

<b>Institution: University of Bath</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 22: Social work and social policy</b>
<b>Title of case study: Encouraging policy-makers to listen to children when developing policies to address childhood poverty</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b>          Over 3 million UK children live in poverty. Ridge's research has shown that understanding the impact and experience of poverty from the child's perspective is essential for developing effective policies and services to improve children's lives. Through strong, close and enduring relations with policy makers and advocacy groups, her research and knowledge exchange have directly influenced national and local government policies for low-income children. Policy-makers now listen to children's perspectives as they develop policy, incorporating statutory consultation with children into key initiatives such as the Child Poverty Strategy. This has significantly improved the quality of life of children and families in poverty.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> [<i>Numbers in square brackets refer to references in Section 3</i>].</p> <p>This research was carried out at Bath 1997-2013 by Tess Ridge (ESRC PhD, lecturer, ESRC Fellow, and Professor from 2012). Ridge developed some of the first research to reveal the complex ways in which poverty affects children's lives. Contrary to accepted academic and policy positions at the time, which situated children as passive victims of poverty or used adults as proxy informants about the impact of poverty in childhood, Ridge presented children as active social agents, to provide new and innovative child focused perspectives on poverty.</p> <p>The underpinning research includes the first UK study of child poverty from a child-centred perspective (funded by ESRC) [3.1, 3.5, 3.6]. This found that poverty and disadvantage permeated every aspect of children's lives, from the economic and material to the social and emotional. A lack of economic and material resources reduced children's opportunities enjoyed by their peers; further processes of stigmatisation operated <u>within</u> school [3.4,3.5]. Ridge showed that childhood is a formative social experience, where the demands of participation and inclusion could be considerable and the costs of exclusion particularly damaging. The effects of such childhood poverty extend into adulthood.</p> <p>The work advanced further, through a unique qualitative longitudinal study of low-income work and family life. This consisted of 3 waves of in-depth interviews with children aged 10-16 and their mothers [3.2, 3.3, 3.4]. Funded initially by ESRC, and then by DWP, this research explored how lone mothers and their children negotiated the everyday challenges of sustaining low-income work and family life. Children played a key role in sustaining their mothers in work, taking on household chores, managing their own and their siblings' care [3.7, 3.8]. This challenged accepted notions of children as passive care burdens within working families. However, in families where work was insecure and financially unrewarding, this risked alienating children from the values of employment [3.9].</p> <p>The research challenged accepted policy approaches for children, which addressed children mainly as a future resource, a form of human capital to be protected and developed. It challenged policy makers to take children's needs and concerns seriously; it raised policy questions about what worked best for low-income children at home, in school and in their neighbourhoods; and it showed that children's own accounts could make an essential contribution to understanding these processes.</p> <p>In 2009 Ridge was commissioned by the DWP to conduct an expert review of qualitative research with low-income children and their families to inform the development of the Child Poverty Act and policy for children [3.10].</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b>  <u>Research awards including the ESRC and DWP:</u>          3.1 <i>A Child-centred Approach to Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion</i> ESRC Studentship,</p>

1997/2000

3.2 *Children, Poverty and Social Policy: A Child-centred Approach*. ESRC Research Fellowship Award: Tess Ridge 2002/2004 £106,764. ESRC rated 'outstanding'.

3.3 *Staying in Work: Work and Welfare for Lone Mothers and Their Children Over Time* Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC): Ridge and Millar (PI) 2005/2007 £88,464

3.4 *Transitions to work - longitudinal qualitative research exploring work, welfare and wellbeing for lone mothers and their children DWP*: Ridge (PI) with Millar 2007/2008 £89,600

#### Key Research Outputs

3.5 Ridge, T. (2002) *Childhood Poverty and Social Exclusion: From a Child's Perspective*, Bristol: Policy Press. (Translated into Chinese 2007, Japanese, 2010). Over 1,650 copies sold (can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.6 Ridge, T. (2003) 'Listening to Children: Developing a Child-Centred Approach to Childhood Poverty in the UK' in *Family Matters* 65 Winter Melbourne: AIFS pp. 4-9 URL: <http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/fm2003/fm65/tr.pdf>

3.7 Ridge, T & Millar, J (2008) 'Work and Well-Being Over Time: Lone Mothers and Their Children'. *DWP Research Report* No.536. Leeds: Corporate Document Services (REF2)

3.8 Ridge, T. (2007) 'It's a Family Affair: Low-Income Children's Perspectives on Parental Work', *Journal of Social Policy* 36/3 (July 2007). pp 399-416 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0047279407001109>

