

## Work and Pensions Committee

Oral evidence: Benefit sanctions policy beyond the Oakley Review, HC 814

Wednesday 21 January 2015

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Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Child Poverty Action Group](#)
- [Derbyshire County Council](#)
- [Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite](#)
- [Gingerbread](#)
- [Community Links](#)
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Members present: Dame Anne Begg (Chair), Debbie Abrahams, Graham Evans, Sheila Gilmore, Glenda Jackson, Kwasi Kwarteng, Paul Maynard, Nigel Mills, Anne Marie Morris, Teresa Pearce

Questions 84 - 180

Witnesses: **Alison Garnham**, Chief Executive, Child Poverty Action Group, **Lois Race**, Service Manager, Welfare Benefits Information and Advice Team and Derbyshire discretionary fund, Derbyshire County Council, **Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite**, Durham University, and **Fiona Weir**, Chief Executive Officer, Gingerbread, gave evidence.

**Q84 Chair:** Can I welcome you to our second evidence session in our inquiry into the benefit sanctions policy, further to the Oakley review? Beginning with you, Alison, can I ask you first of all to introduce yourselves for the record?

**Alison Garnham:** I am Alison Garnham. I am Chief Executive of the Child Poverty Action Group.

**Lois Race:** I am Lois Race. I am the Service Manager from Derbyshire County Council for welfare rights and the Derbyshire discretionary fund.

**Dr Garthwaite:** I am Kayleigh Garthwaite. I am a Research Associate at Durham University.

**Fiona Weir:** Fiona Weir, the Chief Executive of Gingerbread, the single parent families charity.

**Q85 Chair:** You are all welcome. We have two panels this morning with lots of people giving evidence, so I hope you do not mind if we rush through things. Do not feel offended if we do move things along, but obviously time is quite precious for us this morning. Lois, the first set of questions I am going to ask specifically to you about Derbyshire's experience, because you are representing the view from the local authorities. How many people—just an average a month—present to your council saying that they require emergency financial assistance as a result of benefit sanctions? It might be more than that, but as a result of benefit sanctions.

**Lois Race:** We do not specifically sample for benefit sanctions every month. Over the course of the first year, we

had 13,744 applications to the fund. That increased over the course of the first year and is increasing continually through the second year. On average at the moment, we have 1,300 applications a month, no less than that. Indeed, in the most recent week, we had nearly 500 applications in one week.

Of that, we sample at periodic times for different causes of demand, and of the most recent sample that we have the data on, which is May 2014, 15% of the people who were presenting were presenting because of a benefit sanction issue and a further 40% were presenting because of a benefit delay issue, so over half of the demand for the fund, at that time, was coming as a result of difficulties with the benefit system.

**Q86 Chair:** While you do not have the actual data since then, what is your sense of what is happening in terms of the trends?

**Lois Race:** It is still consistently at the same level. We did some sampling last week, the data for which is very raw. We have not fully analysed that yet. As a proportion, the number of people who came through with benefit sanctions last week was lower, but the number was the same. We have a spike every January, so there were other reasons that people were applying in the most recent sample period that we did, but our sense is that the number of people who have difficulties because of sanctions is at a consistent level; it is not dropping.

**Q87 Graham Evans:** Why is there a spike in January?

**Lois Race:** There is a managing income situation, I think. We have different trends. We do not fully understand what the drivers always are but, certainly in both Januaries that we have been operating the fund, we have seen an increase in demand, and we also see an increased demand at times like school holidays, with people finding it difficult to manage their money. In August last year, we had a spike when the tax credit system had a difficulty around people who were moving education establishments, and we had a lot of families coming in saying, "My tax credits have stopped," so there are quite immediate responses in terms of the requests that we get.

**Q88 Chair:** Did it have anything to do with winter fuel, or is it the costs of Christmas that might be putting the extra financial pressure on families?

**Lois Race:** It could be both of those things.

**Q89 Chair:** We are obviously interested from the sanctions point of view. What is the total number that your council has helped over the two year period?

**Lois Race:** In the first year it was 13,744, and at the moment we are having no less than 1,300 applications a month over this current year, so we are expecting that to be much higher this year.

**Q90 Chair:** How much is that costing the council, and how much of that is covered by money that comes direct from central Government?

**Lois Race:** All the scheme is funded by the money that has come from central Government in both years, and in the first year, the Derbyshire discretionary fund total spend was £1.1 million. This year, our projection is that we are going to be around £1.6 million.

**Chair:** That is not coming out of the council's own resources.

**Lois Race:** No, it is from local welfare assistance funding.

**Q91 Chair:** Do you know if your experience is typical of others? You are the only witness we have from local government. How typical is Derbyshire's experience?

**Lois Race:** In terms of whether we are a typical fund, there are some councils that do very different provision from us. The demand for support and the drivers for support that we have are similar across lots of other welfare assistance, and also in common with food banks. The evidence that you have previously heard from food banks shows there are similar issues there. The report that came out from the Centre for Responsible Credit recently

was suggesting that local welfare assistance schemes are finding similar problems and similar themes, and certainly our experience would chime with that.

**Q92 Chair:** You talked about the sampling that you do. What we discovered in the last evidence session is that sometimes people think that they have been sanctioned when they have not been sanctioned. Either they have been disallowed or their benefit has been suspended, and it is quite difficult for someone else to work out what is going on if the claimant themselves does not know. How do you cope with that? How do you know that the figures you are quoting are as a result of sanction, rather than just other problems with the benefit system?

**Lois Race:** We have two ways of knowing that. One is that the Derbyshire discretionary fund team, the local welfare assistance team, has access to the DWP CIS, so they can see some of the reasons that people are having difficulties and they also have conversations with Jobcentre staff around: “What is the issue behind this person’s present difficulty?” The second part of that is that we refer into the other team that I manage, which is the welfare rights service, and they then get underneath the benefits advice need and try to resolve the issue, so we are confident that, for the people who we are talking about and the examples that we are giving, it is actually sanctions and not other reasons.

**Q93 Chair:** You are quite happy that your figures are robust? There is a sense that people have that there may be more need through the discretionary fund as a result of benefit sanction than your figures would suggest. Do you think that is, again, because people are thinking that they are coming as a result of a benefit sanction but, in reality, when you look at it, they are not—they are under other financial pressures?

**Lois Race:** There is certainly a wider picture of people who have problems with the benefit system. Those may be new claims, and we will talk to them about short term benefit advances, because sadly they have not always been told about those already. There are wider issues or difficulties that cause problems, but for the examples we have given of sanction, we are clear they are sanction situations.

**Q94 Glenda Jackson:** Could I go back to the discretionary fund? Is it capped, and do Government ever query it?

**Lois Race:** We were given an allocation of money, and the Department for Work and Pensions has done a request for information about how that has been used and published that as a data set, but it is up to each individual council how they decide to use that money—how much of it gets used in the way that Derbyshire is using it and how much of it gets used in other ways.

**Q95 Glenda Jackson:** Thank you for that. When I say, “Do the Government ever query it?”, I mean, do the Government ever say, “This isn’t actually a valid claim,” or do they accept the local authority’s disbursement of the discretionary fund?

**Lois Race:** Absolutely. It is left to the local authority to disburse it as they see fit—as we see fit as a fund.

**Q96 Nigel Mills:** One thing I see from my case work at times is that people do not always realise that they can challenge a sanction when they have one. Is that the same situation you find—that people have got a good excuse, but just had not realised they could appeal it?

**Lois Race:** Absolutely. There are two things. One is that our experience is that people do not realise they have been sanctioned, often, until the money does not appear in the bank, so there is a time lag there. The second thing is, when they go to the Jobcentre and query that, they are not made aware, or they do not come away aware, that they can challenge that sanction and how they go about doing that.

**Q97 Nigel Mills:** That is not a situation that you have seen change in recent months. It is still the same as it was when you started this process.

**Lois Race:** I would say it is the same as ever.

**Alison Garnham:** Part of the problem is that the letters themselves are very difficult for claimants to understand. If I can just quote from one, “We have looked at your claim again. We cannot pay you JSA. This is because we recently told you that a decision would be made about a doubt on whether you failed to comply with requirements. From X date, your allowance will be X.” At no point does it say that you have been sanctioned, what you have been sanctioned for, the reasons for that decision, whether you can apply for a hardship payment or whether you can appeal. It is a very uninformative letter. Even if people get that letter, it is unsurprising that they do not understand the reason for the sanction. We have come across a lot of cases where the letter comes after the sanction has happened, and sometimes even refers to an earlier date, so it is impossible for the claimant to do anything to rectify the situation.

**Lois Race:** As an anecdotal example, we had a lady in recently who went to the Jobcentre to find out why she had not had any money. She was told she would be sanctioned. From the system, the officer she was dealing with could see that and said, “The letter is with the team upstairs. You have to go away and wait for the letter to come, and then you will be able to challenge it.” It was in the same building.

**Q98 Nigel Mills:** The best way to fix this would be to improve that letter and make sure it was out before the sanction and it was clear what was going on.

**Alison Garnham:** I would argue that there should be the requirements in law that someone has been properly informed of a decision before a sanction can be imposed, because otherwise it is a breach of natural justice, because the claimant cannot possibly make the case, for good reason, if they do not know that something has happened.

**Q99 Chair:** Can I just ask a question? The Clerk reminds me that he has seen letters that say the things that you say this letter does not say, Alison. I am just wondering whether a different letter is going out in different parts of the country or whether they have already changed the letter.

**Alison Garnham:** I don’t think so. We have not come across that.

**Chair:** If you don’t know, that is fine. It is a question for us. Debbie, do you want to come in?

**Q100 Graham Evans:** I do. On that point, they are jobseekers at the end of the day, aren’t they? They are jobseekers who have been sanctioned. I have two Jobcentres in my constituency. I am going to one tomorrow and I visited the other one last week. I went into great detail on the processes. What you are talking about is a letter. You are quite right; I would not defend the fact that a letter is in the same building and it is on the way. I have seen some letters that are inappropriate and more work should be done in terms of the wording and how it is explained.

However, there have been lengthy conversations with these jobseekers about job opportunities, not turning up for interviews or the agreement that they have signed up to. These are all verbal conversations over several weeks. The letter is the final part, and it is the thing that you are rightly pointing out is perhaps not done appropriately. These people have had conversations with Jobcentre staff, over months and weeks, on finding employment and getting jobs, so it is not totally news to the claimants that they are going to get sanctioned. They would have been told that they are going to get sanctioned if they do not turn up for an appointment. Is that your experience? There is an ongoing dialogue with Jobcentre staff and the letter is the final thing saying that you have been sanctioned. They have had several discussions with Jobcentre Plus staff; that is the point I am making.

**Fiona Weir:** There is a massive difference between the system as described by Jobcentre Plus and the system as it works, and one of the things that points to that, which we have drawn attention to, is the incredibly and unacceptably high level of non-adverse sanction decisions, i.e. things that are wasting massive amounts of time, causing distress and financial hardship, and they are wrong decisions in the first place. In the case of single parents, a lot of them are because, despite years of having these conversations with Jobcentre Plus and being given assurances that there will be a new level of training and communication improvement, Jobcentre Plus advisers either do not have enough time—these “lengthy conversations” are not lengthy but very quick and box-ticking—or are not properly—

**Graham Evans:** I disagree with that. I have seen Jobcentre staff have lengthy ongoing conversations over weeks and months to try to help these people into work.

**Fiona Weir:** Sometimes they do, but the facts are that the Oakley review showed very strongly, as is certainly our experience, and that a large number of claimants do not fully understand the process; they do not understand the flexibilities that are there for single parents. We consistently log examples of Jobcentre Plus telling people that they have to work night shifts or they will be sanctioned. We have multiple examples of this kind.

There is something very dysfunctional about the system at the moment. Some bits of it may be working very well, but it is patchy and inconsistent. The sheer number of non-adverse decisions shows that the system is not working, and that time is being taken up not on conversations about how to support somebody into work, but on conversations about sanctions, good cause and how the system is working, which are leading to a lot of time being taken up on decisions that need to be overturned. It needs fundamental review at the moment. It would be good to look at the business case for switching Jobcentre Plus adviser time back to refocusing on the support into work and a lot less time on administering this process.

A crucial first recommendation you could look at would be not to leap into a sanction decision initially, and certainly to give discretion to Work Programme advisers but also Jobcentre Plus to have a first informal warning discussion with somebody that this is the sort of thing that might lead to a sanction, before you go into this process and get a big pile of wrongful decisions that then have to be overturned. Somebody has already gone through the distress and fear of sanctions.

**Q101 Nigel Mills:** Lois, back to you. In the survey you gave us the details of, over half of people who applied for funds from your discretionary fund also applied for a hardship fund payment in the first place. It would be useful to understand why people are having to apply for both. Is that because the hardship fund is not enough or is it because it is too late? Is it a bit of both?

**Lois Race:** Both, if I may say so. There are clearly some people who cannot access hardship immediately and so they come to us while they are waiting for the hardship to become a possibility, and there are other people who do not know about the hardship fund. We will have that conversation with them. If you have somebody who is presenting and saying, "I have no food; I need to feed my family," if you send them back to the Jobcentre and say, "Now you have to talk to somebody else about whether they will give you hardship and then come back to us," you end up risking a game of ping-pong between agencies, and then you have people who have access to hardship payment but, for their particular circumstances, that was not sufficient to see them through the immediate crisis of not having their full amount of benefit available.

**Fiona Weir:** In 2012, DWP's research found that less than a fifth of single parents had been told about the hardship fund and only 5% had received a hardship fund payment. There is a particular case where you have children in a family, because we have to take responsibility for the welfare of a child in a household that may have lost benefit payments. We would strongly recommend that hardship payments become automatic for single-parent families, because of the inevitable consequences of cutting benefit on a family where there is a child. That child should not be suffering the adverse impact of this process.

**Alison Garnham:** I would agree with that. From the work we do in food banks, and we have done research in a range of food banks, very few of the people coming to the food bank ever have any notice of it.

**Dr Garthwaite:** I was going to say as well, echoing what everyone has said, that from the research that we have been doing in food banks, it is very rare that people know that there is a hardship fund to access, let alone have accessed it. More often than not, I will ask people, "Are you getting hardship?" and they are like, "Oh, what's that?" There seems to be quite a lot of confusion around that issue.

**Alison Garnham:** Some people are not entitled to a hardship payment for the first 14 days unless they are in a vulnerable group. There is a list of people who are vulnerable groups, which includes people with children, people coming out of care, people who are carers, people with chronic medical conditions and so on, but the problem is that most of the people we come across simply do not know that hardship payments exist.

There is a second problem that, in order to get one, you have to attend in person at a Jobcentre Plus office and fill in a 10-page form. For some people, if they have these medical conditions, they have children at home or they live a great distance from Jobcentre Plus, it is quite difficult for them to do that. They are unable to do it by telephone, for example. We also have examples of people who have had that delayed by DWP, which has said, "You may be able to claim a hardship payment, but not now; you have to come back on Monday." There are a lot of problems with getting them.

**Q102 Nigel Mills:** How do people find out about your services, Lois? Is it that they have been sanctioned, they hit trouble and they find it on the internet, or does some friend tell them?

**Lois Race:** A big majority of claimants are referred by the Jobcentre. It seems to be that the Jobcentre either identifies the Derbyshire discretionary fund or signposts to us, when we would quite like them to be having a conversation about hardship payments or short term benefit advances first and then seeing whether that can resolve the issue.

**Q103 Nigel Mills:** That was where I was heading with that question. It seems strange that they do not advertise their own service before they advertise yours.

**Lois Race:** Absolutely. We do have a range of other agencies that we work with across Derbyshire. There are children's centres, support workers and homelessness advisers. The full range that you would expect us to be networked into, we are, but certainly the most frequent start of the conversation is, "I've been told to contact you by the Jobcentre."

**Q104 Nigel Mills:** People seem to be finding your discretionary service before they have had welfare rights advice. Is that something that you notice?

**Lois Race:** Yes, and there is a value in the fact that we have both available. If somebody comes to the Derbyshire discretionary fund and there is an advice lead, we can access that or help them to access that to resolve the underlying issue, because that is part of what we want to do. We do not want to have to have people continually needing local welfare assistance. The whole point is to try to fix the problem that has created the crisis.

**Q105 Nigel Mills:** Why do you think people are not going for welfare advice before they are seeking help? Is that just lack of awareness?

**Lois Race:** That is part of it, but I also think that, if you do not have any money, there is quite a hierarchy of need going on. If you need to feed yourself or feed the children in your family, you think about that, you sort that one out and, once that is dealt with, you then think about whether you have brain space now to think about challenging that decision. But there is quite a crisis in that family situation that needs to be resolved.

**Nigel Mills:** My experience in my seat suggests there is pretty good welfare advice provision. It gets out into all the towns. I would probably see the same as you; it is people choosing to get the money before they worry about fixing the system.

**Q106 Chair:** Dr Garthwaite, you were nodding away there. Is there anything you wanted to add about the welfare rights side of things?

**Dr Garthwaite:** Yes. I will say to a lot of the people who come to the food bank, "Have you been to the Citizens Advice Bureau?" and sometimes it is anxiety. For people with mental health problems, often the thought of going and having to explain to someone else their problems and seek advice and help can be a big first step. At the food bank, it is a last resort; they have exhausted all the options available to them, so they have come to the food bank. Sometimes that can be a turning point for people in that they can access the Citizens Advice Bureau. I know the Citizens Advice Bureau now comes twice a week to the food bank that I have been working with for the past 14 months, so they can say to people, "You know you have this issue with your housing. Citizens Advice Bureau is here, and they can help you with that issue right now, rather than you having to go away and wait for however long to get an appointment with the relevant person."

**Q107 Debbie Abrahams:** We heard at the last oral hearing from Professor Dwyer from York about the universal credit regulations, which extend conditionality to people who are in work—so people who are on low pay and in receipt of working tax credits. Currently we have 2.1 million families with children who are on working tax credits and 2.6 million single parents with children who are accessing working tax credits. If you look at the

Autumn Statement budget book, you can see the reduction in working tax credit payments. I have asked this question of the Secretary of State and he was not able to tell me anything on it, but would you like to comment on the potential implication for sanctions on people in work on low pay?

**Alison Garnham:** There are implications in the future in that, under universal credit, there will be in work conditionality. The number of occasions for which you can be sanctioned has grown, because there is a new category of sanctions related to work related activity. There were always sanctions related to being unemployed voluntarily or not being entitled in the first place because you do not fulfil the conditions, but what has grown is these fixed length sanctions in relation to not carrying out work related activity. In the future that will apply to low paid people too, if they are not working sufficient hours or the equivalent of 35 hours at minimum wage. They will be required to increase their hours or level of pay, so sanctioning could become more of a feature of working lives as well as people who are out of work.

**Fiona Weir:** It is really not clear how DWP will implement it or that they would apply sanctions to people who are in jobs. It would certainly be an extraordinary development to start sanctioning somebody for not taking sufficient steps to try to grow their hours, and it would be very difficult to see how it would work in the context where we find many people are in voluntary part time working or on zero hour contracts and cannot get the hours they want. They are already banging their head against how to get the hours they want without having to demonstrate that they are trying to work hard enough to increase their hours. We need a much clearer statement from the DWP about how they see the in work conditionality regime being implemented.

**Alison Garnham:** One of the problems about challenging these sanction decisions is that, even if you succeed in arguing that you had good reason or if you can get it revised under a mandatory reconsideration or an appeal, by that time you have already lived for a considerable period of time without any money, so it is often too late, hence people turning up at food banks or local welfare assistance schemes. I would add to that that we have come across local welfare assistance schemes that turn people down simply on the grounds that they have been sanctioned, and also local authorities that have refused discretionary housing payments because people have been sanctioned, so it is having a domino effect into other forms of support that they could get.

Most of the people we see at the food bank have never had advice before at all, so this brings a real problem with these fixed length sanctions. Why they seem to be completely inappropriate for this work related activity is that you cannot do anything to rectify the situation, because the sanction is fixed-length. If you do the required behaviour that you seem to have failed to have done, it makes no difference. The sanction continues anyway. It does not work as a system to improve people's behaviour; it simply results in destitution.

**Fiona Weir:** Can I add to that that we are losing track of the whole point of sanctions? It was meant to support people into work. The fact is, when you are struggling to put food on the table because you are experiencing a sanction, you are not in very good shape to be looking for a job. The fact is we have had major reviews of the Jobcentre Plus offer and, just last December, a whole series of reviews of the Work Programme—really solid DWP research. In both cases, it shows that you are no more likely to get a job as a result of sanctions. It is affecting certain types of behaviours, but the majority of claimants see it as unnecessary and irrelevant, because they see themselves as highly motivated to work, and our experience is that most are. Practically, you are not getting better job outcomes as a result.

The whole system has to stop looking at getting people's flow of benefit and start looking at sustainable job outcomes again, because on the Work Programme you are more likely to get a sanction than a job. Sanction figures are higher than the jobs achieved. We are just focusing the whole system around the administration of conditionality. We are talking every day to people who are crying out for skilling up, work experience, some time with a specialist lone parent adviser—now a very rare breed indeed. People want the support. That is what they want from Jobcentre Plus. They want it to be pragmatic and realise that most want a job and support them to get it. They are walking into a system that is totally geared up around the assumption that somehow you will not make efforts to get a job unless you are threatened with sanction.

**Q108 Debbie Abrahams:** Very briefly, do you have any examples? One of my constituents had a heart attack and was sanctioned while in the middle of a work capability assessment. We have reported about the appropriateness of sanctions, and they are often not appropriate. Do you have any very brief examples?

