

September 2003

Consultation response to the Lyons review: Public sector relocation project

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Introduction

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Lyons Review: Public Sector Relocation project as outlined in your consultation paper.

The Foundation's response has been compiled by Anne Green based at the Institute of Education, University of Warwick. In preparing this response she has drawn on knowledge derived mainly from the Foundation's "*Work and Family Life*" research programme, with particular reference to her research project about the effects on families of job relocation. This work was originally published in May 2003. A copy of the *Findings* summary can be found [here](#).

The work outlines seven 'good practice in relocation' points which we hope will guide the Lyons Review:

1. sensitivity to the employment needs of partners;
2. financial and wider relocation assistance;
3. relocation mentoring and counselling services;
4. the provision of information on the destination area;
5. recognition of the practicalities relating to obtaining school places;
6. recognition of different mindsets of individuals relating to relocation moves;
7. consideration of commuting rather than relocation options.

In confining her response to JRF-funded research Anne Green has not made any detailed points relating to her wider research which covers regional economic differentials, nor made the point that the public sector is already a more important driver of local and regional economies outside London and the South East than it is in London and the South East. Anne would be pleased to answer any specific queries about the detail of the response or drawing on her wider knowledge. You can email her at A.E.Green@warwick.ac.uk

1. Background

In June 2001, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned a project about the effects on families of job relocations - ('Geographical mobility: family impacts', University of Warwick) - as part of a Programme of research on *Work and Family Life*. Details of this five-year

Programme can be found in the concluding report *Families and work in the twenty-first century* (Shirley Dex, 2003) which assesses the key findings from the 19 separate studies. [Foundations Ref 932](#).

The project on job relocations was carried out in 2001/2 and included case studies in twelve different organisations – mainly drawn from the private sector. Interviews were conducted with those human resource specialists concerned with relocation, with more than sixty individuals faced with relocation, and with partners of some of the relocatees. The research covered both:

- *individual* moves – involving the relocation of individual employees, often for career development and wider business purposes; and
- *group* moves – involving the move of a group of employees from one location to another.

2. Relevance of the research to the public sector relocation project

It is considered that some of the lessons learned from this research could inform the debate about some of the ‘advantages’ and ‘disadvantages’ of relocation by:

- identifying some of the ‘individual’ and ‘family’ impacts of relocation; and
- highlighting some lessons from the case studies undertaken and associated ‘good practice’ considerations.

First, however, it is useful to consider how recent and ongoing changes in the labour market and in household and family structures have implications for relocation, that need to be borne in mind when considering the impact of relocation on individuals and families.

3. Context - implications of labour market and family changes for relocation

Amongst key changes highlighted by the research and which are of relevance to relocation policy more generally, five are highlighted here for particular attention:

a) Partner employment

There is an increasing number of dual-earner and dual-career households. Such households are keen to assess the implications for the employment opportunities / careers of *both* partners in any relocation decision. In labour market terms, any relocation is more disruptive for an employed partner than for a non-employed partner. The evidence suggests that the increasing numbers of dual-career households tends to act as a constraint on willingness to move and on destinations of moves. Destinations offering a wide range – in quantitative and qualitative terms – of jobs are

generally most attractive. Relocation is generally easier if the partner has a 'geographically transferable' rather than a 'locationally-specific' job. Partners who have jobs based around a local network of established contacts tend to be difficult to move to other locations.

b) Greater diversity in family structures

A trend towards greater diversity in family structures, with more variable and complex patterns of residence and co-residence, means that the potential family impacts of relocation are more varied and less predictable than in the past. This suggests that relocation policy has to operate in a context of more complex individual and household circumstances and aspirations.

c) Children and their education

The premium placed on qualifications means that issues relating to the impact of mobility on children and potential disruption to their education are a very important concern to families with school-age children facing relocation.

d) Young adults in the parental home

As young people remain in the parental home for longer and the transition to independent living lengthens, the impacts of parental relocation on young adults – especially those in further education and in their first jobs – become a more important factor in relocation decisions.

e) Older relatives

Care for older relatives – whether living independently or in residential care – is an important consideration for some workers facing relocation. Telecommunications technology does not adequately substitute for face-to-face visits to frail and older relatives.

4. Lessons and 'good practice' considerations

The research highlighted a number of issues that could usefully be taken account in developing 'good practice' for future relocations:

a) Sensitivity to the needs of partners: Relocation poses more uncertainty for partners and family members than for the individual relocatee. Relocating employees and partners alike highlighted the need for employing organisations to be as sensitive

as possible to the needs of partners in the development and implementation of relocation policy.

b) Nature of relocation assistance: Property-related financial assistance eases the costs of relocation and the services of relocation agents play a helpful role in coordinating the various elements of the moving process. Some would welcome a wider range of non-financial assistance, but employees and their families have diverse circumstances and different concerns. This means that achieving a consistent, equitable and transparent relocation policy is a difficult challenge.

c) A role for mentoring and counselling: Several interviewees who had relocated indicated that they would have benefited from mentoring and counselling.

d) Information on the 'destination' area: The evidence from employers, employees and partners suggests that employees are likely to be more assertive in requesting information on the destination area – in terms of houses, schools and childcare services, etc.

e) The importance of schools and education: 'Education' is of fundamental importance for relocating families with school-age children. Several interviewees participating in the research project experienced considerable difficulties in gaining places for their children in what they perceived to be 'good schools'. In practice, the introduction of league tables, class size limits, frequent public examinations, the diversity of school systems in different parts of the country and entry criteria that tend to favour local residents rather than long-distance migrants all posed potential problems.

f) Different 'mindsets': Some individuals are more predisposed than others to moving. Previous experience of relocation helps an individual / family know what to expect, but it does not necessarily follow that they will be more willing to move again.

g) Substituting commuting for relocation: Information and communications technologies can facilitate distance working, such that some individuals may choose a 'long distance commuting' option (perhaps working from home for part of the week, and spending part of the week closer to the workplace) rather than relocation. The research indicated that more employees faced with the option of relocation are choosing to commute long distances rather than relocate, in order to 'internalise' the costs of geographical mobility rather than 'externalising' them on other family members. However, 'living apart' can itself pose different pressures on families.

5. Impacts of and on other government policies

Geographical mobility – whether it takes the form of relocation or commuting – is a key cross-cutting issue. As such, policies in other ‘domains’ may have unanticipated consequences for those involved in relocation, and the behaviour of those faced with the option of relocation may have impacts on other policy domains. Examples include:

- *Educational reforms* – changes in the education system mean that:
 - it is difficult for relocatees to find their way around ‘the system’ without more guidance;
 - in many areas there is a lack of places available in what parent perceive to be ‘good schools’ (as highlighted in section ‘4e’).
- *Social networks and quality of life* – at least in the short-term, relocation may strain / destroy social networks of friends and family in the local community that are an important component of individuals’ and families’ life quality; it takes time to build up such networks in a new area.
- *Longer commuting journeys* – choice of a ‘commuting’ rather than a ‘relocation’ option has implications for:
 - housing policy – if ‘dual location’ households require two homes;
 - transport and environmental policy – if more longer journeys are undertaken (particularly by car).