current period of unemployment?**

Yes  No

**Part Four: Education, Qualifications and Training**

**4.1 At what age did you finish your continuous full-time education at school or college?**

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**4.2 Which secondary school(s) did you attend? (please provide name of school and town):** \_\_\_\_\_

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**4.3 From the following list, please tick the highest level of academic qualification that you have obtained:**

- No formal qualifications
- SCE Standard Grade or Ordinary Grade 1-3
- SCE Standard Grade 4-7 or Ordinary Grade 4-5
- SCE Higher Grade A-C
- SCE Higher Grade D-E
- Scottish School Leaving Certificate
- GCE O Level/GCSE Grade A-C
- GCE O Level/GCSE Grades D-G
- GCE A Level, S Level or AS Level
- Degree or degree level qualification

Any other qualification (please state)

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**4.4 From the following list, please tick the highest level of vocational qualification that you have obtained:**

- No formal qualifications
- Higher National Certificate or BTEC
- Higher National Diploma
- RSA or other clerical qualifications
- Teaching, nursing or other professional qualification (membership awarded by a professional institute)
- SVQ/NVQ Level 1-2 or GNVQ (Intermediate/Foundation)
- SVQ/NVQ Level 3 or GNVQ Advanced
- SVQ/NVQ Level 4
- SVQ/NVQ Level 5

Any other qualification (please state)

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**4.5 Have you participated in one or more of the following training/jobsearch programmes over the past year? (SHOW CARD A)**

- |                        |                                |                          |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| New Deal:              | Gateway                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Employment option              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Environmental taskforce        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Voluntary sector option        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Education option               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Follow-through                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                        | Other provision (please state) | _____                    |
| Employment Service     |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Skillseekers           |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Training for work      |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job club               |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Work trials            |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local college courses  |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Modern apprenticeship  |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| YT                     |                                | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify) |                                | _____                    |

**4.6 Do you think this has improved your chances of getting a job?**

Yes  No

**4.7 Do you think that being provided with further training or other assistance would help you to find a job?**

Yes  No  If yes, what type of training or other assistance would have the most beneficial impact on your ability to locate employment?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part Five: Looking for Work**

**5.1 Which of the following statements most accurately describes your current attitude to looking for work?**

- |                                                                               |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I am actively seeking work, and I have looked for work in the past seven days | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am actively seeking work, and I have looked for work in the past four weeks | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I want to work, but I have not looked for work in the past four weeks         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am not actively looking for work                                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**5.2 Which of the following do you have regular access to?**

- A telephone at home
- Private transport (i.e. car or motorcycle)
- A personal computer, with internet access

**5.3 What methods do you most often use to look for work?**

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**5.4 Which of the following do you use as a source of information about available jobs?**

|                                    | <u>At least<br/>once a<br/>week</u> | <u>At least<br/>once a<br/>month</u> | <u>Less often</u>        | <u>Never</u>             |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Job centre: vacancy boards         | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job centre: staff                  | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Job club                           | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local newspapers                   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| National newspapers                | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Trade journals                     | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shop/notice board advertisements   | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Employment/recruitment agency      | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Internet                           | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local libraries                    | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community organisations            | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personal contacts (friends/family) | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Direct approach to an employer     | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please state)               | <input type="checkbox"/>            | <input type="checkbox"/>             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**5.5 On average, how many hours per week do you spend pursuing employment:**

a looking for work

- Less than 3 hours  3-6 hours  6-10 hours  10-15 hours
- 15-20 hours  20-25 hours  25-30 hours  More than 30 hours

b writing applications

- Less than 3 hours  3-6 hours  6-10 hours  10-15 hours
- 15-20 hours  20-25 hours  25-30 hours  More than 30 hours

c attending interviews

- Less than 3 hours  3-6 hours  6-10 hours  10-15 hours
- 15-20 hours  20-25 hours  25-30 hours  More than 30 hours

**5.6 What occupation/type of work would you like to be employed in?**

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**5.7 How many hours would you prefer to work in a normal working week?**