**Fiona Weir:** We had a panicked phone call from a mum who was recently made a single mum. She has two young kids, one with health difficulties, who cannot be left on their own. She cannot cope with her shift work

any longer because she is now on her own. She phoned Jobcentre Plus for advice and was told that she would be sanctioned for three years if she gave up her job. That was completely wrong advice, but you can imagine the kind of panic somebody is in by the time they come to us, having been on the receiving end of wrong advice. This is the kind of thing that we can all give daily examples of.

**Alison Garnham:** It is the sort of thing people cannot do anything about, as well. We came across one case in Scotland where someone had attended a Work Programme interview, but DWP still sanctioned them in the belief that they had not attended. This person then committed a crime in order to feed themselves, so it is leading to consequences that are nothing to do with work activation.

**Lois Race:** We have examples of clients who have missed telephone interviews with Work Programme providers. There was no record of that telephone call ever happening. Fortunately, we do get those turned over on mandatory reconsideration, but it is another example of time spent doing something that we really did not need to be doing.

**Q109 Paul Maynard:** You have all talked about the flaws in the process, the inappropriate letters and bad process, all of which we can recognise from our own constituency case work. Specifically to Alison, the Oakley review looked at improving the quality of the literature; it looked at notifying of hardship payments. As far as I am aware, the Department is either in the process of updating the letters or has updated. I am not quite sure what tense to use. They explored that. Equally, the DWP evidence states that, since 14 July 2014, no one can be sanctioned without being told of the availability of hardship payments. They have invested in accelerating the payment of those hardship payments. Have any of you seen evidence since July 2014 of that occurring?

**Alison Garnham:** No.

**Lois Race:** No.

**Q110 Paul Maynard:** That allows me to ask the Minister when we have her here and feed that back. Specifically to Fiona, your evidence slightly contradicts something that we heard last time regarding the likelihood of lone parents being sanctioned. The Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion says that lone parents are substantially less likely to be sanctioned than we would expect. Your evidence is about non-adverse decisions.

**Fiona Weir:** You are absolutely right that single parents are less likely to be sanctioned and go into the sanction system than other claimants but, once they go into the sanctions system, they are much more likely to have a non-adverse decision.

**Q111 Paul Maynard:** That was going to be my “but”. From something you said earlier, clearly there is an issue here with the first part of the process of engagement with Jobcentre Plus for lone parents. You were talking about the issues of formal and informal warnings. Could we have some sort of discretion? I wanted to explore that philosophically without this taking too long. We would all think it common sense to have a brief chat with someone to say, “If you do this, X will occur.” That is an informal discussion, if you like. It will not appear in any statistics anywhere or anyone’s record so, in a sense, it almost does not exist.

The moment you start to move to a more formal system whereby you have to give someone a warning of some sort, that discretion becomes formalised, if you like. You are moving it forward in the decision-making process. You then start to have another argument, “Oh, shouldn’t you be having an informal discussion before you start the formal discretion?” and you start to go around in circles. We would all agree common sense says you need to have some form of discretion. Jobcentre Plus advisers I speak to all say that they already have that informal discussion and deploy that discretion. How do you think we can resolve this tension, so that common sense can apply but as a formal system that allows everyone to feel that natural justice, as Alison mentioned, is being done? Sorry, too long a question.

**Chair:** It is also Anne Marie’s question.

**Paul Maynard:** My apologies, Anne Marie. I do beg your pardon.

**Alison Garnham:** Can I offer a partial explanation? In relation to sanctions for a qualifying benefit, there used to be a list of what good cause was and examples of what that might be. Those have all been taken away now and

apply to none of the occasions where sanctions might be applied, so decision makers do not have any kind of guidance about what sort of thing, like transport problems or childcare problems, might be a good reason. It leaves it open to say anything is a failure to meet the conditions, and that is really unhelpful. It would be really useful to bring something like that back.

**Fiona Weir:** I think ERSA raised it as part of their evidence, but it is a particular problem with the Work Programme, where they really are required to refer people across. They cannot just have that basic conversation and say, “Why didn’t you turn up?” or “Why were you late?” when it is fairly obviously a good cause to be able to say to them, “That is exactly the kind of situation that will get you sanctioned if it happens again,” and then be able to leave it at that and move on.

**Paul Maynard:** That requires legislative change. Yes.

**Q112 Glenda Jackson:** To go back a bit, speaking about the kinds of anxieties that are produced in people when they are sanctioned, we have had evidence of people simply giving up on Jobcentre Plus and never going back. Do you have any figures to support that, over and above anecdotal evidence? I have it from my own constituency, but are there any figures to show it? These people are not going into jobs. That is the bottom line; they are just never going back to Jobcentre Plus.

**Dr Garthwaite:** I have not got any figures on that, but I have seen examples of people who have come to the food bank who say, “I have been for my ESA work capability assessment and I have been found fit for work, but I feel like I cannot apply for jobseeker’s allowance because I cannot fulfil the conditionality that that requires me to fulfil.” I have come across it. It is not common, but it is something I have come across in the past 14 months of doing the research.

**Chair:** That is a question for our next panel, probably.

**Q113 Sheila Gilmore:** We are almost talking about two different things, I think. There is giving people warnings like, “If you do this, that might happen,” and then there is what actually happens when there is a sanctions referral. The experience of some of my constituents is not that they do not understand it or they have not had those informal discussions, but when there is a referral for sanction the money stops. That particular incident is really quite different. They know in theory, “If I do not apply for X jobs or I do not go to that interview, I could be sanctioned,” but when the sanction happens they say it is because they had transport difficulties, a child fell ill or something, which might be good cause. I am not sure whether they are the same things, and whether informal discussions are enough or whether, if it is first incident of that, giving somebody a yellow card is a different phase of the process. You can understand it perfectly well, and still something happens.

**Alison Garnham:** This is why we think you need a 14 day period before a sanction can be imposed, because otherwise you do not have the opportunity to have that conversation, because people do not know, in many cases, that it is about to happen, plus the decisions are often made on quite frail grounds. You have been asked to look at 48 job sites and you did not have access to a computer, so you looked at 47 and you get sanctioned. These kinds of things are ridiculous.

**Fiona Weir:** It is also why we get into the kinds of discussions we were having where Jobcentre Plus says, “But we produced a new leaflet,” or “We have improved our communications.” In good faith, they think they are making the improvements, but what they keep underestimating is how hard it is, particularly for more vulnerable claimants, to take it in, digest it and understand the implications. That is why nothing beats a relationship of trust with your adviser and having some time, so they can ask you to recap on what your understanding of something is and how you think it might apply to your own circumstances. That is the point at which it begins to sink in.

**Alison Garnham:** That is a really important point. Following on from what Fiona is saying, we have huge amounts of evidence from DWP evaluations of previous new deal programmes and employment support programmes about what works, in terms of work activation, and that is the relationship of trust with the personal adviser. There is no evidence that sanctions improve people’s work activation; in fact, there is evidence to the contrary—that it is less likely to lead to positive work outcomes and job retention. It is more likely to lead to people being alienated from the Work Programme.

DWP could well look at its own evidence. It has a lot of evidence. There were schemes like the new deal for lone parents, which doubled lone parents’ chances of getting a job, but it was an entirely voluntary scheme. There

were no sanctions involved. The successful aspect of it was the engagement with the personal adviser.

**Lois Race:** Just going back to a phrase that Alison used, which was “frail grounds”, we do not have the analysis in a statistical form, but we have lots of examples of sanctions decisions being made for what we could regard as frail grounds. “You have not done enough job search over Christmas,” but the libraries and the Jobcentres were all closed. We are clearly not the only ones with that experience.

The claimants present at the Derbyshire discretionary fund in need of support. We talk to them about doing the mandatory reconsideration, and mandatory reconsideration can take seven to 11 weeks, by which time they have had four weeks without income. We may well have supported that in that situation. The resolution of that, in terms of an overturned decision on mandatory reconsideration, comes too late for that immediate crisis.

We also have claimants—I do not know whether others have similar experience—who by the time they have got into the mandatory reconsideration process have managed, through our support or other reasons, to see through that period, and they lose faith and lose heart with the point of doing the challenge and exit that process. Our great concern is, if there is another frail reason for a sanction decision in the future, that is a 13 week sanction, so we really do want to talk to people and say, “You need to get this four week one sorted, even if you have weathered the storm, because that is there now and the next one is going to be a 13 week one, if there is another situation that arises.”

**Dr Garthwaite:** I would like to add to that as well that it can sometimes be a problem, particularly for new jobseekers, especially with health problems—people who have worked for a long time and are new to the benefit system. I have seen people who have come to the food bank who, through a genuine mistake, have missed an appointment at the Jobcentre and they had not realised the acceleration of what will happen when they do get sanctioned. For people who are new to the whole benefit system, sometimes there can be confusion there.

**Chair:** There is another example of letters being sent by the DWP dated 25 December. Anne Marie, we are finally on to you and your question about single parents.

**Q114 Anne Marie Morris:** We have covered quite a bit on single parents but, Fiona, perhaps I could prevail upon you to pull together some of the comments that you have made and indeed that have been made by others. Fundamentally, what you are saying with regard to non adverse decisions is that the system does not work; it is a waste of money. You have a two tier process between the Jobcentre and the DWP, and you have said that there is not the help and guidance and all the specialists that there were on the ground. You are concerned about the level of training and indeed the awareness of the individuals, with the whole flexibility regime. If you had a magic wand, after listening to everything that Paul and others have said, maybe we could drill down into a little more detail as to how you would change the system to deal with those faults in it.

**Fiona Weir:** Fundamentally, the system has to be designed for the majority of claimants who want to work. Single parents are highly motivated to work. Most DWP reports say that. You have to start with that aspiration and give them time to overcome the barriers and opportunities to skill up—time with an adviser, work experience and so on. That is what they are looking for when they come to the system, fundamentally. You need to refocus Jobcentre Plus very much around sustainable job outcomes and working with the aspirations that most of their clients have, and see sanctions as being back in that box called “last resort, use sparingly” for the small number of cases, not the predominant culture that hits you when you go into Jobcentre Plus. There is something very fundamental about culture and rewarding Jobcentre Plus advisers on sustainable outcomes, not on how they are processing conditionality and benefit off flows and so on.

That really gets back to acting in a very pragmatic what works way—let’s look at what works. We know stacks of DWP reports say it is adviser time. We know that there are important things you have to do, like childcare costs, which the Government is addressing and which we hope they will do more on. Get those bits into place, but move the focus.

The new Government that responds to your inquiry needs to take a fundamental look at not just the process changes we have been recommending at the margins but pragmatic, effective ways of getting people into work. That is what people want. That is for the vast majority of claimants coming through. It is what every citizen who wants to see the welfare bill fall wants. We just want to see people supported into a sustainable job and, at the moment, the system is not geared up around that as the predominant culture.

**Q115 Anne Marie Morris:** Can we drill down a bit into how you do that? The challenge is that culture change is probably one of the most difficult changes to make. How would you do it? What you are talking about is quite a lot of face time, and that is expensive. I am not saying that is not the right way to do it, but how do we make that efficient? Do we train everybody a bit or do we still have specialists? Is there any information that we give to single parents before they come?

**Fiona Weir:** You need specialist lone parent advisers. They have been proven to be very effective in the past. You need very high quality information about the single parent flexibilities and how they apply, and that needs to be very clear and checked at the claimant commitment stage. You need to performance manage Jobcentre Plus advisers using the right indicators, and they have to be sustainable job outcomes. We should be challenging Government saying, "That is too expensive," because it is clearly the right way forward.

Jobcentre Plus advisers would love to have a workplace culture that was more geared around supporting clients into work. What they are getting is signals from the top that the system has to be seen to be essentially enforcing a conditionality regime. As to the predominant signal from the top from the new Government, whichever complexion that Government is, this is an area where we would say to each major political party that you need to re think the current consensus about how the sanctions regime is working and start getting back to basics on sustainable job outcomes. That is what we are here for.

**Q116 Anne Marie Morris:** With regard to the claimant commitment, you are saying that we could do a better job at that point of explaining flexibilities, etc. Is that now completely absent? Is it mentioned at all?

**Fiona Weir:** There is a huge amount that goes on. If you look at the processes and procedures Jobcentre Plus has, a lot of the key things in place you would expect and want. The problem is getting them applied consistently across Jobcentre Plus. We are picking up on a huge amount of patchiness that is causing problems, and the other problem is sheer pressure on adviser time. It would really be worth examining the business case for how much time all the decision making processes are taking up, because they are very time consuming and Jobcentre Plus adviser time is at a premium. We know that when there was new conditionality introduced for income support, Government put a really big chunk of money into the system just to administer the new conditionality regime.

Somebody needs to look hard at where adviser time is going and whether, long-term, you would get a better use of adviser time if they were focused on getting people into work and spending less time overturning poor decision making. We would ask you to ask the Minister to take some steps to initiate some of those kinds of assessments.

**Q117 Anne Marie Morris:** In the short term, given that culture change takes a long time, what you pointed to is a waste, and frankly everybody would see it as a waste, of a two part process. What could be done with regard to the working relationship and/or the processes between Jobcentre and DWP to stop these non adverse decisions, while we thought the problem out?

**Fiona Weir:** In terms of the process reviews, some of it is about getting safeguards into place. You need to give time for the decision making processes to work their way through. You need to have time before benefit cuts kick in. Ideally you need to have some automaticity about hardship payments, because we keep losing track of the fact that there are children in these families and there are real question marks about the ethics of a sanctioning regime that is affecting children, who are not accountable for what is happening. You need to put a lot more of those safeguards in place to make sure that you are not having vulnerable people suffering from a system that should be there to provide them with support.

**Alison Garnham:** We have come across cases where lone parents are afraid to mention that they have childcare difficulties, because of the background of fear of sanctions. They think that, if they say that, it will count against them in some way. In fact, the lone-parent flexibilities are there to help them with that situation, and there are even funds that could help them with childcare costs to attend. Because of the level of fear, they are not even having that discussion. That is a real problem.

**Q118 Anne Marie Morris:** While specialists clearly are better, pro tem, because it will take a while, is

there an argument for some sort of general training so that all advisers have a better understanding?

**Fiona Weir:** There has to be accredited training to a standard, because advisers are taking essentially judicial decisions—decisions that profoundly affect the level of income that very poor families will have. That is an extraordinary power to give to somebody and, therefore, we should take very seriously the responsibility for making those decisions well.

**Q119 Glenda Jackson:** To pick up on the point that you made, Alison, with regard to single parents who do not discuss their childcare because of fear, how much of it is about an employer's reluctance to be flexible with regard to the shift work that is often presented to a single parent? This is only anecdotal from my own constituency, but I have had three cases where single mums, because there was such inflexibility on the part of the employer, could not take the job. That was not the fault of the mother; it was the fault of the employer. Of course their business was dependent on shift work in that way, but what is the linkage there, if it comes close to sanctioning? That should never happen, in my view, for single parents anyway.

**Alison Garnham:** That is what the lone parent flexibilities are supposed to be for.

**Glenda Jackson:** They do not know about them; that is the point.

**Alison Garnham:** That is the problem. Also, there is long-standing research that single parents are afraid to take certain types of jobs, because they fear that they will be sacked because of not being able to fulfil those conditions. Again, that is what the lone parent flexibilities are for, so that you can put in place those restrictions.

**Q120 Glenda Jackson:** On occasions—well, a couple of times—it seems to me that the urging of Jobcentre Plus of this job being the one is incorrect. They should know if an employer is going to be inflexible in that way. There should be some kind of linkage, I would have thought, but there does not seem to be.

**Alison Garnham:** It ought to be a good reason to say a job will not work for you as a single parent, absolutely. That should be seen as reasonable.

**Glenda Jackson:** That does not seem to be said, ever.

**Q121 Graham Evans:** Continuing from Glenda's good point there, you just talked about advisers doing the sanctioning. You mentioned a tick box culture earlier. In my experience of Jobcentre Plus staff, the decision to sanction somebody is not taken lightly, and it is not by the individual adviser; the line managers have all been involved and they have gone to great lengths to try to help the individual. Glenda's point is exactly right: in my constituency, the Jobcentre staff know of the jobs. There are jobs that are appropriate for people who work part time with children, and so on and so forth. They have lined up interviews and they have failed to attend. You keep saying that Jobcentre staff are using the tick box culture and putting people in sanctions. That is not my experience. Jobcentre staff work very hard on a case-by-case basis, and they do not take the decision lightly to put people on to sanctions.

**Fiona Weir:** We are very positive about a lot of Jobcentre Plus staff, but the facts are that over 43,000 single parents were wrongly referred for a sanction decision that a decision maker then decided should be non adverse, and another 16,000 went to the next stage to decision review before it was then decided that the sanction was non adverse. The fact is there are quite a lot the system is not getting.

**Graham Evans:** Sure, but all I am saying is that not all Jobcentre staff get it wrong. In my experience, they work very hard to help individuals on a case-by-case basis.

**Fiona Weir:** No, absolutely not.

**Chair:** Consistency is the key. We have about eight minutes for the last section, and Debbie's got a question on health impacts.

**Q122 Debbie Abrahams:** Dr Garthwaite, your submission to the Committee describes the effects of sanctions on people who are already poorly, who are suffering from ill health, particularly those who have mental

health conditions. Could you tell me how sanctions affect people?

**Dr Garthwaite:** Our research has shown that people using the food bank are likely to be living with already fairly long term financial problems, which can include low wage work, accumulation of debt and issues with housing. Additionally, we see a lot of people who are affected by the bedroom tax. There are issues with fuel poverty. All of these things combine to have a negative impact on often already poor health. When people are sanctioned, these problems are often aggravated even further, because they have lost their only source of income. Therefore, they are going without sufficient food and energy to maintain their health or even improve their health if they are recovering from illness.

Another detrimental impact on mental health comes because people are often quite embarrassed and stigmatised about having to come to the food bank in the first place. They feel quite ashamed. There is a lot of stigma surrounding food bank use. As has been mentioned this morning, there is a lot of distrust of the system and a feeling that the system is out to get them, rather than there to support them, which is a shame. Often people who come to the food bank say, "I would love to work, but my health problems are so poor, I feel like I cannot maintain a full time job because of ongoing health problems."

**Q123 Debbie Abrahams:** Can you describe a bit of detail of how it manifests itself for somebody who already has mental health conditions, for example? You described a few case studies. There was one woman who was so badly affected by it that she did not feel like she could go out of the house. Could you just describe that?

**Dr Garthwaite:** The particular example is Jessica, who is case study 2 in our written evidence. Jessica was 22 weeks pregnant when I met her at the food bank, and she had walked over two miles to get to the food bank because she could not afford the public transport. She was receiving ESA for her mental health problems, which had been triggered after she had a stillborn son about eight months ago. Since then, she had been finding her anxiety and mental health problems extremely difficult to cope with. She missed one of her appointments and, despite letting the adviser know that she could not get in that day, she was sanctioned.

From her mental health problems there was a spiral effect. Her worsening debts led her to seek out Citizens Advice Bureau for some help with that. She told me as well how she was not eating proper meals. She had not eaten a proper cooked meal for over two weeks. She was living on her sister's children's leftovers. She did not have any electricity in her flat. She said, "I haven't had my fridge or my cooker switched on for three weeks. I can't afford the electricity. I sold my telly last week; there was no point in keeping it, because I cannot afford to use it anyway." Unfortunately, cases like Jessica's aren't untypical. We see quite a lot of people coming to the food bank who are experiencing similar incidents, which are therefore impacting on already poor mental health.

**Q124 Debbie Abrahams:** You mentioned food bank use, and over a million food parcels were provided last year. The report is saying that 45% are directly as a result of sanctions. In my constituency it is 60%. You also talk about the issues. Obviously the food parcels are food that is not going to go off, so it tends to be tinned or processed, and that has implications for health as a whole. Could you just describe that in a bit of detail?

**Dr Garthwaite:** Obviously food bank provision is intended to be emergency food. It is nutritionally balanced for three days' worth of food for somebody in a crisis. The problem we are seeing with people in the food bank is that a crisis does not just last three days. There are longer-term financial and all sorts of problems, which are leading to people not being able to afford to eat the healthy food they need to maintain their health.

Particular examples that I have come across within the food bank, which quite shocked me, were people who have, for example, digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome or other deficiencies such as anaemia. People have reported how, after they have received the food from the food bank, they have eaten food that aggravates their condition white pasta or white rice, and processed foods. There was the example of Naomi. She was suffering from irritable bowel syndrome. She said, "I ate the food that I received from the food bank and then I was ill all over the weekend. I knew I would be. I knew from eating the white wheat based food that I would be poorly, but I was hungry, so I just suffered the consequences afterwards."

Another example of how people living on low incomes are not able to afford the healthy food that they need for their health is Anna. Anna is 51, and she has digestive problems that make consuming wheat and dairy difficult. She was also suffering from mental health problems. Anna was sanctioned after she missed her jobseeker's allowance appointment. She was an example of someone who had always worked in the past and was new to the benefit system, so she had accidentally missed her appointment. Anna had an 11 year old daughter, and I met

both of them in the food bank. It was in the school holidays. Anna told me how she and her daughter had been having to eat tinned food that was out of date and were often overlooking fresh produce, because the more fruit and vegetables they buy, the more the chance of wastage.