3.9 Ridge, T (2009) 'It Didn't Always Work': Low-Income Children's Experiences of Changes in Mothers' Working Patterns in the UK in the *Journal of Social Policy & Society* 8:4, pp 503/ 512 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S147474640999008X>

3.10 Ridge, T (2009) *Living with Poverty: A Review of the Literature on Children's and Families' Experiences of Poverty*. Research Report No 594, DWP, HMSO: Norwich URL: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2009-2010/rrep594.pdf>

#### 4. Details of the impact [Numbers in square brackets refer to evidence in Section 5].

Ridge's research first came to prominence during the New Labour administration after 1997, when rising rates of child poverty rates brought a new focus on its eradication. She has continued her knowledge transfer activities with the Coalition government, contributing to the development of its Child Poverty Strategy. Through her expert advisory roles and her networks of longstanding relationships with policy makers, child poverty lobby groups, public service professionals and charities, she has sought to influence policy and practice development for the improvement of low-income children's lives. An ESRC review of the impact of their funded research on the development of child poverty policies names Tess Ridge as one of a few academics to have made 'significant research contributions to the development of this emerging policy area' [5.9]

In relation to the REF guidance (REF 01.2012, Main Panel C) we identify four main types of impact.

##### 1. 'Shaping or influence on policy made by government'

Ridge provided invited written and oral evidence and advice on child poverty to Social Security Select Committees (2002, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2011); to HM Treasury Rural Forum (2002); to the government's Children and Young People's Unit; and to the 2007/08 Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into child poverty. Typical were the last-mentioned Committee's recommendations, which cited Ridge's evidence and urged the 'DWP to work with DCSF, local authorities and other partners to address the socially excluding impact of poverty on children. This must be a priority of the new Child Poverty Unit' [5.6: page 25].

More recently, Ridge has played a key role in ensuring the incorporation of children's voice in policy development. Since 2009 she has had an on-going strategic relationship with the Child Poverty Unit (tasked with delivering the Child Poverty Strategy) and the DWP.

*Child Poverty Act*: In 2009 Ridge was commissioned by the DWP to conduct an expert review of qualitative research with low-income children and their families. This was intended to 'help meet the commitment outlined in *Ending Child Poverty: Everybody's business ...* to identify

gaps in the evidence base and advise the CPU on best practice when engaging with these groups. This will inform the CPU's plans for engaging children and families in developing a "vision" of 2020 – what a world in which child poverty has been eradicated could or should look like' [5.7]. Ridge's review [3.9] and her own research were core elements of the evidence which informed the Child Poverty Act, and the national, devolved and local Child Poverty Strategies (including Wales, Newcastle, North Somerset) [5.1]

During the passage of the Child Poverty Act 2010, Ridge was one of only two invited academic expert witnesses to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Public Bill Committee. At the amendment stage the importance of children's views and Ridge's expert research review were highlighted by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, DWP: 'Taking into account the views of children and families living in poverty is central to the development of our strategies for tackling child poverty... We have commissioned Dr. Tess Ridge ... who gave evidence to the Committee last week, to research the experience of children and families living in poverty. Her report ...will help to inform the development of the child poverty strategy [5.10].

*Child Poverty Strategy:* In 2010 Ridge was seconded to the CPU for five months, at a critical period in the development of the first Child Poverty Strategy. Acting as a 'critical friend', she played a key role in ensuring that children's voices and concerns were robustly and appropriately sought in the development of the Strategy. During this time she providing insight, evidence and advice across a range of policy areas, including participating in the development of the life chances and families strand of the Child Poverty Strategy [5.1].

2. *'Policy debate has been stimulated or informed by research evidence which may have led to the confirmation of policy, change in policy direction, implementation or withdrawal of policy'*

Ridge's research has stimulated political debates, including in the House of Lords during the passage of the Welfare Reform Bill, when her research was cherry-picked by the government, to support proposed changes in lone mother employment obligations. Cited in a Ministerial note which argued that lone parents' employment can provide a good role model for their children, this evidence was challenged by the Opposition, citing the more nuanced findings of the study, as Hansard records from the debate: 'The research also found that that is not always the case. One of the researchers, Tess Ridge of Bath University, writes that, "encouraging lone mothers into unstable and insecure labour markets runs the risk of alienating children from the values of employment. For these children work had held out the promise of something better and that promise had not been kept, so they also experienced disappointment and for some, an apparent loss of confidence in the value of work". [3.9, 5.5]

3. *'Influencing the work of NGOs'*

A review of impact in child poverty policy by the ESRC found that 'Interaction between researchers and lobby groups has been an important feature of child poverty policy development, and ... has helped to create a mechanism through which research findings influence the thinking of policy-makers, including opposition political parties, their advisers and supporters' [5.9] Ridge's work has played a significant role in this area. She has worked with national civil society groups to establish trusted and enduring relationships through knowledge exchange, policy advice for campaigns and lobbying activities.