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**5.8 What is the lowest acceptable weekly 'take home' wage that you would consider working for on a full-time basis?**

less than £100     £100<£125        £125<£150        £150<£175      
£175<£200        £200<£250        £250<£300        £300+   

**5.9 If you are willing to consider working part-time: What is the lowest acceptable hourly rate that you would consider working for on a part-time basis?**

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**5.10 Where would you consider taking a job?**

in your immediate area only (within walking distance your home)     anywhere in the Edinburgh area   
anywhere in the Lothian area     outside the Edinburgh/Lothian area

**5.11 How much time would you be willing to spend travelling each way in order to get to and from work?**

up to 15 minutes     16-30 minutes     31-45 minutes   
46-60 minutes     more than 60 minutes

**5.12 Would you be willing to move house or live away from home if you secured employment outside the Edinburgh/Lothian area?**

Move house                      Yes                       No                       Possibly   
Live away from home            Yes                       No                       Possibly

**5.13 Would you be willing to consider the following forms of work?**

|                             |                              |                             |                                   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Temporary/fixed-term        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Weekend work                | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Night work                  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Shift work                  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Variable hours              | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than 40 hours per week | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> | Possibly <input type="checkbox"/> |

**5.14 Have you undertaken undeclared work while still signing on as unemployed?**

(Please note that all responses will be treated with the strictest confidence)

Yes                       No                       Not prepared to answer

**Part Six: Barriers to Work**

**6.1 How would you rate your skills or achievement in the following categories?**

|                                                        | Good | Adequate | Not so good |
|--------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|-------------|
| Formal/academic qualifications                         |      |          |             |
| Evidence of relevant work experience                   |      |          |             |
| Job related skills (e.g. IT skills)                    |      |          |             |
| How you present yourself                               |      |          |             |
| Reliability and time-keeping                           |      |          |             |
| Motivation and enthusiasm                              |      |          |             |
| Self-confidence                                        |      |          |             |
| Literacy and numeracy                                  |      |          |             |
| Communication skills                                   |      |          |             |
| Team-work skills                                       |      |          |             |
| Flexibility (in terms of working hours and conditions) |      |          |             |

**6.2 What are the greatest barriers preventing you from finding work?**

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**6.3 Which of the following personal factors do you consider to be significant barriers to you finding employment? (Please tick all relevant boxes.)**

- Family, household or caring responsibilities
- Cost of childcare
- Problems associated with losing benefits
- Lack of access to public transport
- Costs of public transport
- Lack of access to private transport
- Costs of private transport
- Costs of applying for employment (stationery, newspapers, telephone, etc.)
- Costs of starting employment (clothing, travel, etc.)
- Health problems
- Disability
- Other personal barriers: police/criminal record
- Other personal barriers: substance dependency
- Other (please state): \_\_\_\_\_

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**6.4 Which of the following other external factors do you consider to be significant barriers to you finding employment? (Please tick all relevant boxes.)**

- Employers' discrimination: on grounds of race (if relevant)
- Employers' attitudes towards people of your age
- Employers' attitudes towards the long term unemployed
- Employers' attitudes towards your own area of residence
- Lack of appropriate and obtainable job opportunities in the local area
- Lack of adequately-paid job opportunities in the local area
- Lack of information about job opportunities
- Inadequate assistance from the Employment Service and other agencies

Other (please state): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6.5 How do you rate your prospects of obtaining work in the next three months?**

- Very good  Fairly good  Fairly poor  Very poor  Don't know

**6.6 Do you think the 'boom' in the Edinburgh economy will have any benefits for you?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6.7 What would help you most to find employment?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Part Seven: Personal Details**

**7.1 Gender:** Male  Female

**7.2 Age at last birthday:** \_\_\_\_\_

**7.3 To which ethnic group do you consider yourself to belong?**

**7.4 Are you registered as disabled?**

Yes  No

Please specify nature of disability

**7.5 Do you consider yourself to be disabled, though you are not registered disabled?**

Yes  No

Please specify nature of disability

**7.6 Have you been suffering from a long-term illness, though you are not registered disabled?**

Yes  No