I asked her how this was all impacting on her health and she said, “Completely. Because of the anaemia, my energy levels are so low, I nod off regularly and, towards the afternoon, I do not have energy to do the housework. I am not unintelligent; I know what I need to keep my levels going. I know what I need for my diet, but it is hard to keep that going when you are left with eating just bread, with maybe chocolate spread on it, and that is all you have for the day. Those carbohydrates are the short-lived things for energy. I know enough about what I should be eating, but you cannot always manage to afford it.” She also went on to say, “My daughter has been quite constipated recently. She has never been like that and that is no good for her. We could always afford yoghurts and things with fruit in, but now we really struggle to do that.” Both of those examples show how being unable to afford healthy foods can impact upon the health of people living on low incomes.

**Q125 Debbie Abrahams:** Absolutely, and we have rises in deficiency diseases as well. My last question, Dr Garthwaite, is about the transferability of your work. Obviously this is a qualitative piece of work that you have undertaken, but would you like to comment on how you think this could apply to areas other than the north-east and Stockton, where you were working?

**Dr Garthwaite:** Obviously, as you say, our study is just focusing on Stockton but, from looking at the range of written evidence and other research that is coming out looking at food banks, our findings are quite typical of what has been said already. The recent *Emergency Use Only* report just before Christmas highlighted the impact of mental health issues for people who have been sanctioned, so it is a wider issue than just simply our case study. It definitely has transferability.

**Lois Race:** Can I add that there is an issue brewing that is very prevalent for us, which will continue? It is the correlation between people who are challenging ESA work capability assessment decisions and being, in effect, forced on to jobseeker’s allowance. Then they end up not being able to comply with the jobseeker’s agreement conditions and end up being sanctioned. There is another unvirtuous circle there.

We certainly have a number of people who we are concerned about. We have one lady in particular at the moment who has been presented to the Jobcentre three times, while she is in the middle of challenging her ESA decision. We are still waiting for a mandatory reconsideration outcome before we know whether we need to appeal or not. If we get her to appeal stage, she will be able to get ESA assessment rate money, and she will not need to be in the jobseeker’s allowance situation. While the mandatory reconsideration is on the way, she cannot do that, so she has to go and claim jobseeker’s allowance.

She has seen three different Jobcentre advisers. The first two were fine with her, and said, “We recognise the restrictions on your availability because of your illness, disability or what have you.” The third one had her in tears, a very different experience, and he said to her, “You have to do 35 hours a week job search, otherwise you are at risk of being sanctioned.” We are waiting to see whether that is going to be a problem for her or not but, in the meantime, her health is not good because she is under that stressful situation.

**Q126 Sheila Gilmore:** I wanted to follow this up, because this is something I have done quite a lot of work on and had various debates on. The assurances I have been given by ministers repeatedly are that, in that situation, people will be given flexible conditionality, which will take regard of their health situation, and that that is happening and there should be no worries. What is your experience of that?

**Lois Race:** That might be working, but we certainly see cases where it is not, and we have concerns about that.

**Dr Garthwaite:** I would like to add that there are instances of people under claiming benefits and receiving zero income. It was not a common experience, but it is something I have definitely seen in the last 14 months. Even just last Friday, I met someone who was living without any income at all. He was 34; he left work after a shoulder operation and tried to claim for ESA, but he was found fit for work. He also has depression problems and is having a lot of issues with ongoing debt problems and relationship problems. I asked him if he was claiming JSA while he was awaiting his appeal, and he said he had just been told by Citizens Advice that he could claim for JSA, but he said, “I cannot do all the things they would want me to do. They look at you; you seem fine.” They think he is fit to work, “But I am not,” he said. “My mind is all over the place.” He said he does

not want to go back into work while he is not ready, because that will just make him feel worse with his mental health.

At the moment, he was just struggling on but with nothing, no income at all. Like I say, that is not a common experience, but it is something that we have come across and it is something that needs highlighting.

**Alison Garnham:** In relation to sanctioning decisions, we have come across this with people who have moved to JSA, and we had somebody who tried to commit suicide as a result of the sanction. One of the problems seems to be that information is not being shared between the Work Programme and decision maker. The decision maker does not pass on the ESA85 form, which explains what the basis of the Atos decision has been.

**Chair:** It is something we have picked up.

**Alison Garnham:** The Work Programme does not know about that and, in reverse, if there has been safeguarding activity in the Work Programme, that is not then conveyed to the decision maker at Jobcentre Plus when they make a decision about a sanction. Although some of this is going on, it is not being fully communicated when the sanction decision is being considered.

**Q127 Paul Maynard:** I will be as quick as I can. In the last session, we discussed with Mind whether financial conditionality and sanctions were an appropriate model for those with a mental health condition. I wonder, Dr Garthwaite, from what you have observed in Stockton, if you feel it is possible to develop a model of conditionality that would work for patients with a diagnosed mental health problem who are claiming JSA, and would deliver conditionality without the negativity that clearly comes with a financial sanction, which then traps them almost into a spiral.

**Dr Garthwaite:** At the moment, the people that we are seeing at the food bank feel, in terms of conditionality, that there is more focus on the responsibilities rather than their rights. There is the issue that people feel like they have to fulfil certain responsibilities, and there are certain things that they are having to do.

**Q128 Paul Maynard:** Which responsibilities do you think it would be fair for them to fulfil? Any at all, or should it be non conditional?

**Dr Garthwaite:** In terms of sanctions, people receiving ESA and people with health problems, sanctions do not seem to fit people with health issues.

**Paul Maynard:** That would be no conditions at all then, you would suggest.

**Dr Garthwaite:** I would not say no conditions at all.

**Paul Maynard:** I am just trying to understand what they could look like, that is all.

**Dr Garthwaite:** From what we have seen, any conditions that there are would need to be a lot more transparent and a lot more flexible to fit people's health problems, rather than it being strict. I know there has to be some sort of level of conditionality, but I would argue that, for people who are receiving employment and support allowance and who are jobseekers with health problems, they could do with more of a flexible and personalised approach, if that answers your question.

**Paul Maynard:** Well, there are a lot of minds on the topic. There is some thinking to be done.

**Q129 Chair:** Can I put a question to you that I put to the panels last week? Part of the reason for this inquiry is to see whether sanctions work to make people more likely or less likely to get into work. I am just asking if sanctions work as a barrier, in your opinion, not to all people but to some people accessing the labour market—just a quick yes/no.

**Lois Race:** From our experience in the discretionary fund, they cause a crisis that has to be dealt with. It gets in the way of people's ability to be fulfilling the conditionality requirements of jobseeker's allowance or employment and support allowance, so they create another diversion from the work.

**Chair:** Everybody else is nodding.

**Alison Garnham:** I agree. It puts them in a less good position, and the research reflects that. The culture of encouraging people into paid work is completely different from a culture of sanctioning. We were just talking about health conditions. I wanted to read a little bit from the decision maker's guide, where basically it is assumed that your health would be damaged by a sanction. It says, "It would be usual for a normal healthy adult to suffer a deterioration in their health if they were without essential items, such as food, clothing, heating and accommodation or...essential items. The decision maker must decide if a person with a medical condition would suffer a greater decline in health than a normal healthy adult and would suffer hardship." It is assumed deterioration in health is part of the result of a sanction regime. That is just a simple point showing that, in relation to work activation, that cannot be the way to encourage people.

**Chair:** Can I thank you very much for coming along this morning? We have a second panel coming in, so I ask you to move quickly and the people who are in our second panel to take their seats. Thanks very much.

### Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Ben Robinson**, Head of Policy, Community Links, **Steve Hughes**, Head of Economic and Social Policy, Policy Exchange, **Mark Serwotka**, General Secretary, Public and Commercial Services Union, **Helen Flanagan**, Vice-President DWP, Public and Commercial Services Union, and **Professor David Stuckler**, University of Oxford, gave evidence.

**Q130 Chair:** I think we will get started. We were doing very well on the time and then I blew it by asking an extra question at the end. Can I thank you very much for coming along this morning to help us in taking evidence on our sanctions work? Starting with you, Ben, can you perhaps introduce yourselves for the record, please.

**Ben Robinson:** Ben Robinson, Head of Policy at Community Links.

**Mark Serwotka:** Mark Serwotka, General Secretary at PCS.

**Helen Flanagan:** Helen Flanagan, a PCS NEC member and Vice President of the DWP group.

**Professor Stuckler:** David Stuckler, Oxford University.

**Steve Hughes:** Steve Hughes, Head of Economic and Social Policy at Policy Exchange.

**Chair:** Thank you very much and you are all very welcome. The first set of questions is from Sheila Gilmore.

**Q131 Sheila Gilmore:** Good morning. I wanted to ask Steve in particular about a statement in the 2014 report that suggested that, at times, the regime was too lenient on people who had repeatedly failed to keep to their regime, but sometimes too stringent on those who had made a single mistake. Could you perhaps explain a bit more about that?

**Steve Hughes:** Firstly taking the too stringent point, which was in relation to the evidence that you have heard and seen a lot of, those people receiving a sanction could be going through a system whereby it gets overturned. There is quite a high proportion of people getting their sanction overturned. Engagement in understanding the sanctions is very important for jobseekers and those people on jobseeker's allowance.

We suggested that, instead of having a financial sanction for a lower-tier first offence, we could test and pilot non financial sanctions. We obviously have a lot of evidence that people go to food banks because of sanctions. Hopefully, that financial impact would no longer occur, because instead the benefit would be paid in a different format to recognise that an offence had occurred, but it would still be paid.

The second element of that was another part of the non financial conditionality, which would be engaging with the Jobcentre a bit more. We recommended daily sign on for a period of eight weeks, which would attempt to overcome the problems of people not engaging and just dropping out the system, being able to access a Jobcentre

adviser, where they would be able to be told about hardship loans, for example, and the appeals process.

That is the first part of it, and on the second part of it—making things more stringent—the argument essentially was that there is a very small proportion of people in the overall piece who are repeatedly flouting the sanctions system. We recognise within the reports that we do not know much about these people. Now, if it is repeated flouting for not good enough reasons, that might indicate that sanctions should increase proportionally for every sanction. If it was not for that and we found out that it was something different, or there were some other problems with that particular claimant, that might not be suitable. Ultimately, the idea was a more proportional system, starting with non financial sanctions, with increasing financial sanctions as offences increased.

**Q132 Sheila Gilmore:** Is there a risk that people who have long periods of sanction, who are obviously the smaller number—we know that—simply drop out of the system somewhere and therefore are not in contact with the Jobcentre?

**Steve Hughes:** That is certainly a risk, and it is one of the many areas of sanctions and conditionality policy that we simply do not know that much about. That is why we said, “Do not implement this system all in one go.” It is an idea to test and pilot, as we should do with all aspects of welfare policy, which is a test and learn approach.

**Q133 Sheila Gilmore:** If someone is sanctioned, say, for three months, what is the incentive for them to seek help or go on trying? Did you look into that at all—whether people during that period disengage rather than re-engage?

**Steve Hughes:** My reading of the evidence is that some people can disengage and other people can engage and will come back into the system as well. Again, as I say, the evidence is pretty sketchy and we do not know much about it. One of the things the DWP should be looking into is what is happening to those people on longer periods of sanction, to see where they are going and what they are doing, because until we know that we cannot improve the system.

**Q134 Sheila Gilmore:** The stated aim of this, and I think your organisation would hold to this, is to encourage people to get employment, and that sanctions will be part of that role. Do you think we have sufficient knowledge as to whether that works?

**Steve Hughes:** No, in short. As I have said before, the evidence is patchy, and it is from all over the world with welfare systems that interact with each other in very different ways, depending on where you look at them. There is a strong case for a system of conditionality backed up by sanctions, but it is more about the fairness of the application of those sanctions, rather than necessarily whether they exist in the first place.

**Q135 Sheila Gilmore:** Do you think we should be having some sort of proper independent review of the system at this stage?

**Steve Hughes:** Yes, I do but, again, going back to my previous answer, I would be reluctant to look at the sanction system by blowing it up entirely, and would rather have Oakley style reviews of certain elements of the system where we know there is a problem. We know there is a problem with the number of cancellations of referral decisions, because we can see that simply by looking at a graph. We know there is a problem from looking at the number of successful appeals that go through, because it is quite a high proportion of those decisions that are made. There is a problem with the interaction of providers and Jobcentre Plus as well, and I would advocate independent reviews on those three aspects.

If you look back at the impact assessment that came alongside the Welfare Reform Act, there are a lot of references in that to the fact that we simply do not know what the behavioural change will be from some of these changes. Therefore, that necessitates us looking into these kinds of things further down the line, after the policy has been implemented.

**Q136 Sheila Gilmore:** Surely part of the problem is that we implement the policy with a statement that it will work and then, in effect, we are experimenting on people a bit. Are we?

**Steve Hughes:** I am not entirely sure whether that is the case. If you look at the broad evidence, you can say that there is a system and there is a framework for a system within that system. We have problems further on down the line, and therefore we need to test what is wrong with those problems. The problem is that we have problems, but we do not really know what is causing them.

**Q137 Sheila Gilmore:** Those three areas that you have outlined are ones that you think are worth digging into, and that the Department should be doing it.

**Steve Hughes:** Absolutely, and there is probably pretty broad consensus on those three areas. Whether those three areas are the focus of a review is a different question, but I think there would be consensus that there are problems in those three areas, definitely.

**Q138 Paul Maynard:** Helen, you talk a bit about the claimant commitment, which has been presented by the Government as a step forward in the jobseeker and claimant understanding the nature of their conditionality. How do you think the claimant commitment has worked in practice, in capturing people's different capacity for work and the different challenges that they may face in overcoming hurdles to get to work? How is it functioning as it has been rolled out, in your view?

**Helen Flanagan:** The claimant commitment itself is a lot more complicated than the jobseeker's agreement. It is supposed to be much more tailored to the individual but, in reality, we find that it has many more steps that the claimant has to take each week. It was referred to before; people mentioned that you might have to apply for three jobs a week, whereas under the claimant commitment it lays out individual steps, for example looking on a website three times a week. That would become three steps. You could have a claimant commitment where there are over 40 steps that that individual has to do each week, and they may well be actively looking for work.

For instance, if they look at the Reed website, which is an employer website, rather than Indeed, which is on their claimant commitment, they can be referred to the decision maker on that issue. We find in practice, although some advisers and claimants say that they welcome it, in other centres it is much more complicated for the individual to fully understand what they are required to do in order to meet the conditions.

**Q139 Paul Maynard:** Therefore, are you suggesting that a variability in individual claimant commitments is about the actions that they need to take, rather than their individual circumstances? That is not making them more complex.

**Helen Flanagan:** It is both. We find that some claimants do not fully understand, and that is down to their individual circumstances. Despite the fact that it is meant to be tailored, we still have anecdotal examples where our members have been told that they are not meeting the district standard for claimant commitments. If there is a standard, that gives the impression that it is a template. Therefore, they are not tailored. There are a number of steps they are being told have to be there for each person, so it is not tailored to the individual.

**Q140 Paul Maynard:** If someone arrives with a diagnosed mental health condition at the Jobcentre Plus, what steps are taken to ensure that the claimant commitment is tailored to their specific needs and, perhaps more importantly, that the individual claimant understands the ramifications of what they are signing? Do you have examples of where people will not sign because they are concerned that they will not be able to fulfil the commitment?

**Helen Flanagan:** Generally people do sign a claimant commitment, but they may not realise the full implications of what they are signing. In terms of people with mental health problems or other underlying conditions, there are relaxations and flexibilities that can be put into that claimant commitment, about looking for work or hours available, for example. The staff either do not know or are simply not encouraged to put those flexibilities in there for each claimant. There are specialist disability employment advisers, but they are very small in number and normally with quite large caseloads. By the time they are referred, if they are indeed referred to a disability employment adviser, those flexibilities will not have been put in there.

**Q141 Paul Maynard:** If you are suggesting that the system in some way militates against making the claimant commitment as flexible as it needs to be, is that a factor of the time available for individual advisers—that they simply do not have the time to do it—or is it more structural than that?

**Helen Flanagan:** I would say it is more structural because, as I said, it is more of a focus on what should be a standard claimant commitment. They are not encouraged to tailor according to individual needs, especially those with health needs or those who need to have some kind of part time working for childcare needs as well.

**Q142 Paul Maynard:** Do you think that perhaps quite a significant policy change has occurred without people noticing it, in that we now assume that to be a jobseeker is analogous to having a full time job, i.e. you are spending 35 hours a week searching for a job? Therefore, a jobseeker is now a job, if you like. If that has occurred, would you agree that it might therefore be sensible that, just as in any other job the employee can try to ensure that the job is flexible enough to meet their own personal needs, the same should apply to a jobseeker if they are doing something analogous to a full time job? Does that make sense?

**Helen Flanagan:** Not particularly.

**Paul Maynard:** It makes sense to me. I know what I mean. I apologise.

**Chair:** In other words, if you have a full time job and you have some health problems, there might be flexibilities in the job. I suppose he is asking if that same kind of flexibility should be reflected in the claimant commitment. Is that right?

**Paul Maynard:** That is exactly what I mean, yes.

**Helen Flanagan:** Yes, that should be there in terms of what you do in order to look for work, as well as what you would be expected to work for. I do not think it is a hidden policy change of looking for a job being seen as a full time job. That is the mantra that is repeated, and I am pretty sure the 35 hour-a-week job search was in the universal credit legislation. Even though that has not transferred over to jobseeker's allowance as yet, our experience is that staff are being told you have to include that anyway. There is no encouragement, as I said before, to tailor it to individual needs, especially for those with health problems.

**Q143 Paul Maynard:** I know, Mr Robinson, that Community Links have said that they have been hoping that the claimant commitment will see the claimant steering their journey towards work. Do you think that the claimant commitment is delivering on that aspiration, in your view?

**Ben Robinson:** These are still early days but, from our experience, that tailoring is still pretty patchy. We would say two things. We welcomed it because it should have given an opportunity for claimants to shape, not decide, what steps they would be taking, and have a greater input into where they wanted to go and what they could be expected to do.

The other thing is, it should be a live document. It should regularly be updated and changed as claimant circumstances change. There is patchy evidence on both of those. We would urge much greater opportunities and guidance for advisers to allow people to shape it and to feed in to that process. At the moment, we are seeing, as Helen described, a greater burden being placed on people as a result of it.

**Q144 Paul Maynard:** Back to you, Helen: in the case of jobseekers' directions in particular, obviously pre claimant commitment they had a clear and distinct role. If the claimant commitment is meant to be specific to the individual, what role do you see for jobseekers' directions parallel to the claimant commitment? Should they exist now, or should they all be incorporated in the claimant commitment?

**Helen Flanagan:** They still exist. In fact, they are used more now than they were before as part of the SR13 conditionality measures.

**Chair:** Sorry, SR13?

**Helen Flanagan:** The Spending Review that came in, in April 2014, with the help-to-work measures as well. It introduced day one conditionality, where more directions were issued. They could be parallel to the claimant commitment, for example the creation of a CV or attending a workshop in the Jobcentre, but they are used more

ad hoc. There could be an argument that they are no longer needed, but they are used as a kind of immediate threat of sanctions: “If you don’t do this by this date, you will be referred to a decision maker.”

**Q145 Paul Maynard:** Do you think it is made sufficiently clear that, in addition to the obligations under the claimant commitment, jobseeker directions are as liable to incur a sanction if not followed as the contents of a claimant commitment? Do you think that is blurring the picture for the average claimant?

**Helen Flanagan:** In that first interview when you are hit with your claimant commitment and the direction, or maybe one or two directions, that is a lot to take in for an individual to understand the consequences if you slip up in these areas. If you slip up twice, you could face a four week or several month sanction. It is emphasised a lot. Conditionality is the main focus of all interviews, I would say, certainly the initial ones, but I do not think people have a fair opportunity to take that in.

**Q146 Chair:** Helen, you said that most people sign their claimant commitment. Is that because they have a fear that, if they do not sign it, even though they might think it is inappropriate, they will be sanctioned? Fear of sanctions is making them sign up for something that is inappropriate, and then the next stage is something that they cannot fulfil; therefore, they are going to be sanctioned anyway. They are being set up to fail almost.

**Helen Flanagan:** Yes, basically. If they do not sign that claimant commitment, that instance gets referred to a decision maker. If you have lost your job and you are desperate for money, you do not want to put that off any further, especially as you now have increased waiting days for the benefit. You do not want to wait for that any longer than necessary, so you are probably under quite a lot of pressure financially to think, “I’d best just sign it so that I can get my payments.”

**Chair:** The sanction is almost built in. It is just being delayed.

**Ben Robison:** Can I add very quickly a case study that was in our submission? We worked with one gentleman who, in his first interview, asked for a sentence to be added to the claimant commitment that said, “I’ll attend all the training courses and interviews arranged for me, but only if such courses and activities will give me an advantage in finding work,” and the Jobcentre refused that additional sentence and consequently sanctioned him for not signing the claimant commitment.

**Q147 Sheila Gilmore:** It is this 35 hour issue. Ever since we have been discussing this, I have wondered how that could be evidenced. My fear was that then itself becomes quite box ticking. How do you assess whether somebody has spent the requisite time, unless you are just making a judgment about being able to do so many things in that time? How do you judge whether somebody has spent 35 hours a week job seeking?

**Ben Robison:** This goes back to the kind of point that Paul was asking about before. We believe that it should be an investment in the relationship between the adviser and the claimant. If they work together and they spend that time to really understand their situation and the kinds of activities they can be expected to do, they will be in a better position to be able to judge whether somebody is complying with them or not. At the moment, it is a much more transactional relationship, not because that is what Jobcentre staff necessarily want to do; it is the position they are put in. It is only through investing in the resources to give advisers time to work with people and understand their situation that they will be able to make better judgments about whether they are complying or not.