At Child Poverty Action Group, she has served for 10 years on their Policy Advisory Group, advising on child poverty strategy and campaign. She has regularly written for their publications and for use in lobbying work. The CPAG CEO at the time commented: 'Tess's influence helped encourage the charity to become more child-focused in its approach to its work. .... Her emphasis on a child-centric approach to poverty solutions and the importance of such an approach for CPAG was vindicated when child poverty was taken within the ambit of the newly formed Department for Children, Schools and Families. As a result, CPAG found itself well-placed to align its work to the government's *Every Child Matters* framework, and to work closely with and influence the Child Poverty Unit which was established within the Department. [5.3].

She has a 12 year advisory relationship with The Children's Society, including sole academic presenter at policy discussion and development event at St Georges, Windsor. She carried out

collaborative research with them into rural poverty, and children's experiences of being in public care and she was recently invited to contribute a submission to policy discussion at the 2013 CofE General Synod, to be used to engage with church leadership, grass roots and politicians. 'We need authoritative, independent and credible evidence that enables us to argue in the interests of children experiencing poverty. Tess Ridge's work has provided us with that evidence and has strengthened our efforts to put children's experiences at the centre of our campaigning message and ensured that we continue to speak and act from the perspective of the child' [5.4].

#### 4. 'Influencing Policy or Practice leading to improved take-up or use of services'

At a local level Ridge has a long-standing relationship with North Somerset Council (NSC). Her research inspired them to develop their local Child Poverty Strategy with a child-centred perspective. The strategy draws extensively on Ridge's work and has been identified among the strongest in the country by the Charity 4 Children, in their National Survey of child poverty strategies [5.8]. Helen Caldwell of NSC writes:

'I referred to your book *Childhood poverty and social exclusion from a child's perspective* on a daily basis when I was developing and rolling out 'Join Up Join In' across North Somerset. Your research enabled me to roll out a one year funding stream within a wider context of child poverty and social exclusion from the child's perspective... Your research was so compelling, all of the schools in North Somerset agreed to ring-fence the funding for eligible children to spend on positive activities outside of school hours.' This 'Join up Join in' campaign resulted in a significant increase in FSM (free school meals) pupils and families engaging in informal learning activities. [5.2].

Ridge has made a particular child-focused contribution to policy and practice development, lobbying and legislative procedures. In a report commissioned by ESRC to examine impact, she was identified as being 'particularly important in developing qualitative child-focused studies that look at what poverty is like for children experiencing it, including children in lone parent households, and how they see parent's income.' [5.9]. In 2011 her research was instrumental in winning the Diamond Jubilee round of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education: the University of Bath for '*Influential research into child poverty and support for vulnerable people*'. [www.royalanniversarytrust.org.uk](http://www.royalanniversarytrust.org.uk) & [www.bath.ac.uk/sps/about/queens-award/](http://www.bath.ac.uk/sps/about/queens-award/)

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial on file from the Child Poverty Unit.
- 5.2 Testimonial on file North Somerset Council
- 5.3 Testimonial from Child Poverty Action Group former Chief Executive
- 5.4 Testimonial on file The Children's Society
- 5.5 Welfare Reform Bill debate. The House of Lords (2012) Hansard 25 Jan 2012 : Column 1146: 020 Clause 144 : Commencement, Amendment 69
- 5.6 Work and Pensions Committee: *The Best Start in Life? Alleviating Deprivation, Improving Social Mobility and Eradicating Child Poverty 2007–08*, Feb 2008
- 5.7 Child Poverty Unit (2008) *Research Specification for the commission of an expert research review of the Literature on Children's and Families' Experiences of Poverty*
- 5.8 *Pathways out of Poverty* (2011) North Somerset CYPS Strategic Commissioning Team
- 5.9 Economic and Social Research Council (2011) *Conceptual Impact of ESRC Research: Case Study of Child Poverty Policy*
- 5.10 Parliamentary Under-Secretary, DWP. Column 258 Hansard. Public Bill Committee Child Poverty Bill  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmpublic/childpoverty/091029/pm/91029s05.htm#09102944000182>