**Helen Flanagan:** Can I just make the point that it is not necessarily the same adviser who would refer them to a decision maker, if they had met the claimant commitment conditionality as well? There is this assumption being made that they go back and see the same person each time. That is the aim, but on occasions they will go back in and there might be somebody in the Jobcentre who is on call at the DMA diary, so they would see all the people who had been referred to them that day by the band Bs, the people who do the signing. That relationship is not there. If they fail to attend, if they miss their appointment, it is a band B decision maker who makes that decision as well. There is not that relationship to understand what the person has done to look for work.

**Q148 Anne Marie Morris:** Graham and I are going to look at JCP sanctioning targets, so the questions are

for Mark and Helen. If I can start perhaps with you, Mark, when Neil Couling did his report in 2013 for the Secretary of State, he noted that, when the sanction benchmarks were removed in 2011, it “suggested that conditionality was no longer being enforced appropriately by some individuals”. Clearly everybody has a different view about whether or not sanctions are right or wrong but, if you are employed in the system and that is the law, do you agree that your members, whatever their personal view is, and indeed whatever the unions’ views are, are obliged by law to enforce the law?

**Mark Serwotka:** Bear in mind that we are representing 67,000 people working for Jobcentre Plus. Our view is that staff are employed as civil servants and they are obliged to carry out the duties that the law stipulates. The issue for us here is not whether people are applying the law; it is whether the system that has now developed overly emphasises the pressure on staff to make sanctions referrals and adverse decisions, rather than emphasises most that their main key function should be to build up a relationship of trust and support, and help people back into work.

We have supplied and can supply evidence from staff surveys, and indeed extracts from people’s performance improvement plans and their appraisal interviews, where the emphasis on making sanctions referrals and making 80% adverse decisions is astonishing. There is, for example, an effect on staff if they are not seen to be sanctioning enough. In fact, they cannot get part of their pay rise, but there is no facility for people to be told off if they are making too many sanction referrals.

In other words, our members tell us that the big problem is that they came to this job to help people back into work, and now they feel that their job is to trip people up and to find reasons why you can sanction their benefit. That means that the relationship of trust that is so important is breaking down. Assaults on staff have increased dramatically in the two years since the regime was tightened up. What we now see is often that civil servants, many of whom are fantastically low paid and 40% of whom would be entitled to universal credit, are now the target, because people think they are there to blame. The pressure put on individual members of staff is therefore distorting the job that people should be doing.

I would finally say that we think the reason for that is that there seems to be an obsession with designing a system for the tiny proportion who may be seeking to flout the rules, rather than a system that should be entirely geared to respect claimants and believe that they do want to get back into work. We should be helping them do it. That is where the service has changed so markedly, and all the evidence we have from our members is that that is why Jobcentre Plus is a worse place to work than it was previously.

I should finally add that it is not the union, therefore, that does not agree with the sanctions policy because we have decided that. Our position on believing sanctions do not help but hinder is arrived at from the members themselves, who are delivering the service, and them saying to us that this is now essentially corrupting what they think they should be doing.

**Q149 Anne Marie Morris:** I hear what you say with regard to the views, but that flies in the face of your first answer, where you said that clearly employees need to apply the law as it is, and they do not have free rein to take on board their own views. The implications of Neil Couling’s comments were that individuals—clearly not all would necessarily be members of your union—were taking a view and looking at what they thought was right and fair, rather than what the current situation is. It seems to me, if you have a view about what is not working, you take that to your boss, the politicians, the unions. It is not something that you can unilaterally take on board in your decision making. Do you think that the drop in conditionality being applied appropriately is because individuals were making a judgment, rather than just following the rules? I hear your comments about the rules, but this is simply about the action of the members.

**Helen Flanagan:** In terms of Neil Couling’s report, in May 2013, it was very limited. It was meant to look at some press reports that had been leaked, showing that there were targets in some areas of the country around sanctions. His investigation basically looked at those press reports, a brief discussion that he had had with us and information that we had supplied, and some discussions with senior managers. I do not consider that, and I do not think anybody else would consider that, a full investigation into the situation. I am not sure how he came to the conclusion that people were choosing not to apply conditionality, given that the sanction referrals had increased so much since the change in the regime. His investigation and the outcome were flawed.

**Q150 Anne Marie Morris:** Fundamentally, what you are saying is that he did not have enough information, he was not looking in the right place and what he said was not true. Can I just ask you a supplementary? Clearly, you do not agree with what Mr Couling said. Let us, for the sake of argument, say that maybe he had a point and there were some people who inappropriately used their own judgment. Let's say, for the sake of argument, that a manager recognised that was happening. Would you agree that it is right that a manager then takes disciplinary action? I am assuming of course that we have an example where a manager looks at an individual, looks at the case and says, "I think you've applied your own judgment, rather than applied the system. Therefore, there will be disciplinary action." Do you think that is right? Should you be entitled to do that?

**Mark Serwotka:** Clearly a manager has to manage. If they believe that somebody is not applying something in the way it should be, it is right to take that up and discuss it with people. Our evidence is that the opposite problem is the one that we should worry about, which is the fact that the pressure, targets and all the move from the top are that more and more people should be sanctioned. If you are not doing enough you are penalised, but if anybody is doing too many nobody looks at it. All the internal documents and the performance appraisal targets that are set are focused on the 80% adverse decisions and say that more referrals should be made.

This is why, from our point of view, we strongly support the call that was made for an independent inquiry, and we think it should be very far reaching. Certainly it should look at the effectiveness of sanctions; whether people who are sanctioned are going into work or not; what the equality impact is of sanctions on people with disabilities and mental health issues, and on single parents; and the link between sanctions and food bank referral; but also the key point you are taking up, which is the effect of sanctions on the staff, the pressure put upon them and the targets or expectations in the system.

When we do that, something profound will emerge, and the question we think everybody should ask is, "What is our social security system for?" How do you deliver a safety net, and how do you treat people with respect, and help and support them, rather than our public servants—very low-paid people—now being seen as people who are out to trip you up? If you get called in, you often do not think you are being called in to be supported; you think you are being called in because somebody is trying to find you out to impose a sanction, which is extraordinary severe.

There were 906,000 sanctions in 2013. There have been 1,700 sanctions that have been for three years. When a sanction is imposed, of course, even if you get hardship payments, you are not getting it for the first two weeks. The effect of a four week sanction is often that someone's income is reduced by 70%, and we already have some of the lowest benefit levels of any European country. We think the system is fundamentally flawed, but we would welcome a full independent inquiry to scrutinise it properly and for us and others to give our evidence to. Helen's point is that we do not feel that previous Select Committee reports or DWP management, whenever they are asked, have really looked into many of the issues we are raising today. It is therefore timely that that is done independently.

**Q151 Kwasi Kwarteng:** This is the first question I am asking in this session. We have heard over about an hour lots of complaints about the system and lots of individual stories suggesting that the system is not working. What I want to know from the panel is where the problem is. Is it the actual sanctions, the actual concept, the philosophy of it or the idea behind it? Is that the problem, or is it a question of the implementation and the operational side of things? I just want to get a sense, as individuals who know about this area and have experience in it, of what your thoughts are. Are you against sanctions in principle, or are you just worried about their application as we currently see today? I would like to go through each of the panel to get a sense of what your thoughts are.

**Ben Robinson:** We are not against the idea of conditions being placed in the system. The Oakley review had a lot of very good recommendations about how the process should be improved, and it dealt with a lot of those issues. We would urge the Government to implement them in full and the Select Committee to follow up later to review whether they are being implemented. What we need now, as Mark mentioned, is a look at whether the conditionality regime is working in what it intends to do. We need clarification of what its intention is, and we believe that should be about getting people into sustainable good-quality work. There is no evidence that it currently does so and, further, there has been no evidence that the stricter regime brought in in 2012 was necessary in itself and has had any positive effect, though we have heard quite a lot of evidence of the negative impact of it.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** But you accept the principle that it is something that you do.

**Ben Robinson:** We are a Work Programme provider. We currently raise doubts ourselves. We see in a very small number of cases that it should be a tool for advisers to use but, as other people have said, it is a very small number of cases. The vast majority of people are very motivated to work, and at the moment it is pushing people further away from work. That is why, again, we would call for a full independent review looking at the effectiveness of it, not just in encouraging people to engage in job search activity, which the Select Committee called for last time, but in getting people into work. To do that, we would need DWP and HMRC to do that benefit and tax data matching exercise. We have lots of anecdotal evidence that people are coming off the system not because they are being encouraged into work but because they just cannot handle the system. It is only through that data matching exercise that we will ever know what the long term impact is on people.

**Q152 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Is that where most people on the panel broadly sit? Would you agree with Mr Robinson?

**Mark Serwotka:** As a union, based on the experience of our members, we do not think sanctions are the right approach. We think it is reasonable to have some expectations on what people should do in return for their benefit, but the problem with a sanctions approach, as we have already tried to say, is that it skews the system. Our view is that, if we accept that the overwhelming bulk of people want work, the role of Jobcentre Plus should be to help provide training and support to help people back into work. We think that that would bring about a far better situation than we currently have.

However, if there was an independent inquiry and that was not what most people thought, we do also think that, if you are going to have them, you must ask yourself what they are for, how are they being done and whether they are helping the situation or making it worse. At the moment, we think the evidence is that they drive people into absolute poverty and do not help them find jobs, and we are not benefiting from that. We are making things worse.

**Q153 Kwasi Kwarteng:** The reason why I asked the question is that there is a big philosophical question about whether you think sanctions are a good thing broadly or not. You have been very up-front and said that you do not think that is the way we should be going or path we should be treading. Clearly, there is a fundamental difference from some of the approaches that the Government wants to push forward.

**Mark Serwotka:** There is a fundamental difference, but the point that we would make most strongly is that that fundamental difference probably arises because, we think, too much of the political approach has been about shirkers, scroungers and saying that people are work-shy. Our start point, from our experience, is that that is not where the overwhelming bulk of people are. Therefore, the system is designed to deal with this problem that everybody is worried about, rather than for the overwhelming majority, doing them a disservice—and the hardworking staff.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** You have a clear position. People could disagree with you, but I commend you on the clarity of your position.

**Helen Flanagan:** To add to that, the system is based on an assumption that people are somehow trying to fiddle benefits and get away with claiming jobseeker's allowance. It is this idea that people have the life of Riley on benefits. It breaks down, because it both demonises the unemployed and pits the advisers against the claimants, which does not help them get into work.

**Q154 Kwasi Kwarteng:** Do you share Mark's view that you do not think that sanctions are the right way to go at all?

**Helen Flanagan:** Yes, we are from the same union.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** I just want to get it all down on the public record.

**Professor Stuckler:** Let me jump in on this. I have not spoken so far. Sanctions are not a one size fits all policy. If you look across Europe, there is a great deal of difference in the extent of the conditionality and how harsh the penalties are. Taking where the UK system now sits, it has one of the toughest conditionality regimes and some of the harshest penalties for sanctions. Ultimately, this is a question of data, the stories behind those

data and what works to get people back into jobs, reduce harm and save taxpayer money.

**Q155 Kwasi Kwarteng:** What about the principle of conditionality? Is that a useful thing? We have heard other panellists say that they do not think that makes sense in terms of trying to get good outcomes.

**Professor Stuckler:** Again, this is a question of data.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** It is a conceptual one, I'm afraid. It is a conceptual one. The idea of punishment or sanctions is a concept.

**Professor Stuckler:** I am not opposed to the concept, but I am pragmatic about this working, so it is about data and what we have learned from looking at the UK.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** Sure, but I am interested, as you have said you are not opposed to the concept, and that is what I wanted to learn.

**Steve Hughes:** I am not opposed to the concept either.

**Chair:** I am going to come back to the philosophical thing and go back to Anne Marie, because the key to this is whether they work.

**Kwasi Kwarteng:** We have had clear evidence that not many people think they do work.

**Q156 Anne Marie Morris:** Mark and Helen, you have both effectively said that, with regard to Neil Couling's report, he got it wrong. Did you ever do your own investigation internally to find out, among your members, whether individuals had effectively been disciplined, because that is the only way you would have identified them, for taking a personal view rather than applying the rules strictly?

**Mark Serwotka:** Perhaps Helen will say more in a moment. We did a survey of our members who were advisers and decision makers. What came back was quite startling. The headlines were that 70% of the people answering the survey said that they did not think that sanctioning positively impacted on claimants finding work. We were told that 61% felt that there was pressure on them as individuals to refer claimants for sanctions, and that over 20% felt that that pressure was for inappropriate referral for sanctions.

As a result of that, what came out was that there was an 80% referral target or adverse decision target from referrals, so the whole emphasis of what our members were saying to us was that this was where all the pressure was and they did not think that it was working. The knock on of that was that they felt, therefore, it introduced fundamental barriers in the relationship between them and the public, which was the most morale sapping part of what information was coming back.

**Q157 Anne Marie Morris:** There was clearly a lot of feeling that the system was not working, but to what extent did that impact on people's judgment and therefore how they did their job? I suppose the question I was asking was less about the research about what they thought and more about whether anybody was disciplined because they were not applying the rules.

**Helen Flanagan:** The survey also found that 61.8% felt they had experienced pressure to refer claimants where they felt it was inappropriate to do so. Just to pick up on a point you made about whether advisers could be picked up and disciplined for using their judgment, advisers should be using their judgment. That is what part of that relationship is about. That is why they are graded at that level, because it is about discretion.

**Anne Marie Morris:** That is within a framework.

**Helen Flanagan:** Within a framework, and within this framework 60% felt they had been pressured to refer inappropriately. They then go on to have examples of where there had been "expectations", which is another term for a target. 10% thought they had been given the lower appraisal marking—they do not go through disciplinary procedures; they are capability or performance procedures. As a result of that lower performance marking, they do not get part of their pay rise that year.

Anecdotally, as a union rep, I have also represented quite a few members in my own Jobcentre who have been

given that lower marking, and the reason either indirectly or sometimes directly given to that member is that they have not made enough referrals throughout the year. You might think that maybe they had not, but they had made some referrals. How can it be enough unless there is a figure set? They did not look at how many people had got into work and what they were doing as an adviser; they were looking at just the number of referrals.

**Mark Serwotka:** Could I just read you one small extract of what one of our decision-maker members has said? For obvious reasons, we would not want to say who that was or what office it was, because there is a climate of fear for any Jobcentre Plus employee. It says, “At our benefit centre, we are very closely monitored around sanction rates. Each week, everyone is given a printout of the percentage of sanctions decisions that are being made. This is clearly a bullying tool in order to bring people into line with senior management’s requirement for 80% of referrals to be a sanction. In one-to-one meetings, the managers then strongly focus on why we must achieve the 80% sanction rate. We are being forced to make adverse decisions and conduct perverse behaviours in order to achieve unachievable targets, all to get to the 80% rate of sanctioning.” That was not from a union rep; that was from a frontline decision maker, which we think, at least in that one case anecdotally, supports the general view we are trying to get across that the pressure is all in one direction. That is what people are so uncomfortable with.

**Q158 Graham Evans:** Helen, I hear you have spent a lot of time in Jobcentre Plus, and I personally have two Jobcentre Pluses in my constituency and pay tribute to your members and the staff, because the ones that I see and speak to work very hard and are dedicated to helping jobseekers get work. Indeed, something is working, because unemployment is down and more people are in jobs than there have ever been before. In my constituency, there is falling long term unemployment. On the targets that you were talking about, Mark, I see targets in Jobcentre Plus that are entirely positive, because the number of long term unemployed is coming down and the number of youth unemployed is coming down, so I see positive targets in Jobcentre Plus.

Regarding the appraisals, do you have any evidence of inappropriate targets being set in recent times? My feeling of Jobcentre Plus is that—it might just be my constituency—I have outstanding Jobcentre Pluses in my constituency. They work very hard. I am particularly impressed with your members. They do not seem to share your rather sanguine view on life. They work very hard and they find their job enjoyable, helping people find work.

**Helen Flanagan:** We have given you some examples there.

**Graham Evans:** Yes, they are negative examples, but there is a lot of good practice out there, and we have not heard that in your evidence.

**Helen Flanagan:** I am not by any means putting down the work of our members in Jobcentres. We also think that they work extremely hard in difficult times to get people into work.

**Graham Evans:** They are effective and do a good job.

**Helen Flanagan:** We are saying that this does not help and is creating a negative situation. You cannot say that sanctioning has somehow created a boost in the labour market and helped those people into work. We are saying that our people do work hard, but this does not help. These are negative targets. You also have positive targets of trying to help people into work, but this 80% target on adverse decision rates is in the benefit centres, not in the Jobcentres. That means they are told that they must sanction 80% of the referrals that come on through. In the Jobcentres, they are being told, “You must refer more people for sanctioning.” How is that positive?

**Graham Evans:** My question, was I have seen no evidence of any targets for sanctions—if you have seen targets, then tell us.

**Helen Flanagan:** I am trying to tell you.

**Q159 Graham Evans:** Tell us where, what you are doing about it and what can be done about it.

**Helen Flanagan:** What we are doing or what you are doing about it?

**Graham Evans:** What you are doing about it.

**Helen Flanagan:** As a union, we have armed our members and our representatives with information and with

tools to go out and challenge managers. Where this comes up, we have a good record of our representatives going to managers and saying, "This is inappropriate behaviour," and managing to get that squashed to some extent. We are not here to police the Department to that extent either.

**Q160 Chair:** The 80% that you have quoted, Mark, is not a figure we recognise from anything we have. Can you provide us with the evidence?

**Mark Serwotka:** We can supply all of the stuff I have. We would just want to anonymise it. They are extracts from people's appraisal discussions.

**Q161 Graham Evans:** One of the recommendations of our investigation into Jobcentre Plus was that, where there are examples of outstanding performance in Jobcentre Plus centres, they should be named and that should be used as an example of best practice, which could be duplicated throughout the centres.

**Chair:** Graham likes best practice, and he asks that of everybody.

**Helen Flanagan:** One of the problems is, where we raise it with senior management when there is evidence of this behaviour, and they do not stop and it is raised at a lower level, it is just marked down as rogue managers without any recognition that this is built into the system. This 80% target was on a letter from Jason Feeney and Neil Couling, who were head of the benefits and work services directorates at that point. That tells you that that is endemic within the system and is endorsed by those senior managers.

**Graham Evans:** We will see this evidence.

**Chair:** It would be useful to see that. We are going to move on, because we are now on other targets, but off flow targets. Debbie has the questions here.

**Q162 Debbie Abrahams:** I am going to start with Professor Stuckler, if I may. You are publishing a report today from the University of Oxford and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, describing the impact of sanctions on unemployment and employment. I wonder if you could very briefly describe what you did and the headline findings of that. I am particularly interested in the pre 2012 effects on JSA claimants and the post 2012 effects with the introduction of the new sanctions regime.

**Professor Stuckler:** We took the Department for Work and Pensions sanction data, collected across 375 local authorities in the UK, and compared that with data on the labour market statistics, also from official sources, on unemployment benefits and employment rates. Then we compared the pre 2011 and post 2011 period, when the UK coalition Government began to reform the work and sanctions regime.

We found that, over the entire period we looked, 2005 to 2014, for every 100 sanctions, about 24 people were flowing off unemployment benefit. After the reforms came into effect, this heightened so that about 43 people for each 100 sanctioned were leaving the system. We then looked at those who were leaving in association with a sanction. We found that fewer than 20% were returning to work. The rest were, for other and sometimes unspecified reasons, ceasing to sign on. We also looked to see if we could find an effect on employment rates of sanctioning across local authorities and did not find it, so that led us to the conclusion that sanctions appeared to be driving people off benefit, but few returned to work.

**Q163 Debbie Abrahams:** Thank you. That is very clear. Since the 2012 regime came in, 43% of JSA claimants who are sanctioned leave JSA, and 80% do so for reasons other than employment. Those are quite significant figures. Today, the ONS will be publishing JSA claimant account figures, and if you estimate that in December 60,000 JSA claimants would have been sanctioned, that would suggest that the unemployment figures, based on the estimates that you have suggested, would be about 25,000 lower than they are. Do you agree with that?

**Professor Stuckler:** We have not made that specific calculation, which is difficult to do, in part because our data, which was the latest available from official sources, only went up to March 2014 at the time, so we would be extrapolating. Some people also received multiple sanctions. In the data we analysed, there could be some small degree of double counting, but if you extrapolate the 43% estimate, it could be as high as the number you suggest.

**Q164 Debbie Abrahams:** What do you think is happening to the people who leave?

**Professor Stuckler:** It is a very good question, and unfortunately not one that we are able to answer with the quantitative data that we have. We are following up with qualitative work in some of the regions of the UK that have some of the highest rates of sanctions being imposed, such as Derby. We are also looking at Oxford, Manchester and a few other sites.

**Q165 Debbie Abrahams:** What do you think should happen, then? What sort of investigation do you think needs to follow on from your work, in terms of a qualitative and longitudinal study as well?

**Professor Stuckler:** One concern we have is that if, as our data show, people are not receiving benefit but also not getting into work, this puts them in a highly precarious, vulnerable situation. There is evidence from other countries that, when people encounter this precarious situation, they interact with highly costly social institutions—hospitals, jails, homeless shelters, emergency food banks and shelters—which can cost more, net, to taxpayers. We look to perform a full cost-benefit analysis that looks not just narrowly at employment but at the wider and potentially hidden costs of sanctioning.

**Q166 Nigel Mills:** Just a quick question, Professor Stuckler: I was just trying to work through the numbers you were quoting and was looking at figure 3 in the report you have published today. It says that of 46 who receive an adverse decision, 20 move off JSA, 3.5 for work, 16.4 to unknown destinations and none for other reasons. When you say fewer than 20% find work of those 20 who leave, how many of those 16.4 to “unknown” do you know did not go into work?

**Professor Stuckler:** Jobcentres, when they close an unemployment benefit claim, record the reasons why.

**Nigel Mills:** Sometimes they do.

**Professor Stuckler:** In the majority of cases they do. Correct, it was made optional in 2009, but over the period we have looked at, it has hovered at about 55% were and are still recorded in the system. The Jobcentre staff would like to be able to code that person as having found work, so these data would overstate the extent to which people who leave are finding work. Our calculation was based on that.

**Q167 Nigel Mills:** If I have been sanctioned, I am not going to be desperately keen to ring up and tell the Jobcentre I have just found work, am I? There must be a little fear here that this “unknown” could be completely unknown. A decent chunk of those could have been going into work. You just do not know, I guess. It makes the finding a little shaky, does it not?

**Professor Stuckler:** It is covering 55% of those leaving. I do a lot of work in epidemiology and that is a good response rate, as would be used for many studies of diabetes, obesity, heart disease and breast cancer to name a few. I would just point to the need to collect data, ideally longitudinally and at the individual level, as has been done in other countries, that can give more definitive answers to these questions about where people are going.

**Q168 Nigel Mills:** There is no way in your study of looking at real time information feeds from PAYE data to check whether people who had been sanctioned and gone off benefits were having tax or NI recorded against them. That kind of study has not been done and that data was not available to you.

**Professor Stuckler:** Real time data with precise categorisation of destinations unfortunately are not available, but it would be possible to do; other countries have done it.

**Q169 Chair:** Can I just ask about the targets and where there is doubt? In the research you have done, were you able to see whether there was a difference in sanction rates across the country? Some areas have high sanction rates; some areas do not. What were the characteristics of the ones that had high and the ones that had low sanction rates?

**Professor Stuckler:** That is a good point. There is a remarkable degree of variation in the extent to which sanctions are being imposed in different regions, which is as high as above 10% in Derby, Preston and a few other local authorities we cite in the paper, and below 3% in others. We have not got to investigating the reasons for those discrepancies. That is the next step we will take.

**Q170 Chair:** There is no correlation between areas of high unemployment that have high sanction rates. I have an area of fairly low unemployment, but I do not know whether sanction rates are therefore higher or lower because of that, because the cohort that is reporting to Jobcentre Plus are the ones who are much harder and further away from the labour market, otherwise they would be in a job in what was, until the oil price collapse, a very buoyant labour market—I am going to have to change what I say now.

**Professor Stuckler:** That is something we are looking into in the international literature. There has been a suggestion that sanctions work less well where jobs are scarce and unemployment is high, so we will get back to you when we have answers.

**Q171 Debbie Abrahams:** I am just going to finish off very quickly. One for you, Professor Stuckler, as a follow up: you have rightly included confidence intervals in the sensitivity analysis, so there is considerable confidence in the figures that you have produced. I appreciate that these statistical models are difficult to understand for a layperson, but is JCP not incentivised for follow up? You would expect that there would be a degree of confidence from that perspective. Thank you; Professor Stuckler is nodding to that.

Can I just move on to Mark and Helen very briefly? Regarding off flow, the Minister has denied that there are any targets around sanctions, as you probably know. Although we have been pushing for an independent inquiry, the Government have not been forthcoming, although they initially said about 15 months ago that they would. From your experience, what proportion of sanctioned people will go off flow as a result of that?

**Helen Flanagan:** It is difficult for us to determine that, because it is not fully recorded by the Department, but off flow is a published target, and our experience is that there is a focus on getting claimants off the books, so to speak, by any means, with off flow being that primary target. If you cannot get people into work, there is only one other way that you can get people off the benefit counts for that week to meet those cohort targets that they have.

As Mark said before, we fully agree that there should be a fully independent review that looks at the sanctions regime as a whole, rather than just individual areas of issues. The problem with having these individual areas is that they can sometimes lead to negative and perverse behaviours. If you look at the cancellation rates or the number of referrals that do not result in a sanction being applied, that is where you get this practice, which they have brought in, that 80% of referrals must now result in a sanction to try to even it out. That is obviously the wrong approach to take.

**Chair:** The last section before everybody disappears off is from Teresa, who was not here at the beginning, but she had a good excuse. She had a Westminster Hall debate.

**Q172 Teresa Pearce:** Thank you. Apologies for not being here earlier. On the subject of sanctions, obviously we have the discussion as to whether they are relevant and whether they work. If we are looking at whether they work and we think they do not—I am not saying we do think that, but if we think they do not—what other alternatives could there be? I would like to ask Steve Hughes, because your organisation, Policy Exchange, has looked at this and you have recommended that the DWP pilots a yellow card system, which could be that benefits are paid on a card rather than a financial sanction. Could you talk a little bit about how this would work?

**Steve Hughes:** Yes, sure. I outlined it a little at the start of the session, but the basic principle is that, for a lower-tier first sanction, there would not be a financial sanction—it would be a non financial sanction—and there would be a pilot of whether that non financial sanction would drive better engagement with the Jobcentre as well. There are two elements to it. The first is payment in a different method from the one that the claimant is used to, to recognise the fact that it is different and the claimant has gone through a sanction. That would be paid on a pre paid card, twinned with daily sign on, or more regular sign on, with the Jobcentre.

Now there are problems with that, obviously. For example, it might cost the claimant a lot more to sign on with

the Jobcentre on a daily basis. It might cost money to implement a pre paid card system as well. Pre paid card systems do exist in other countries, such as Australia and America, but not for the purpose of sanctions. The technology does exist, but not necessarily for this purpose.

**Q173 Teresa Pearce:** What would be the difference to somebody between getting their money in cash into their bank account, and getting the same amount of money on a card?

**Steve Hughes:** It would be the recognition that ultimately the claimant—

**Q174 Teresa Pearce:** It is just stigma; is that what you are saying?

**Steve Hughes:** It is recognition that you have done something different.

**Q175 Teresa Pearce:** What difference would it make to the individual?

**Steve Hughes:** It would be recognition to them that they have had a sanction applied to them and they are not receiving their benefit in the same way anymore.

**Q176 Teresa Pearce:** That is the only difference. It would be just that they could use the card exactly as they could with cash.

**Steve Hughes:** We did outline in the report that you could use these cards to apply different methods of sanction to it as well. For example, again in Australia and America, there are methods of controlling what can be purchased with the cards. The difficulty with that is that you require technology, on behalf of say the retailer, to develop that system. It is important to point out that we did not just say that that is what should be applied, but it is a potential method of non financial sanction. Really the point that we made was that it is about non financial sanctions.

**Q177 Teresa Pearce:** It is a discussion point looking at alternatives, rather than that you think it is the answer.

**Steve Hughes:** Yes, absolutely.

**Q178 Teresa Pearce:** Ben Robinson, your research has concluded that one of the things that is key to helping people back into work and building the potential for them to job-see is a strong trusting relationship between the claimant and the adviser. That is a really key element. Do you think that the potential financial sanctions have an impact on that relationship? Do you think that the person you are meant to trust and engage with should be the person who can stop your money?

**Ben Robinson:** We did a survey with the Employment Related Services Association of a number of Work Programme providers, and the feedback from that was that 60% of advisers thought it did have a negative impact, but about the same proportion also thought that it should be part of the system. It does have that potential. I agree with Steve that we need an alternative for the first sanction, a non financial sanction, and we would agree with the previous witness who talked about a first warning system. That would give an opportunity to check whether the claimant commitment is appropriate to their current situation, as well as signifying that there has been an offence. That is a more appropriate way of doing it without causing confusion as well as a stigma being attached.

**Q179 Teresa Pearce:** Do you think there is any evidence that financial sanctions drive behaviour?

**Ben Robinson:** We would strongly urge a review to see whether they do improve job outcomes. Anecdotally from some of our work, as I said before, we believe they can do in a very small number of cases, but only where the primary barrier is attitudinal. As I said, the vast majority of people do want to find work. The severity of sanctions at the moment is out of proportion with the benefits that they could cause.

**Q180 Teresa Pearce:** What you would suggest is, as a first instance, some sort of marker, but not necessarily a financial sanction. Have you any thoughts on what that could be? Would it be just a verbal warning or something else happening? Would there be increased signing on?

**Ben Robinson:** It would not be dissimilar from the workplace, where you may have a formal official warning, whereby you would check whether the conditions placed on people are appropriate, but also whether the level of support that they are receiving is appropriate. This comes back to the idea that the claimant commitment is a reciprocal arrangement, where they can expect a certain level of support from the Jobcentre, as well as an appropriate assessment of their situation and the number of requirements on them, before the financial sanction kicks in. We would also say that, while that review is taking place, we would strongly urge the system to revert back to before 2012, before it became that much more stringent, because there is no evidence that that increased severity has had any positive impact on job outcomes at all.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. We have exhausted our time but probably not our questions. If we could have the extra evidence, we would be grateful. I would just point out that the reason for this inquiry is that we thought we had got the Minister to agree to the independent inquiry you mentioned in your evidence, but discovered that she had not. That is part of the reason for us holding this inquiry. We do not have, as a Select Committee of the House of Commons, the breadth of ability to do the full independent inquiry that the Government can commission, so that is part of the thinking that lies behind our looking at this. It is obviously an important issue and affects not just your members in the PCS but all of our constituents who are affected by the sanctions regime.

Thank you very much for coming along this morning. Your evidence will be very useful to us when we come to write our report. Thank you very much.

## Written evidence submitted by Derbyshire County Council (SAN0111)

1. Derbyshire County Council provides both a Welfare Rights service delivering benefits advice to the population of Derbyshire, and the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund which is the local welfare assistance provision put in place in April 2013 following the end of elements of the Social Fund.

The comments in this response draw on the experience of operating both these services.

### Executive Summary

2. The experience of Derbyshire Welfare Rights Service contact with benefit claimants experiencing sanctions is:
  - that they are not so much employed by JobCentre Plus as a 'last resort' as an 'initial reaction';
  - that those found 'fit for work' by the ESA process do not have any limitations on their ability to work, or to seek work, adequately reflected in their Jobseeker's Agreement
  - that we have had contact with a number of people who are homeless, or have underlying health problems, that have contributed to their being sanctioned;
  - that few people we have been in contact with have clear information about what is happening and why – and it is certainly not un-typical for a claimants only to find out about a sanction when their benefit is not paid and they go to the JobCentre to ask why.
3. **A sample of applicants presenting to the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund in December 2013 because of financial problems associated with sanctions is summarised in Appendix One. This exercise is being repeated this December.**

### Whether the current sanctions regime is appropriate/proportionate

4. Sanctions are referred to by the DWP as a 'last resort' but nationally there is an accumulation of evidence that they are being employed as an initial reaction, sometimes for minor or one-off lateness at meetings or for signing on.

Policy has concentrated upon making sanctions harsher and longer; punishment and not persuasion appears to be the outcome. Whatever the sanctions regime, the emphasis should be changed to persuading claimants to comply with Regulations and reasonable requirements, and explaining in plain language why this is required.

A scheme must be considered that will focus claimants upon returning to seeking work or improving chances for returning to work rather than reacting to a crisis and trying to find short-term financial help that will help them to eat and/or keep their fuel on and accommodation paid for.

### Whether particular groups are more likely to be sanctioned

5. In the sample work undertaken in December 2013 with the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund (DDF), there were a number of young, single, jobseekers facing sanctions and for whom homelessness was a significant factor, and for whom underlying health problems played a part.
6. From work on Derbyshire County Council's Benefits Helpline, we have found that claimants with health problems, (physical disabilities, learning disabilities, mental health problems etc) as well as literacy problems are also experiencing sanctions.

The policy of requiring ESA claimants who have been found fit for work to claim JSA while a Mandatory Reconsideration is considered has placed vulnerable people in a situation where they are likely to be sanctioned.

The policy intention was that there should be a more 'lenient' JSA regime for claimants in this situation, but we have seen cases where the Jobseeker's Agreement does not reflect any disabilities, and the onus has been placed upon the claimant to show that they have limitations upon their ability to seek work, or be available for work.

ESA WCA scores and the content of any ESA Mandatory Reconsideration (grounds and further evidence) should be automatically available to JSA staff when dealing with claimants in this position.

We have also encountered a case in which the contents of the JSA Claimant Commitment has been used by a Decision Maker to deny the disputed ESA claim. We hope this is not a widespread practice.

7. Some claimants who would be eligible for other benefits (e.g. carers who could claim Income Support) have also been directed to JSA during a WCA dispute – it should be part of the Jobcentre's task to identify the most appropriate alternative benefit in this situation, and not to insist that JSA be claimed.

### **Wider implications**

8. In our experience, claimants sanctioned on JSA are likely to seek short-term, help (via the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund in our case) to relieve the immediate crisis, but not to challenge the sanction decision. This is not necessarily because they agree with or fully understand the decision. Their concerns are with having enough to eat, to pay for heating and to avoid homelessness.

They also almost always do not understand that if sanctioned again within 52 weeks, they are likely to suffer a greater penalty.

9. Although our small sample in December 2013 did not reveal many debt cases, the problem of debt is an obvious one: removal of income starts a spiral of financial problems for people who by definition will usually have few resources.

Where claimants are already in debt, sanctions can only intensify the debt spiral – even a 'short' sanction may have implications that last for many months or longer, and may tip an individual and/or family in to crisis.

The likelihood of borrowing from expensive but legal sources, or simply illegal sources is increased.

### **Suggested alterations to the current system**

10. Decision Makers should take more account of:
  - homelessness,/potential homelessness
  - claimants who are subject to Possession Orders in the County Court
  - preventing suspension of Housing Benefit wherever possible
  - literacy problems and other problems in managing forms, paperwork or electronic communications
11. The number of people sanctioned but still economically inactive should be included in the unemployment statistics.

### Signing On and attending the Jobcentre

12. Too much emphasis can be placed on physically attending the Jobcentre. This sometimes clashes with the government's stress upon digital claims and management of claims. It can also prove counter-productive to the aim of job-seeking.

Where a claimant is short of money (through sanctions or any other reason) alternative means should be considered such as signing on and providing job search details by pre-paid post or electronically where this is appropriate. This should also be considered where the claimant lives in an area where the Jobcentre is at a distance, or is costly to reach, or where public transport is less available.

Postal signing is already available but we do not believe that it is well used or that claimants are told of it.

Some claimants may use up scarce resources, including time, in reaching the Jobcentre, and may be forced to spend long periods away from home owing to long gaps between public transport services.

Attendance at Jobcentres, in such cases, should be reserved for activities that are essential to the management of the claim by face to face contact or activities that are directly beneficial to the claimant and cannot be done in any other way.

#### If a sanction is being considered or implemented

13. Few claimants who have sought our advice seem to have been given clear information as to what is happening or why. Many have only found out that they were sanctioned when they found there was no money in their account and on enquiring at Jobcentre Plus they discovered that they had been sanctioned. They then report being advised by the Jobcentre that they have to wait for “the letter” before they can ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration of the sanction decision - building in further delay through which they are without income.

As advisers we never see any written reasons until and unless we ask Jobcentre Plus for them.

14. When a claimant is sanctioned, they should be given:

a clear explanation in writing of:

- what sanction applies
- from what date(s)
- the date(s) of sanctionable offences(s)
- the reason for the sanction
- the financial effect of the sanction
- whether this is a first sanction or an escalation of a previous sanction (and details of that sanction also)
- where compliance (with Work Focused Interview etc) will end the sanction, clear information that this is the case and what to do to bring the sanction to a swift end
- clear information about the possible effect of further sanctions
- a clear statement of rights to challenge the decision
- a clear statement about hardship payments
- local contacts for emergency advice

This should be given to the claimant before the sanction is applied and they should be given a time to respond/seek advice and to give good cause/reason or other appropriate reasons

15. Sanctions decisions relating to actively seeking work frequently refer to the failure of the claimant to meet the Commitment/Agreement, rather than meeting the requirements of the relevant JSA Regulations. JSA decisions (and Claimant Commitments) need to be more in keeping with CJSA 1814/2007 which directed the Tribunal to the Jobseeker's Act and the Regulations, and to apply a positive test of what the claimant had done, not a negative one addressing what they had not done.
16. Where sanctions are imposed for lateness, they should be imposed only where a pattern of lateness can be shown, and certainly not for minor lateness on only one occasion – claimants should receive written advice that a sanction is being considered for a pattern of lateness. (see also paragraph 24 below).

#### ESA sanctions

17. Any decision on ESA sanctions should refer to the Action Plan for the individual, and ensure that any referral for sanctions from a Work Programme provider has taken the Plan in to account.

Work Programme providers should have access to the claimant's WCA score and other evidence of limitations upon their ability to do work-related activity.

18. Referrals based upon failure to work or to apply for jobs should be rejected in every case and providers reminded that this is not the function of the Work-Related Group for ESA.

## Mandatory Reconsideration

19. Mandatory Reconsiderations for sanctions should be completed where possible either prior to the application of a sanction, or within a time limit that would realistically avert financial hardship in cases where the initial decision is unsound.

Appeals against sanctions decisions should similarly be listed swiftly.

20. Claimants must be able to see that it is worth challenging a decision and that there will be a rapid response. It is unsurprising that claimants show little interest in challenging decisions where they may have to wait months for an outcome.

## Hardship Payments

21. We are not confident that sufficient claimants are told of these. More and clearer information is needed for claimants.
22. People in existing debt – where that debt may lead to a crisis, especially court action leading to added costs, loss of home, or loss of liberty (for fine arrears, Council Tax arrears) should be considered a ‘vulnerable group’
23. Where hardship payments are recoverable (Universal Credit), we would urge that this policy should be changed – they should be non-recoverable or they will add to continuing financial instability and debt problems.

## ‘Traffic Light’ or ‘Yellow Card’

24. Methods of pre-warning and advising claimants at risk of sanctions have been suggested by other commentators.

We would concur that a clearly-worded explanation of the problems as perceived by the Jobcentre and an invitation to explain extenuating circumstances and/or to remedy the breach of any obligations would be very important.

Any notice should also contain information on how to seek independent advice on benefits.

The Default Notice required prior to action under the Consumer Credit Act may provide a model – though any benefit-related version should avoid over-complex or legalistic language.

## Non-financial sanctions

25. Financial sanctions may hinder the ability of the claimant to seek work or undertake work-related activity and may lead to further sanctions.

Non-financial sanctions which seek to require the claimant to address problems with their claim may overcome this contradiction in the system.

These could take the form of reasonable further requirements to address the ‘sanctionable’ behaviour but should include reasonable consideration of claimants’ individual circumstances so that they are beneficial and not purely punitive.

A senior DWP official recently claimed that claimants were grateful for the ‘wake-up call’ provided by sanctions, although he never substantiated his claim that Jobcentres were inundated with thank-you cards.

Non-financial sanctions in the form of periods of more focused individual support may provide a genuine and effective ‘wake-up call’; more importantly they may help to provide motivation for claimants who feel that they have little chance of finding work and who are suffering from the undermining and demotivating effects of successive unsuccessful job-searches.

12 December 2014

## **Appendix One**

### **Work with a sample of with Derbyshire Discretionary Fund applicants – December 2013**

Of a sample of 23 cases presenting to the Derbyshire Discretionary Fund (DDF) for emergency cash help because of financial problems arising from sanctions imposed by Jobcentre Plus we found that:

- All but one were subject to JSA sanctions
- Only two had challenged the decision
- None had taken up Welfare Rights help or advice, even those who had challenged the decision, before contacting the DDF.
  
- 19 were single (1 was fleeing an abusive ex-partner and her sanction arose from him refusing to let her apply for work)
- 4 had partners
- 1 of the single applicants and 2 of those with partners had dependent children, the rest did not.
  
- 7 were homeless
- 1 was 'staying in a shed'
- 11 were tenants (1 of these in 'poor conditions')
- 3 were in shared houses
- 1 was staying with relatives
  
- 9 were 24 years old or younger
- 10 were aged 25-35
- 4 were 50+
  
- 7 had mentioned health conditions (stress, depression, ADHD, back problems, pneumonia, epilepsy)
- 4 people made further requests to DDF owing to further sanctions
- 2 people made further requests to DDF because of moving home owing to dangerous conditions (property or other tenants)
- 13 had applied for hardship payments
- At least 2 did not know of hardship provision until DDF told them
- 2 claimants said that the lack of money from JSA meant that they could not afford to attend JC+ courses or conduct job search – and that non-attendance would lead to another sanction
- 2 claimants stated that they had missed appointments owing to bereavement but had still been sanctioned

## Written evidence submitted by Public and Commercial Services Union (SAN0109)

### Introduction

1. Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) represents around 240,000 members in the civil service and related agencies, bodies and contractors. Within this, we represent 67,000 members based in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) who administer both Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and the conditionality and sanctions regimes for each.
2. Our members, working in a range of roles across the DWP, therefore have a unique insight into the operation of the sanctions regime. We have qualitative and quantitative data from our members on sanctions (including through member surveys), and our members have expressed their clear views through our annual conference.
3. PCS welcomes the committee's new inquiry, following the Oakley review which we believe was too limited in scope. We further welcome and agree with the comments from the committee's report into the role of Jobcentre plus (JCP) in the reformed welfare state which recommended that JCP should continue to provide a public employment service for the unemployed.

### The case for abolishing the current sanctions regime

4. The central role of the DWP should be to alleviate poverty and to provide a welfare safety net below which no one should fall. Sanctions deprive claimants of their only source of income, and can also lead to the removal of housing benefit (administered by local authorities) leading to rent arrears and eviction, as HB is passported benefit from JSA. Sanctions thereby serve to increase poverty not alleviate it and they force people through the welfare safety net. PCS therefore believes that the current sanctions regime should be abolished.
5. The recent all-party parliamentary inquiry into hunger in the UK found that the increased use of sanctions was the single biggest factor behind the increased use of food banks in the UK today.
6. PCS is frequently contacted by academics and journalists researching food poverty as their work consistently leads back to the sanctioning regime as a principal factor. Our own survey of members showed that 76% have seen an increase in food bank referrals.
7. Yet, despite requests from PCS, DWP has refused to conduct any kind of investigation or monitoring of the link between food bank usage and sanctions. The former head of Work Services, Neil Couling (now Director for Universal Credit), even went as far to state that he believed claimants found sanctioning to be a "welcome jolt", and food banks were used as an "economic choice" to a recent Holyrood Select Committee. This demonstrates a lack of political impartiality from senior civil servants with responsibility for this area of work and an unwillingness to take any decisive action over proven concerns.
8. There is no evidence to show that sanctions spur people into finding sustainable employment. On the contrary, the experience of our members is that out of work claimants are consistently keen to find work, with or without sanctions, as has been shown by the constant churn of the JSA liveload.
9. It is a fallacy propagated by the media and, regrettably, some politicians that there are large numbers of unemployed people 'enjoying a life on benefits' of just £72.40 per week who must be forced into looking for work for fear of having their benefit taken away from them. According to OECD data (2012), UK unemployment benefit is the least generous in the developed world as a

proportion of average wages, at only 14%, compared to 59% in Germany and 66% in France.

10. In our survey of adviser members, who work closely with jobseekers on a daily basis, 70% said that sanctioning did not positively impact on claimants finding employment.
11. It is true that there are some claimants who have been on benefit for long periods of time. What is untrue is that this is a lifestyle choice that requires sanctions to disrupt. Long term unemployment is far more likely to be caused by the lack of job opportunities in local labour markets, which explains the large regional variations in unemployment rates. Also there will be health and well-being conditions that make finding work for some individuals particularly difficult. Learning difficulties, language barriers, and lack of skills and access to appropriate training are also 'barriers to work'. None of these underlying causes of unemployment are addressed by sanctions.
12. A jobcentre should be a place that supports people into finding a job. However the current sanctions regime is transforming JCP into a place of fear for claimants as they know that the smallest misdemeanour will result in them being sanctioned. The sanctions regime is poisoning the relationship between work coaches and claimants thereby making it more difficult to build the relationship required, particularly for those further from the labour market. There have been some very worrying incidents in jobcentres of violence and threats to staff as a result of sanctioning which demonstrate this.
13. The levels of sanctions are grossly disproportionate to the alleged offences that generate them. There are many serious criminal offences that receive lesser penalties than the removal of benefits for 4 weeks, which is the minimum sanction. The most severe sanction is the removal of benefit for 3 years. For a single person receiving £72.40 JSA per week a three year sanction equates to a fine of over £11,000. There are few other walks of life where penalties of that severity would be considered, let alone imposed. Despite assurances when the current regime was introduced, that the three year penalty would rarely be used, 1,767 such sanctions have been imposed between October 2012 (when the new sanctions regime was imposed) and June 2014.
14. The number of sanctions that have been imposed are staggeringly high. In 2013 906,246 sanctions were imposed for JSA alone. This is the highest ever number despite the fall in unemployment that took place through most of that year. For JSA claimants this equates to a sanctioning rate two and a half times greater than applied during the previous government. These increases confirm PCS's view that there has been a deliberate policy of increasing the use of benefit sanctions in recent years.
15. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence about the inappropriate use of sanctions there is a lack of empirical evidence. We believe that DWP should publish a more detailed breakdown of sanctions, and specifically more detailed explanations as to why they were imposed. PCS' survey of our adviser members showed that 61% had experienced pressure to refer claimants to sanctions where they believed it may be inappropriate to do so. The all party study into hunger in the UK cited claimants not understanding their claimant commitment, or having impossible requirements to fulfil or having sanctions imposed through no fault of their own.
16. Our members report that they feel a disproportionate number of sanctions are imposed on those belonging to disadvantaged groups such as those with language problems, those with ongoing health conditions, learning difficulties, homeless issues and alcohol and drug problems. Early feedback from members working on Universal Credit shows that the intensified levels of conditionality expected by Universal Credit makes the likelihood of sanctioning for people from disadvantaged groups considerably greater. Many people with mental health issues will realistically not be able to meet their claimant commitment. It appears designed to put people off claiming the benefit completely. As Universal Credit is currently only claimed by those who are supposed to be fit for work, we fear that there will be an even greater impact when Universal

Credit is expanded to take on ESA claimants.

17. Although DWP produces data on sanction referrals and decisions, it does not provide data on the sanctioning levels of disabled claimants as a proportion of the claimant liveload. They have consistently refused to break the data down to this level, despite parliamentary questions. However, in 2011, a document was produced at North West level in DWP which demonstrated that disabled claimants and those identified as BME had received proportionally more sanctions. PCS believes it would be beneficial for the Select Committee to establish in full what percentage of claimants by gender, ethnicity, age and disability are sanctioned compared with their relative proportion of the claimant count.
18. The DWP has a responsibility to ensure that claimants do not fall into the gap between JSA and ESA when they are too ill to work, but have been found 'fit to work' by the deeply flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA). PCS believes this group of claimants are at particular risk of being sanctioned as they are not well enough to meet their claimant commitment. Special arrangements need to be put in place to ensure this group can continue to claim JSA and are not at risk of being sanctioned.
19. ESA claimants in the work-related activity group (WRAG) are also subject to conditionality and therefore sanctions. In the first six months of 2014, 25,011 sanctions have been applied to ESA claimants – an increase of 198% from 8,393 in the first six months of 2013. The level of sanctioning and shocking increase is, we believe, due to a failure to achieve the projected savings on disability benefit spending that the WCA was designed to achieve. As a lower proportion of claimants are being found 'fit for work' or being placed in the WRAG, this means a proportionately smaller group is facing harsher sanctions. PCS believes conditionality should be removed for ESA claimants.
20. Inappropriate sanctions are sometimes only picked up on hardship applications, or appeals, after a claimant has been sanctioned. Evidence suggests that Mandatory Reconsideration requests and appeals overturn many sanction decisions. The appeal success rate was 17% in 2013. But by then the damage is already done in terms of how DWP and its staff are viewed by claimants and others.

### **Pressure on staff**

21. The repeated denial by the employer of targets and pressure to refer claimants for sanction wears a little thin with PCS members. PCS's survey of JCP advisers in January 2014 found that, while the relatively low figure of 23% of advisers said they had been set or told that there was a target for sanctions referrals, 81% said they had been set an expectation for sanction referrals. This is despite written and oral responses from ministers that state "there are no targets for sanctions".
22. Members tell us that the 'expectation' to refer to sanction still exists for jobcentre staff. It is often dealt with as part of an individual's performance appraisal throughout the year. Individuals can be placed on 'Performance Improvement Plans' (PIPs) for not making "enough" sanction referrals. Staff are also issued, or threatened with, a "Must Improve" marking as part of their end year review. In recent pay awards this has meant that they would not receive a non-consolidated payment as part of the annual DWP pay award. Those who are put through formal performance procedures for not making 'enough' sanction referrals would receive no pay rise at all (n.b. the system makes no allowance for punitive markings for staff to make too many sanction referrals). The pressure on DWP staff to sanction is therefore very real.
23. An internal investigation conducted by the DWP in May 2013 found that there was no regime or target culture for staff. PCS refuted this. The 'investigation' was extremely limited and relied on press reports or anecdotal evidence collated by PCS. Any examples of where targets had been

overtly set were written off as 'rogue managers'. No wider investigation or action was taken by the DWP. In part, this prompted our members' survey in January 2014.

24. The DWP announced plans to run a 'Conditionality Week' in October 2013 which was to be about "celebrating how far we have come since the introduction of tougher sanction levels last year", according to the departments headline news page. Across the country it was planned to hold events which could include quizzes, reward and recognition events. Following strong objections from PCS this was cancelled, but some events still took place. PCS believes this demonstrates an inappropriate attitude at the top of the department towards the sanctioning regime.
25. The introduction of SR13 and 'Help to Work' measures from April 2014 has resulted in some claimants attending the jobcentre daily or weekly to complete a jobsearch review. PCS believes that this is motivated by efforts to drive claimants off benefits, rather than offer them additional help (there is not adequate time allocated for this in a jobsearch review appointment). In a recent communiqué issued in the Central England Group by the Regional Director, the term 'Hassle factor' was used in relation to organising an appointment for the claimant to "frustrate" claimants off benefit. Previously this was called "botherability" or "pester power", thereby demonstrating that whilst the names may change the practices do not.
26. In addition to pressure on those who make referrals to sanction, DWP Labour Market Decision Makers are required to process up to sixty decisions a day, leaving little time for the complexities of a particular case to be examined. PCS has been provided with evidence that demonstrates there is now an 'aim' for Decision Makers to reach an 80% adverse rate on referrals, meaning 80% of referrals should result in a sanction. When challenged by the union, departmental management claim that they are monitoring inconsistent decision outcomes, and the 'aim' is not a target. This is effectively the same response that an 'expectation' for sanction referrals is not a target, when in reality they both have the same pressurising impact on staff.
27. Another issue of concern to PCS is the downgrading of "non complex" decisions to Administrative Officers, who often simply follow instructions and impose sanctions, whereas Executive Officers are more likely to consider all issues before making a referral. This was introduced when there was a backlog of decision referrals in 2013, however, since that has been rectified the change has not been reversed. There is a creeping trend within the DWP to downgrade these types of decisions, as can be seen with mandatory reconsiderations and short-term benefit advance decisions under Universal Credit.
28. Finally the behaviour of some managers individually and collectively needs to be examined. PCS is in no doubt that there are some managers who want "to get the claimants off the books" at any cost and use the sanctions regime as one way to harass claimants until they give up their claim. There is still no distinction made for off-flows which arise from employment or where the claimant just stops claiming for whatever reason (sanctioned claimants are not counted in claimant figures). The off-flow targets remain as a pressure for work coaches and middle managers.

## **Our Alternative**

29. PCS firmly believes that the government is insisting on the use of sanctions solely to drive down costs, without regard to the financial and personal consequences for individual claimants. Government policy is fuelling an unjust stereotype of our members as those who bully the unemployed. With more emphasis put on private contractors to deliver jobseeking work, despite the failures of the Work Programme, PCS is concerned that the DWP is being set up to fail.
30. PCS members have the ability and desire to assist benefit claimants in their journey back to work. When given the opportunity, DWP employees consistently outperform private sector providers in helping the unemployed into work and sustainable employment (as demonstrated in the Pathways

to Work pilots). The answer is not sanctions, but increased support, advice and training opportunities for claimants. This should sit alongside a reformed labour market providing sufficient jobs paying at least the living wage, with affordable childcare and housing.

31. Far greater pressure should be applied to employers to ensure they pay the living wage and end practices like zero hours contracts, which force people to claim benefits just to survive. A lot is said about responsibilities of the unemployed. Little attention is given to the lack of responsibility shown by large employers who appear only too content to exploit their workforce with low pay, job insecurity and poor terms of employment.
32. We believe that a more supportive approach to claimants, with the emphasis on encouragement rather than penalty, would be more productive than sanctioning. There is a clear need for increased specialist support for those claimants in disadvantaged groups and there should be more specialist advisers (e.g. for disabled people, lone parents, sick and young people etc.). The success of specialised provision of this nature in the era of the New Deals, or currently with the limited provision available to Disability Employment Advisers, shows them to be the most effective means of helping those furthest from the labour market move into employment. More training and educational opportunities are also important elements in supporting rather than penalising claimants.
33. PCS is clear that we believe that the sanctions regime should be abolished. But despite mounting evidence of the damage done by the sanctions regime, the government has failed to implement either the recommendations from the previous select committee report into the role of JCP or from the Oakley review.
34. In the short term, we believe there is an urgent need for the processes to apply for hardship payments and for requesting a mandatory reconsideration/making an appeal to be streamlined and communicated directly to the individual claimants.
35. PCS would welcome the opportunity to give oral evidence to the committee, based on the experiences of the staff who administer the system.

*12 December 2014*

## **Written evidence submitted by Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite and Professor Clare Bamba, Durham University (SAN0011)**

This submission is based upon the findings of the Local Health Inequalities in an Age of Austerity: The Stockton-on-Tees Study, conducted by an interdisciplinary team of academics and supported by the Wolfson Research Institute for Health and Wellbeing at Durham University.

### **1.0 Executive summary**

1.1 This evidence submission is based on the findings of Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite and Professor Clare Bamba's extensive research into health inequalities, with a particular focus on emerging findings from a five year project investigating health inequalities in Stockton on Tees (the Stockton on Tees Study)[\[1\]](#).

1.2 Drawing on 12 months of in-depth, ethnographic research in a Trussell Trust foodbank ([www.trusselltrust.org](http://www.trusselltrust.org)) in Stockton on Tees, this submission provides the Committee with evidence of how people with existing health problems or disabilities are being affected by the current Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions regime.

1.3 Our research has found that the current ESA sanctions regime aggravates the ill health experienced by recipients of these health-related benefits (and is a particular problem for people with mental health conditions). Sanctions led to loss of their only source of income, resulting in sanctioned ESA recipients often going without sufficient food and/or energy required to maintain good health or recover from illness.

1.4 Sanctions are occurring because of inflexibility within the system, lack of suitability of the system for people with health problems, or a lack of understanding of the complex system on the part of recipients (a particular problem for people with mental health conditions or new recipients).

1.5 We recommend that (a) sanctions for ESA claimants should be relaxed or removed – particularly for those with mental health problems, and (b) welfare rights advice needs to be provided to new and existing ESA claimants.

### **2.0 Introduction**

2.1 Kayleigh Garthwaite (PhD) is a Research Associate at Durham University. Her research focuses on poverty, social exclusion, and health inequalities. Currently, Kayleigh is conducting ethnographic research in the borough of Stockton on Tees, England, which examines how health inequalities are embodied in lived experiences.

2.2 Clare Bamba (PhD) is Professor of Public Health Geography, Durham University. She is an elected Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society of Public Health. Her research focuses on the influence of welfare state policies on health and health inequalities. She contributed to the Marmot Review of Health Inequalities in England (2010) and Europe (2013); the US National Research Council Report on US Health in International Perspective (2013); as well as the Public Health England commissioned report on the health equity in the North of England: Due North (2014).

2.3 Professor Bamba and Dr Garthwaite are part of a wider five year project investigating local health inequalities in an age of austerity in Stockton on Tees, England. This is funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

2.4 Drawing on 12 months of in-depth, ethnographic research in a Trussell Trust foodbank in Stockton on Tees, this submission provides the Committee with evidence of how people with existing health problems or disabilities are being affected by the current ESA sanctions regime.

### **3.0 Factual evidence: Findings and case studies**

3.1 Drawing on 12 months of in-depth ethnographic research, our findings suggest that people who have been sanctioned whilst receiving ESA are using foodbanks as a coping strategy.

3.2 Our research has found that for vulnerable people, such as those with mental health problems, being sanctioned can have an even greater impact on their daily life. Adding a benefits sanction to their already multiple, complex problems can aggravate their health problems even further.

3.3 Food bank users are likely to be living with fairly long term financial problems, arising from low waged work, accumulation of debt, and living in areas of multiple deprivation, leading to difficulties in sourcing affordable healthy food. When sanctioned, these problems are aggravated even further as the loss of their only source of income results in sanctioned ESA recipients often going without sufficient food and/or energy required to maintain health.

3.4 Our research has shown that foodbank provision can provide short term relief in terms of alleviating hunger for people experiencing complex and often long-term factors for accessing a foodbank, such as health problems. However, food bank provision can be unsuitable even in the short term for people with certain health conditions. This relates to the supply-driven nature of foodbanking in terms of what kind of, and how much food, people can and cannot obtain.

3.5 Our findings illustrate what can happen when people remain on low incomes for long periods of time. There is no excess income available to deal with extra or unforeseen expenses (or income loss from sanctions) and budgeting for extras is rarely possible. As a result debts accrue which are difficult to pay back causing a spiral of debt and ever lower disposable income. This in turn leads to going without essentials and leads to further health problems, for example, worsening mental health and digestive problems.

3.6 People on benefits have insufficient money to buy the food they need for health, however carefully they budget and shop. This in turn has long-term health consequences in terms of obesity, diabetes, and other dietary-related diseases as benefit recipients are forced to buy cheaper, high fat, high sugar processed foods. Our research suggests that ESA sanctions are exacerbating this problem further.

3.7 Our research has found that people with health problems who have recently left the labour market can often find themselves sanctioned as they do not understand how the complicated benefits system works; for example, they may miss an appointment or they may not apply for the required number of jobs per week. This is particularly an issue for ESA recipients with a mental health condition.

3.8 The following four case studies illustrate these points in further detail.

### **3.9 Case Study One: Karen's story**

Karen is a single mother with two daughters, aged 9 and 11. Karen is currently not working due to mental health problems. Karen was receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) whilst waiting for her ESA appeal. Karen had been sanctioned by the Jobcentre as she was unable to reach her requirement to apply for 17 jobs between 24/12/13 and 31/12/13 (the Christmas period). Karen now has no income whatsoever for herself and two children. She is particularly struggling with energy costs. She recently changed her electricity payment meter – the old meter charged 38p per day for gas and electric even when not in use – the new one, thankfully, does not, and won't run out if you only have 1p on the meter, whereas the old one did.

### 3.10 Case Study Two: Jessica's story

Jessica is a 23 year old woman, who was 22 weeks pregnant when she came to the foodbank. She had walked over 2 miles to get here as she cannot afford the bus fare from her flat. Jessica explained that she was receiving ESA for mental health problems following the stillborn birth of her first child 8 months ago. Jessica was sanctioned for not attending a Work Focused Interview appointment – her mental health problems prevented her from leaving the house on that particular day. She received a foodbank referral from the Citizens Advice Bureau after seeking help for her mounting debts following her sanction. Jessica had not eaten a proper cooked meal for two weeks, and was instead relying on her sister's children's leftovers. Jessica explained: *"I haven't had my fridge or cooker switched on for three weeks, I can't afford the electric. I sold the telly last week – there was no point in keeping it 'cos I couldn't afford to use it anyway."* As Jessica is 22 weeks pregnant, she knows she needs to eat healthily for herself and her unborn child, but currently cannot afford to adequately heat her home or feed herself.

### 3.11 Case Study Three: Tony's story

Tony was from one of the more affluent areas of town. He had been an IT manager at a large mobile phone company until his sight problems began to deteriorate. He is now blind in one eye and his sight in the other eye is now failing too, so he was medically retired. He applied for ESA but was turned down, so is awaiting his appeal outcome. Tony and his wife can't afford the rent on their three bedroom house. Tony was recently sanctioned for not applying for three jobs a day – he said he can't find any that are suitable for him and his specific health needs: *"Applying for job after job, when you know you can't do the job, is so demoralising"*. This was the first time Tony had been out of work and on benefits, and difficulty finding his way around the system – despite being well educated – was central to his experiences.

### 3.12 Case Study Four: Jimmy's story

Jimmy, in his forties, has been to the foodbank five times in the past year. He last worked in 2009 in a local plastics factory but had to leave due to sciatica in his back and legs. He was receiving ESA but following a medical he was found fit for work. Jimmy is currently appealing the decision but is not claiming anything at all at the moment. When asked why he wasn't claiming JSA in the meantime, he said: *"I don't want to go on JSA in case they keep me on it"* and says he would rather *"struggle on with nothing"*. His girlfriend, his sister and *"this [the foodbank]"* have been helping with his meals. Last year, Jimmy previously won an appeal after being found fit for work but it took over a year to reach the decision. He is hopeful that his medical records will make the decision maker at the appeal *"see sense"* and reinstate his ESA. Jimmy said: *"I would love to work, I hate being on benefits, but with my health problems I know I can't work every day, it would finish me off"*.

## 4.0 Recommendations

4.1 A flexible benefits and sanctions system which takes into account the complexity of the lives of people experiencing multiple disadvantage and ill health is required: sanctions for ESA claimants should be relaxed or removed – particularly for those with mental health problems.

Food bank users reported how a lack of flexibility in the benefits system left them with multiple financial and social problems, ranging from debt, fuel poverty, homelessness, and aggravated health problems, as Karen and Jessica's stories highlight.

The application of sanctions to ESA recipients for small – often misunderstood – transgressions, as in the case of Tony's story, merely complicates the system and can result in total loss of income with a resulting need to rely on emergency food aid.

The current ESA sanctions regime is not proportionate for jobseekers with health problems as sanctions have led to cases of a total loss of income resulting in an inability to eat or heat at the levels required for maintaining good health or recovering from ill health. Indeed sanctions have exacerbated ill health. The sanctioning of people with mental health problems is a particular problem – with the stress and anxiety of income loss adding to their underlying condition.

4.2 Welfare rights advice needs to be provided to new and existing ESA claimants.

For foodbank users who had recently left a job due to health problems, like Tony in Case Study Three, a lack of knowledge or understanding of how the system worked could lead to participants being sanctioned because they had not understood the conditions attached to their benefits. A related problem occurs when those whose ESA ends due to them being found 'fit for work' attempt to claim JSA – often they are quickly sanctioned for failing to actively seek work because no allowance has been made for their "newness" to the system or the additional burdens that ill health can make.

Often, people accessing the foodbank were not aware of other help and support they could access. When sanctioned, people should be provided with comprehensive advice on hardship payments, debt advice, and help with fuel costs.

A smaller group of people, like Jimmy in Case Study Four, were simply unwilling to claim JSA because they felt it would negatively impact upon their chances of winning a subsequent challenge to the ending of their ESA. Further advice and guidance on the complex procedures involved in ESA appeals is therefore necessary to avoid instances of under claiming.

Our research has also suggested that those in receipt of ESA for mental health reasons may be particularly vulnerable to being sanctioned because they experience additional difficulties in navigating the current benefits system correctly.

## 5.0 Annex: Research methodology

5.1 The research reported here is drawn from an ethnographic study of foodbank use and is situated within a wider

five year, mixed method project examining localised health inequalities in an era of austerity in Stockton on Tees, a town in the North East of England. Ethnography is a well-established and widely used method within the social and health sciences.

5.2 Ethnographic research usually involves observing people in their natural, real-world setting, rather than in the artificial environment of a laboratory or focus group. The aim is to gather insight into how people live; what they do; or what they need in their everyday lives. Ethnographic research relies on techniques such as observation, video diaries, photographs, and contextual interviews. Ethnographic research provides extremely rich insights into 'real life' behaviour, and can be used to identify new or currently unmet user needs.

5.3 As part of the ethnographic approach to the project, Dr Garthwaite volunteered at the foodbank on a weekly basis and participated fully in all aspects of foodbank operations. Volunteering and participant observation began in November 2013 and is ongoing. In addition, 44 semi-structured interviews were undertaken – 34 interviews with food bank users, six interviews with volunteers, and four interviews with care professionals to discuss their views and experiences of the food bank. Of the 34 foodbank users interviewed (15 women and 19 men) the age range of the sample varied from 18 to 60 years. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and secured by informed consent. Data were fully anonymised before thematic analysis was undertaken. Ethical considerations were respected throughout the research, with the research being approved in advance by Durham University Department of Geography Ethics Committee.

## 6.0 Relevant Publications

Garthwaite, K., Bamba, C., and Collins, P. (under review) *Food for thought: exploring health inequalities through an ethnographic study of a food bank in the UK*. Submitted to Social Science and Medicine.

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[i] For further information about the Leverhulme Trust funded Stockton on Tees Study, please visit [www.dur.ac.uk/health.inequalities/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/health.inequalities/)

7 December 2014

## Written evidence submitted by Community Links (SAN0102)

### **Background**

1. Community Links is a social action charity rooted in East London and nationally focused. We run a wide range of community services and projects for all ages, aiming to find new solutions to old problems and deliver them to the whole community. Founded in 1977, we now work with 17,500 local people regularly each year; supporting children, young people, adults and families in 40 different projects. We share the lessons from this frontline service delivery, and promote innovations with a national audience of decision makers. We want to make policy work better for people.
2. Community Links is exceptionally well placed to gain experience related to sanctions, from a number of perspectives. Through our delivery of the Work Programme (WP) we “raise doubts”[\[1\]](#), while through our advice services we often support clients who have been sanctioned.
3. Our response to the present Review is based primarily on evidence collected from:
  - Our longitudinal qualitative research project assessing the cumulative local impacts of recent reforms to the welfare system, including changes to jobseeker conditionality and sanctions.[\[2\]](#)
  - A focus group held with our frontline employment and advice workers.
  - A quantitative survey of 61 Work Programme Providers that we undertook with the Employment Related Services Association, appended at Annex 1.[\[3\]](#)
  - Individual conversations with certain beneficiaries of our advice services.

### **What are the current sanctions regimes trying to achieve and what evidence is there that they work? To what extent are sanctions justified solely as a means of ensuring that unemployed benefit claimants fulfil the conditions of benefit entitlement?**

1. There is a lack of consistency about the justification for sanctions from current government Ministers. DWP ministers have often justified the extended conditionality on the basis of ensuring benefit claimants fulfil the conditions of entitlement, i.e. ensuring compliance with the conditionality regime. Iain Duncan Smith, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions told the House in 2010:

we expect co-operation from those who are seeking work. That is why we are developing a regime of sanctions for those who refuse to play by the rules[\[4\]](#)
2. Later, wrapping up the final Commons debate on the Welfare Reform Bill, the Secretary of State said “When [jobseekers’] responsibilities are not met, we will have the power to apply a robust set of sanctions[\[5\]](#)” More recently the Minister for Employment Esther McVey has said “Sanctions ... are imposed only where claimants fail to meet reasonable requirements. Sanctions play an important role in encouraging compliance[\[6\]](#)”
3. As can be seen from points 1 and 2, sanctions are regularly justified by government Ministers on the basis of compliance. However Ministers have at times also justified the sanctions system on the basis of helping people to work. Esther McVey has said “conditionality backed by sanctions has a positive impact on job-search behaviour”[\[7\]](#). In evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee in 2014, Ms McVey said “You have got to have a sanction in place there, just to make sure that people are doing what they are meant to be doing, and that is us helping them get a job.”
4. This contradiction between different rationales offered for sanctions is problematic in terms of both justifying and evaluating the current system: it is hard to justify the system or indeed to evaluate how effectively it is achieving its policy objectives without a clearer articulation of policy intent.
5. Some concepts from punishment theory are relevant to understanding which policy intent could justify the sanctions regime. Punishment theory suggests there are five possible rationales for punishment: incapacitation, deterrence, restitution, retribution, or rehabilitation.[\[8\]](#)

6. Benefit sanctions clearly do not meet the criteria for 'incapacitation' (as claimants can continue to breach their conditions while their payments are stopped) or 'restitution' (as sanctions do not require claimants to take action to make up for any harm caused to society by their breach). Furthermore, it would be very hard to argue that the harm caused to society by a breach of JSA or ESA conditions was large enough to warrant harsh financial penalties in the name of 'retribution'.
7. Thus, the rationale for benefit sanctions from a punishment theory perspective must fit under to 'deterrence' or 'rehabilitation'. That is, either (a) to deter claimants from undertaking activities that would harm their chances of finding work (or failing to undertake activities that would help them towards work); or (b) to ensure claimants who have made such breaches do not repeat them.
8. Both of these rationales – 'deterrence' and 'rehabilitation' can be seen as key to supporting people to find work: ensuring they undertake the positive activities that will move them towards work, and dissuading them from negative activities. However they could also be seen as key to a goal of 'compliance' with the rules, rather than an aim of supporting people into work.
9. Given the issues of fairness and hardship that surround sanctions, discussed below, the current sanctions regime cannot be justified on the basis of compliance alone. Such a justification can lead to counterproductive situations which while they may enforce compliance, do little to support people towards positive outcomes including sustained employment.
10. For example, we recently worked with a man, Alessandro, who had requested a sentence added to his Claimant Commitment which read "I will attend all training courses and interviews arranged for me.... Only if such courses and activities will give me an advantage in finding work." He refused to sign his Claimant Commitment until such a sentence was added, and for this refusal he was sanctioned.
11. Similarly, our research has highlighted how sanctions aimed purely at compliance can push people further away from the labour market, by creating tight financial situations which make people focus on short-term, immediate 'survival' rather than longer-term positive change. Rita's story at the Annex is an example: her story shows how sanctions caused her to be unable to travel to job interviews, and ultimately to sign-off JSA due to the stress which she felt when navigating the sanctions and appeal processes.
12. Rather than focusing on compliance, the explicit rationale for sanctions should be about supporting people towards work: encouraging behaviours that move people further towards sustainable employment and discouraging negative behaviours which detract from this goal.

**Recommendation 1:** the aim of the sanctions system should be clarified and ministers should commit to a sanctions system that is focused on, and evaluated on the basis of, supporting people on their journey into sustainable, quality work.

**Recommendation 2:** The DWP should review and adjust policy and guidance relating to sanctions and their implementation, to ensure that they work towards the goal of supporting people towards sustainable employment, rather than ensuring compliance.

### **What evidence is there that benefit sanctions also encourage claimants to engage more actively in job-seeking and ultimately move into employment? How could this be measured?**

13. There is very little evidence as to how well the current system achieves the aim of getting people into work. A recent review of UK and international evidence on the effectiveness of sanctions on achieving various outcomes concluded that:  
"International evidence indicates that benefit sanctions (especially severe sanctions) substantially raise exits from benefits, and may also increase short-term job entry; but the longer-term outcomes for earnings, job quality and employment retention appear unfavourable."
14. A review paper carried out by DWP in 2010 found "no evidence from the survey that knowledge of JSA conditions led to actual movement into work. Respondents who said they were more likely to look for work because of their knowledge of JSA conditions were no more likely than other respondents to have moved into work when they left JSA."
15. Community Links together with the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) has recently undertaken a survey of 61 Work Programme providers, to investigate their perceptions of how well the sanctions regime is working. Again the evidence was inconclusive, though certain themes emerged. 61% thought that the effectiveness

of sanctions was satisfactory, though only 4% thought they were 'very effective' in supporting people into work.

16. Survey respondents were somewhat split as to whether sanctions had a positive or negative effect on work-search and jobseeking, though on balance most respondents thought the impacts were negative. Respondents were more likely to report that the change in the relationship with an adviser, had negative effects on jobsearch than positive effects (55% vs 39%). Respondents were also more likely to consider a reduction in claimants' income to zero as negative for job search (56% vs 39% positive).
17. Respondents to our survey were clear on the need for increased flexibility: 63% said that increasing flexibility and discretion allowed in the application would improve customers' engagement with welfare to work provision and jobsearch activity, compared to 20% who disagreed. In follow-up discussions with WP providers, it has been clarified that this 'discretion' would be welcome in the form of some additional flexibility to not refer people to for a sanction.
18. Our own experience reflects many of the findings of our survey, and indeed reflects a certain lack of consensus about how effective the current sanction regime is at encouraging people into work. Frontline advisors within both our employment support and advice teams often describe several problems with the sanctions regime – including the damage that a sanction can cause to the relationship between advisor and customer. Overall, our advisers point out several issues with the sanctions system which act as a barrier to its effectiveness – including issues around communication, the time-lag between raising doubts and sanctions being imposed, and WP advisors' inability to accept good cause to not raise a doubt.[\[9\]](#)
19. As can be seen, this survey of frontline organisations involved in the sanctioning process through their delivery of the Work Programme highlights once again the lack of consensus as to whether or not sanctions encourage people towards sustainable work.

**Recommendation 3:** Given the lack of evidence as to the extent to which sanctions achieve their purpose, there remains an urgent need for the Government to commission a formal, independent, evidence-based review of the sanctions regime and whether it works towards the aim of getting people into work.

- When Universal Credit is further rolled-out, legislation should allow sanctions to be varied so as to use the analytical opportunities of the Real Time Information system to investigate which sanctions regime works best to get people into sustainable, well-paid work.
- While we await fuller roll-out of UC, a review should be undertaken that includes a data match between benefit data held by DWP and tax (and Tax Credit) data held by HMRC in order to improve understanding on the extent to which sanctions get people into work.
- While awaiting this fuller evidence, the minimum sanction length should be shortened to one week as was the case pre-2012, and a first warning system (see recommendation 8) should be implemented.

### **What are the wider implications of sanctions in terms of their impacts on claimants?**

20. The most recent sanctions data from DWP shows that in the year to March 2014, an estimated total of 1,104,000 JSA and ESA sanctions were imposed. JSA sanctions have stabilised at the rate of around 7.25% of claimants per month before reconsideration/appeal and 6.25% per month after, while the comparable figures for ESA are 1.58% and 1.37%. This represents a doubling of the rate of sanctions since pre-2010.[\[10\]](#)
21. The removal of JSA for a period of at least four weeks, or of ESA, will have varying financial impacts from claimant to claimant. There is no doubt that for some, the impacts are severe. At the informal food bank that we run, we regularly see 'benefit sanctions' given as the reason for people requiring emergency food support. Rita's story, below, is not atypical of the stories of people attending our drop-in advice service.
22. Our primary qualitative research has shown how sanctions can push some people – particularly those who have already been negatively affected by other reforms to housing benefit, disability benefits or tax credits - into financial hardship which in turn pushes them into 'survival mode', having to focus on getting by day-to-day rather than on longer-term positive change.

**Recommendation 4:** The independent review (see recommendation 3) should also monitor the impacts resulting from sanctions, and consider whether these are justifiable against any positive impacts (such as supporting people into sustainable, quality work).

## **What are the alternatives to the current sanctions regimes?**

### **How might the current system of financial sanctions be altered to make it more appropriate or effective?**

23. Our experience has shown that claimants regularly tend not to understand sanctions and the sanctioning process, or the potential severity of a sanction, until they are applied. This is particularly true for certain groups, including those with learning difficulties or mental health problems. Other problems include issues around communication, the time-lag between raising doubts and sanctions being imposed, and knock-on impacts such as on Housing Benefit administration. We have discussed these in our recent policy briefing.[\[11\]](#)
24. A basic change would be to improve understanding of conditions, the processes of appeals, and of applying for hardship payments. Information about these remains often inaccessible – for example DWP’s recent guide for claimants only provides information about hardship payments and appeals at the end of a four page document.[\[12\]](#)
25. Many of the recommendations from the Oakley review of JSA sanctions would go some way to improving issues around claimants’ understanding and around the process of implementing the existing sanctions regime.

**Recommendation 5:** The DWP should continue to implement all recommendations of the Oakley review. Given that many recommendations were accepted ‘in principle’, DWP should update on progress against their implementation annually, at the start of parliament’s summer term.

26. Another change that would improve the current regime is to improve the extent to which jobseekers can influence or ‘co-produce’ the conditions to their JSA or ESA claim. Our experience shows that most people are keen to improve their situations and to move into work, for a variety of financial and non-financial reasons. If people can jointly own, jointly write and jointly monitor the conditions on their claim, they are more likely to understand them and are more likely to actively follow them, thus minimizing the need for sanctions. The Claimant Commitment offers a good opportunity to change the culture of JCP and enable jobseekers to feed into their claim in a more meaningful way. The process of agreeing it could be further strengthened to allow for a more co-produced Commitment process.

**Recommendation 6:** the DWP’s evaluation of the Claimant Commitment should investigate the extent to which jobseekers feel they can influence their commitments and understand the implications. Based on this evaluation, additional staff training and guidance should be put in place to ensure claimants are meaningfully inputting into the conditions in their Commitments.

**Recommendation 7:** in the longer-term, co-produced conditionality should be trialled in more meaningful ways: trials of jointly-agreed actions, and indeed of jointly-agreed sanctions should be undertaken, to investigate this approach’s impact on outcomes.

### **Is there a case for non-financial sanctions? What form could non-financial sanctions take?**

27. Government ministers often say sanctions are used only as a ‘last resort’. For example, Iain Duncan Smith recently told the House that “As far as I am concerned, jobcentres apply sanctions only as a last resort”[\[13\]](#)
28. However, the rapidly rising numbers of people sanctioned, as well as the experiences of many sanctioned claimants with whom we work, suggests that other steps to prevent a sanction don’t always happen. Indeed the very fact that often some people are not aware that they have incurred a sanction until after their moneys are stopped suggests that more could be done to ensure that sanctions really are ‘a last resort’.
29. We consider that the most appropriate form of ‘non-financial sanctions’ to be implemented is a first warning system. Initial compliance failures should lead to a formal warning being issued, which should also trigger an

interview with a work coach to understand the reason for the 'compliance failure' and if necessary review the conditions included in the Claimant Commitment.

**Recommendation 8:** a first warnings system should be in place before people are sanctioned. This warning system should include:

- A formal written warning, or 'letter of intention to sanction' should in all cases be provided before a sanction.
- This should trigger an appointment with JCP work coach, to check in that the claimant's work-search activity is appropriate to their situation and if necessary review the conditions included in the Claimant Commitment.

**Recommendation 9:** When referring claimants for a sanction or 'raising a doubt', JCP work coaches or Work Programme providers should be asked to document the steps they have taken to help claimants meet requirements.

12 December 2014

### **Annex: Rita's Story**

1. Rita<sup>[14]</sup> was sanctioned multiple times while she was trying to gain more work experience in order to improve her employability. Rita was sanctioned when she failed to sign on at the jobcentre, even though the reason for this was that she was doing voluntary work at her local community centre, and despite the fact that she had gained the prior agreement of JCP advisor and complied with everything the WP wanted her to. She felt she was sanctioned simply for doing work experience.
2. Sanctions led to Rita not having enough money to eat or go anywhere, which ironically made the job search even harder. Due to the sanction, she didn't have money to go to a job interview. Rita was later sanctioned again when she missed a meeting at JCP due to a hospital appointment; again in spite of having previously got prior agreement using official documentation to prove her hospital visit.
3. Jo received information on how to appeal her sanctions by chance as the JCP floor manager who had permitted her to miss her signing on appointment was around on the day she went in to complain. She was given a booklet which explained the process but was given no support. Instead Jo came to Community Links where she was helped to appeal her sanctions. The appeal process took over four weeks, after which she received confirmation that two sanctions had been overturned.
4. Eventually, Rita decided to cease her claim for Jobseekers' Allowance, due to repeat sanctioning; as such she is no longer receiving any formal support to move into employment.

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[1] Work Programme advisors do not have the power to apply sanctions; instead they 'raise doubts' about a client (for missing an appointment, not actively searching for work etc.). Once they have raised a doubt this is communicated to the Jobcentre who apply the sanction.

[2] The two most recent reports from this longitudinal project are Tipping the Balance, and Just About Surviving. Both published by Community Links in 2014.

[3] Information provided, not printed.

[4] Hansard HC Deb, 11 November 2010: Vol 518 Column 440

[5] Hansard HC Deb, **15 Jun 2011 : Column 882**

[6] Hansard HC Deb, **23 Jun 2014 : Column 12**

[7] Hansard HC Deb, **3 Feb 2014 : Column 101W**

[8] Cassidy G (undated). The Purposes Of Punishment. Retrieved on 8<sup>th</sup> December from <http://home.page.ch/pub/rfm@vtx.ch/punishment.html>  
Banks C (2013) The Purpose of Criminal Punishment. In: Banks C, Criminal Justice Ethics (Third Edition). London

[9] We have discussed these issues further in our briefing, Sanctions: Getting them right. Policy Briefing 1. Community Links, January 2014. Available at: <http://www.community-links.org/uploads/editor/file/Policy%20Briefing%201%20Sanctions%20Feb2014.PDF>

[10] Webster D (20113)

[11] Community Links (2014) Sanctions: Getting them right. Policy Briefing 1. Community Links, January 2014. Available at: <http://www.community-links.org/uploads/editor/file/Policy%20Briefing%201%20Sanctions%20Feb2014.PDF>

[12] DWP, *Jobseekers Sanction: How to keep your benefit payment*. Available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/379070/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-dwpf15.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/379070/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-dwpf15.pdf)

[13] Hansard HC Deb, **3 Nov 2014 : Column 540**

[14] Rita's name has been changed to protect her identity.

## Written evidence submitted by Gingerbread (SAN0115)

### Introduction

1. Gingerbread is the national charity for single parent families. We provide expert information, advice and training opportunities to single parents and their families. Employment issues form an important part of our service delivery and policy work. Queries relating to support into work and welfare benefits consistently make up over half of all calls to our Single Parent Helpline and we produce and distribute factsheets on a wide range of related issues. It has been a longstanding goal of the organisation to ensure single parents get the help and support they need in order to move into employment.
2. Gingerbread welcomes the committee's inquiry into benefit sanction policy and this submission covers to the following areas of interest set out in the terms of reference:
  - What are the current sanctions regimes trying to achieve and what evidence is there to say that they work?
  - Are particular groups of ESA and JSA claimants proportionately more likely to be sanctioned than others?
  - What are the wider implications of sanctions in terms of their impacts on claimants?
  - What are the alternatives to the current sanctions regimes?
3. Single parents are at greater risk of wrongful sanction decisions than other JSA claimants. Examples from our telephone helpline indicate that this is because they are not getting the help and support they need to adhere to jobseeking rules and move into employment. The welfare-to-work regime has become distorted, and overly focussed on the enforcement of conditionality requirements rather than investing in interventions that genuinely support single parents into work. Evidence shows that sanctions are not an effective means of increasing the numbers of single parents who find work. The system needs to be recalibrated by strengthening safeguards, improving transparency and promoting accountability.

### What are the current sanctions regimes trying to achieve and what evidence is there that they work?

4. Conditionality is premised on the assumption that sanctions are needed to ensure claimants fulfil the conditions of benefit entitlement. The regime is based on the belief that claimants will respond in an economically rational manner to the risk of a sanction;<sup>[1]</sup> that is, they will follow the rules to avoid a potential loss of benefit, and assumes that breaches of compliance are deliberate, unless a claimant is able to prove otherwise.
5. However, in practice we find most single parents want to work but are struggling to get the support they need in a system that has become very focussed on administering conditionality requirements, rather than working to support claimants' aspirations to work. Single parents face a number of barriers to employment. High childcare costs, low pay or a lack of flexible working can all conspire to hinder the chances of single parents finding a job that is financially viable, and one that is manageable alongside their caring responsibilities. Sanctions which are aimed at influencing the *individual* conduct of single parents are ineffective at tackling the *structural* barriers that put them at a disadvantage in the labour market.
6. The effectiveness of sanctions with respect to supporting job entry is far certain. International evidence shows that sanctions can have a short-term positive effect by increasing benefit off-flows and job entry.<sup>[2]</sup> However, a closer look at the Department for Work and Pensions' evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus offer finds no evidence that knowledge of JSA conditionality leads to actual movement into work. Whilst claimants who were aware of sanctions said they were more likely to look for work, they were no more likely to have moved into work when they left JSA than other claimants.<sup>[3]</sup> Moreover, there was no variation in the occurrence of sanctions between claimants whose knowledge of sanctions made them more willing to look for work and those who said the knowledge made no difference to them.<sup>[4]</sup>
7. Evidence on the longer term employment outcomes and earning levels is more mixed. Some studies indicate that claimants who are severely sanctioned are less likely to move into work, and that sanctions can lead to poor quality employment, jobs with low wages or higher levels of insecurity.<sup>[5]</sup> This is particularly pertinent for single parents, who are twice as likely to enter low paid employment as other workers - 39 per cent compared to 21 per cent - and have the added complication of needing to fit working patterns around their caring responsibilities.

Those taking jobs on temporary or zero hours contracts have a greater risk of cycling back into the benefits system at a later date. One in five single parents entering employment will churn out of work again within 12 months;<sup>[6]</sup> the imposition of sanctions fails to address the real reasons why single parents struggle to find and remain in work.

8. When taken together with barriers that single parents face when moving into work, the efficacy of a tougher regime with harsher financial penalties is questionable. In Gingerbread’s view, the evidence points to a deeper, more complex problem - a schism between the principles underlying the purpose of sanctions and the reality of claimants’ lives.

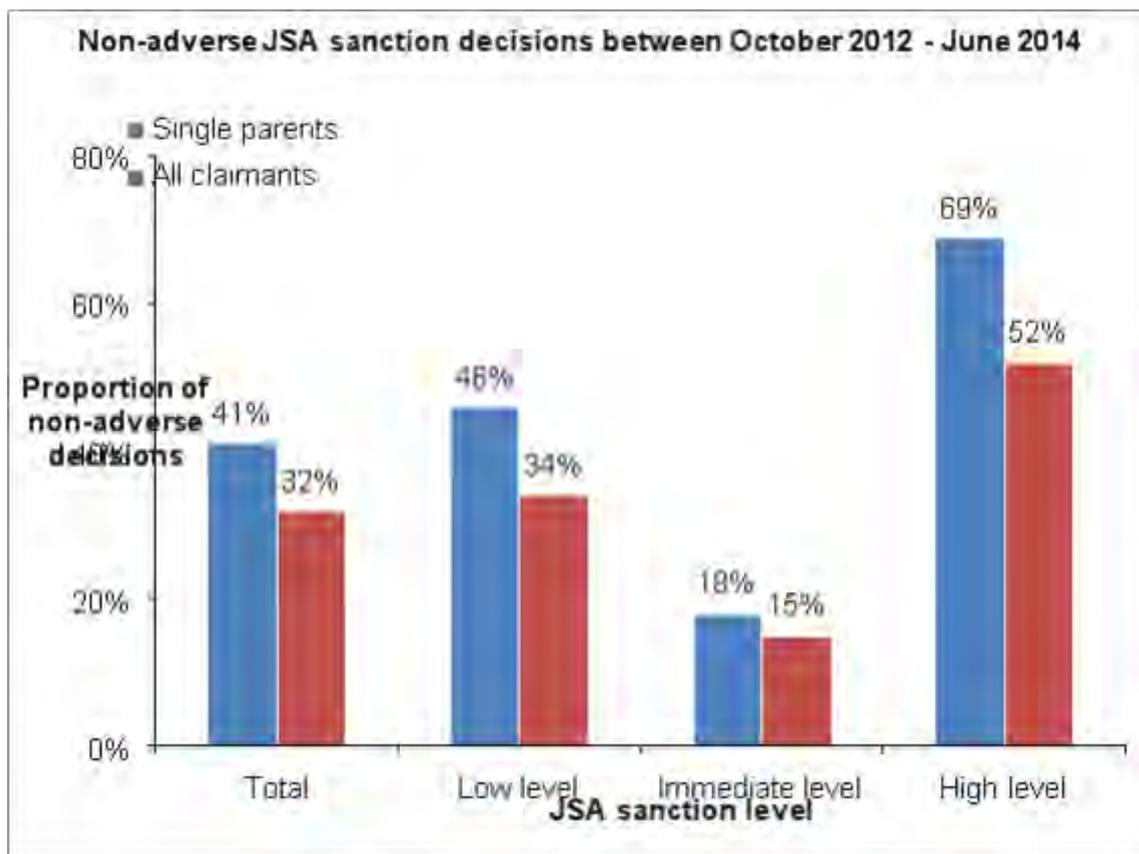
### Are particular groups of ESA and JSA claimants proportionately more likely to be sanctioned than others?

#### Single parents and sanctioning trends

9. Between October 2012 and June 2014, 145,000 single parents claiming jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) have received a sanction decision; representing six per cent of all individual decisions.<sup>[7]</sup>

10. Single parents on JSA are more likely to receive a non-adverse sanction decision than other JSA claimants – 41 per cent compared with 32 per cent (see figure 1). At all sanction levels, a higher proportion of single parents receive a non-adverse sanction decision. This indicates that single parents are being inappropriately referred for a sanction in the first instance or wrongly sanctioned as a result of the decision making process. Worryingly, this is most pronounced with respect to high level sanctions: 69 per cent of single parents receive a non-adverse decision in comparison with 52 per cent of other claimants.

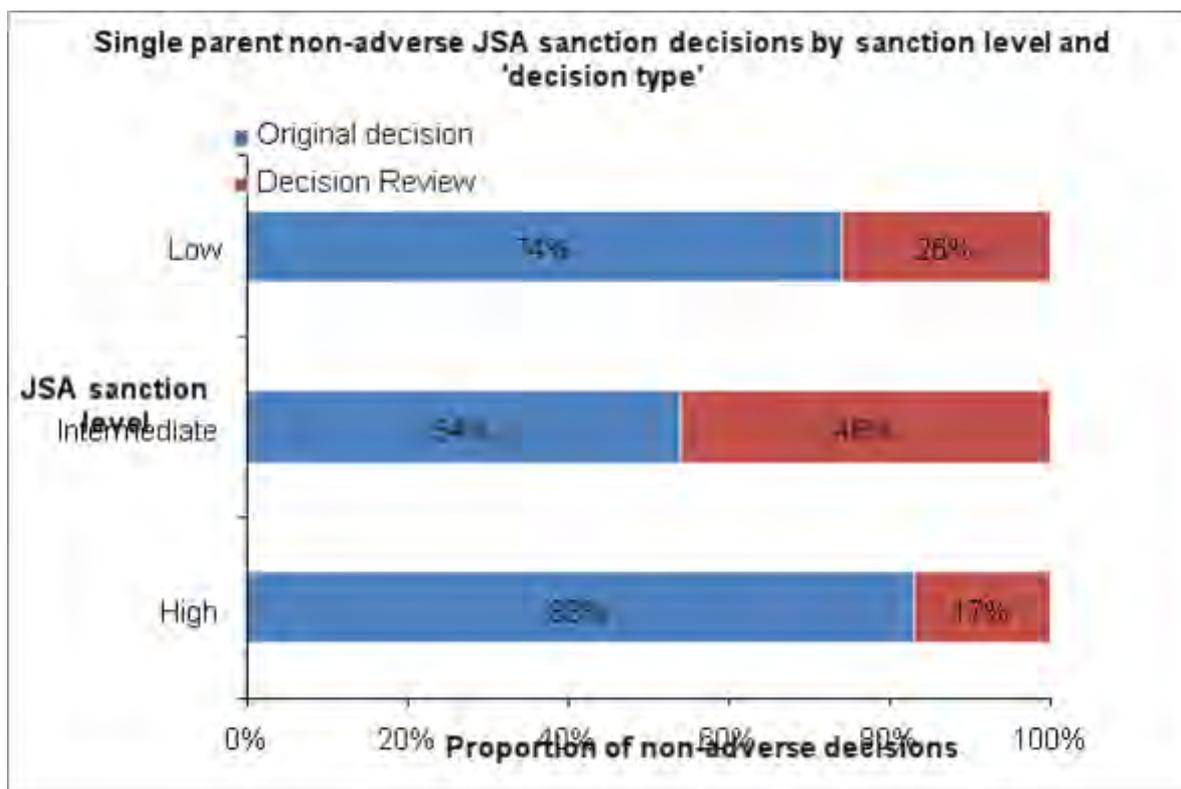
Figure 1



Source: DWP (2014) *Jobseeker’s allowance and employment support sanctions: decisions made to June 2014*

11. Non-adverse decisions can be made at different points in the sanction process (see figure 2). The majority of non-adverse decisions affecting single parents are made at original decision (the initial decision after a referral). In these instances a single parent has been able to demonstrate “good reason” for the alleged breach and no financial penalty is applied to their claim. However, a significant minority of non-adverse decisions are applied at decision review (a reconsideration of the original decision): a quarter (26 per cent) of low level decisions and almost half (46 per cent) of intermediate decisions. In these cases, a sanction<sup>[8]</sup> has been applied to a claim but this has been subsequently overturned after further investigation, meaning that the original adverse decision

was incorrect.<sup>[9]</sup> Depending on when the decision review takes place, single parents could be without any JSA payments for several weeks or even months, leaving them in acute financial difficulty.



**Figure 2**

Source: DWP (2014) *Jobseeker's allowance and employment support sanctions: decisions made to June 2014*

12. It is Gingerbread's view that a lack of appropriate support contributes to the sanction rates of single parents.

13. Gingerbread's national telephone helpline receives calls every month from single parents relating to the threat or imposition of sanctions. The vast majority of these calls are about the application – or lack thereof – of the “parent flexibilities”. These are a set of 12 regulatory safeguards which recognise that single parents are the sole carers of their children. The flexibilities are enabling; they help to shape conditionality ensuring that work search and work availability requirements reflect the caring responsibilities of single parents. For example, single parents with children under the age of 13 can restrict their working hours to school hours, and all single parent claimants are protected from a sanction if they refuse a job offer because they are unable to find appropriate and affordable childcare.<sup>[10]</sup>

14. Only a third (35 per cent) of single parents are aware that conditionality can be tailored to reflect their circumstances.<sup>[11]</sup> Many of our callers contact Gingerbread because they feel unable to meet the requirements stipulated in their claimant commitment and have been threatened with - or have received - a sanction, but are unaware of the flexibilities. The most common issue raised by single parents is being expected to look for full-time, shift work or weekend hours.

15. Below are examples of calls from our helpline that illustrate the persistent problem of inappropriate conditionality, putting single parents at greater risk of a wrongful sanction.

#### Helpline calls: single parents in receipt of jobseeker's allowance

##### Threatened with a sanction for not attending work preparation courses during school holidays

Caller E is being threatened with a sanction by her work programme provider. She is unable to leave her two daughters alone - one of whom has health problems - to attend back to work courses in the summer holidays. No help with childcare costs has been offered.

### **Received a sanction for turning down work when no suitable childcare was available**

Caller F has had her JSA stopped for three months because she turned down night-shift jobs as she couldn't find suitable childcare for her young daughter.

### **Threatened with a sanction for leaving a job when no suitable childcare is available**

Newly single mother Caller G is struggling to balance her shift work job with caring for her two children. She doesn't feel that she can continue in her job as she can't leave her children on their own, particularly as the youngest has health problems. She called the jobcentre for advice and they told her if she left her job she may be sanctioned for three years.

### **Threatened with a sanction for not increasing job search**

Caller H has a primary school-aged child and has been threatened with a sanction if she does not increase her job search in addition to what is stipulated in her claimant commitment. Caller H adheres to the agreement (to apply for three jobs a week at 16 hours), but her adviser is telling her she should look for work with more hours or risk a sanction.

16. The number of working hours stipulated in a claimant commitment should reflect a single parent's caring responsibilities. Single parents with children under 13 can restrict their work availability to school hours. Single parents cannot be sanctioned for failing to undertake a jobseeking direction, refusing a job offer or leaving a job if there is no appropriate childcare available.

17. Examples from Gingerbread's helpline suggests a common story of sanctions being applied because the conditionality attached to a single parent's claim is inappropriate given their caring responsibilities; or sanctions imposed for genuine mistakes – for example, missing a sign-on appointment. In these cases, single parents are not deliberately evading their work preparation or jobseeking requirements; rather they are faced with a set of requirements that are unrealistic given their circumstances.

18. Previous research<sup>[12]</sup> has shown that single parents who have been sanctioned are more likely to be in debt, suffer from ill health or have children with health problems; issues that make it harder for them to fulfil their jobseeking requirements. Research into previous conditionality regimes suggests there is little active non-compliance among single parents<sup>[13]</sup>; rather it is caring responsibilities or other vulnerabilities that impede the ability of single parents to adhere to conditionality. Other reviews of sanction literature to date have also found that claimants facing sanctions are often unable to comply with conditions – due to a lack of awareness or understanding of sanctions, as well as practical and personal barriers to compliance – rather than making a conscious choice not to meet benefit conditions.<sup>[14]</sup>

### **What are the wider implications of sanctions in terms of their impacts on claimants?**

Receiving a sanction is a stressful experience; single parents report increased levels of anxiety about their ability to cope financially, and struggle emotionally because they feel unable to provide for their children.<sup>[15]</sup> Single parents are financially vulnerable. They are more likely to have debt than all other family types; 74 per cent compared with 69 per cent of families with children.<sup>[16]</sup> 80 per cent of non-working single parents find managing their finances difficult at best.<sup>[17]</sup> 20. When sanctioned, coping strategies among single parents vary; most commonly they reduce spending on basic provisions such as food, utility bills and children's activities to mitigate for lost income. For additional help, they also turn to:<sup>[18]</sup>

- Family or friends for short-term financial support
- Hardship payments or local welfare assistance schemes
- Support in kind from foodbanks<sup>[19]</sup>

21. Despite the best efforts of single parents to manage financially when sanctioned, prolonged periods without support from benefits can have negative consequences for children. With less money to pay for the essentials, children's health will be put at risk, their ability to concentrate at school will suffer and opportunities to take part

in social and physical activities will be diminished.

22. Claimants are not routinely told about hardship payments - the primary means of emergency support - when they receive a sanction:

- Less than a fifth (18 per cent) of single parents,[\[20\]](#) compared with 23 per cent of JSA claimants,[\[21\]](#) were told about the possibility of a hardship payment
- Only five per cent of single parents received a hardship payment,[\[22\]](#) whereas 13 per cent of JSA claimants went on to make an application.[\[23\]](#)

23. Lack of information about the availability of hardship payments and delays in the processing of payments were issues raised in the Oakley review and the government has committed to improve communications and systems. However, the negative impact of a sanction doesn't end when the sanction is removed. A prolonged period of reduced income as a result of a sanction can push fragile finances to breaking point and put single parents at greater risk of debt.

24. For claimants with children, hardship payments should be an automatic entitlement in an event of sanction and paid from the date the sanction was imposed. Under universal credit rules, a hardship payment has to be paid back at the end of a sanction period through a reduction in subsequent universal credit payments. Treating hardship payments as loans prolongs the financial difficulties faced by single parents – and the negative impact on their children – resulting from the initial sanction. They can continue to feel the punitive effects of a sanction for weeks or months after a sanction has officially ended. As such, hardship payments within universal credit should be non-recoverable.

### **What are the alternatives to the current sanctions regimes?**

25. It is Gingerbread's view that more can be done to minimise the risk of sanctions and there are alternatives to the current sanction regime.

#### ***Specialist support***

26. The needs of single parents are becoming increasingly invisible in welfare to work provision. The flexibilities available to single parents in the current system will be significantly reduced under universal credit. Only one out of 12 flexibilities will be carried over in its entirety. Single parents will effectively be treated in the same way as jobseekers without caring responsibilities; it will be harder to guarantee that conditionality is tailored to reflect their circumstances. Gingerbread is concerned that single parents will be at greater risk of incurring sanctions and less likely to find work because vital safeguards have been removed. The full complement of flexibilities should be introduced in universal credit as soon as possible.

27. Specialist support and advice is key; the loss of lone parent advisers is a case in point. Repeated evaluations by DWP demonstrated the importance of lone parent advisers in helping single parents return to work. Single parents felt that lone parent advisers understood their circumstances and helped them to overcome the obstacles to employment. Lone parent advisers had the time and expertise to deliver personalised support, however there has been a reduction in the provision of lone parent advisers across Jobcentre Plus in recent years and single parents are missing out on tailored advice as a result.

#### ***Recalibration of conditionality***

28. The introduction of tougher conditionality and more stringent sanctions places an overemphasis on punitive measures to secure job outcomes. Research shows that this can be particularly detrimental to claimants with multiple barriers to employment, causing financial hardship and potentially impeding their progress towards employment.[\[24\]](#) Instead Gingerbread wants to see back-to-work provision recalibrated to build on single parents' aspirations and which taps into their existing high levels of motivation to work. This should start from a basis of well-designed specialist support, rather than relying heavily on punitive measures to enforce adherence to a regime that is unresponsive to the needs of claimants and the wider labour market. There is little evidence to suggest that compliance breaches are deliberate. The government should pilot a warning system for first compliance failure, which would waive the financial penalty and prompt a review of the claimant commitment.

#### ***Preventative approach to non-compliance***

29. A more preventative approach is needed in relation to sanctions. Gingerbread would like to see single parents participate in a thorough diagnostic interview with a specialist lone parent adviser at the start of a claim, to agree appropriate conditionality and provide information about sanctions. If referred to the Work Programme at a later date, an effective triage system needs to be in place. In a warm handover involving Jobcentre Plus, the

claimant and the work programme provider, there should be an opportunity to look again at the existing claimant commitment and make any adjustments. All parties must be clear about expectations, and claimants should not be left to juggle competing demands from Jobcentre Plus and the work programme provider.

### ***Improving transparency and accountability***

30. Evidence from our helpline suggests that job coaches are using the threat of punitive measures too readily. When information about sanctions is conveyed as a threat this constitutes as undue pressure and sets the wrong tone for a constructive on-going relationship between claimants and their job coaches.

31. Communications about sanctions should be constructive and comprehensive. Explaining the consequences of non-compliance should be part of a conversation which seeks to help claimants engage positively with jobseeking or work preparation and not be used as a threat to impose inappropriate conditionality. In a similar vein, if claimants receive a sanction, they need better and timelier information about how to challenge a sanction decision. For those with caring responsibilities, there should be immediate access to hardship payments to mitigate the negative effect of a sanction as a result of a reduced household income.

32. As well as claimants being asked to show good reason for not adhering to a direction from their job coach or work programme provider, those delivering support or monitoring compliance should also have to show the steps they have taken to help claimants meet their obligations. This could be an important counterbalance to ensure that compliance doubts are based on sound judgment rather than performance-related pressures. JCP districts and Work Programme providers should publish data on sanction decisions. Non-adverse decisions should be seen as a measure of poor performance.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

33. Sanctions are symptomatic of a system that is unresponsive to the needs of single parents. The government's own statistics reveal that a significant proportion of single parents are being wrongly sanctioned. Prevention is key: evidence shows that non-compliance with a conditionality regime is - more often than not - a result of poor understanding of what is required; a consequence of poor information rather than a deliberate attempt to evade their jobseeking responsibilities.

34. The growth in sanctioning rates indicates that welfare-to-work provision has become distorted, burdened by conditionality requirements, poorly targeted performance measures and the associated bureaucracy. There is little evidence to show that sanctions improve job outcomes or that stringent controls over jobseeking behaviour effectively tackle the real reasons why single parents struggle to make the successful transition into employment. The government needs to take a pragmatic approach and focus its resources on interventions that genuinely provide single parents with the opportunity to find sustainable employment.

35. Gingerbread recommends the following:

- Reinstatement specialist lone parent advisers across Jobcentre Plus
- Ensure that work preparation and jobseeking requirements adequately reflect the caring responsibilities of single parents and that the current set of parent flexibilities are fully reflected in universal credit regulations at the earliest opportunity
- Roll out a national re-training initiative for Jobcentre Plus work coaches on the parent flexibilities and sanctions prior to the roll out of universal credit
- Ensure that every single parent with a new jobseeker's or universal credit claim receives a clear, plain English factsheet about the parent flexibilities
- Improve claimants' understanding of the sanctions regime including what action to take when a sanction is applied and how to challenge a decision
- Pilot an approach whereby job coaches and work programme providers demonstrate what action they have taken to help single parents to meet work-related requirements in the event of a sanction referral, to ensure that claimants are not unfairly penalised for an absence of help and support
- Implement automatic entitlement to hardship payments for single parents who have been sanctioned, to mitigate the negative impacts on their children
- Amend universal credit rules so that hardship payments are non-recoverable, reflecting the current provision and protecting single claimants from prolonged financial difficulties after a sanction ends
- Pilot alternatives to financial sanctions; including an informal warning for a first compliance failure
- JCP districts and Work Programme providers should publish data on sanction decisions. Non-adverse decisions should be seen as a measure of poor performance
- Examine the feasibility of introducing compensation payments for claimants if an adverse sanction

12 December 2014

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[1] DWP (2014) *Government's response to the Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013*. London: DWP. See:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332137/jsa-sanctions-independent-review-government-response.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332137/jsa-sanctions-independent-review-government-response.pdf)

[2] Griggs, J. & Evans, M. (2010) *Sanctions within conditional benefit systems. A review of evidence*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. See: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/conditional-benefit-systems-full.pdf>

[3] DWP (2013) *The Jobcentre Plus offer: final evaluation report*. London: DWP. See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf)

[4] Ibid

[5] Griggs, J. & Evans, M. (2010) *Sanctions within conditional benefit systems. A review of evidence*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. See: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/conditional-benefit-systems-full.pdf>

[6] Newis, P. (2012). *It's off to work we go? Moving from income support to jobseeker's allowance for single parents with a child aged five*. London: Gingerbread

[7] DWP (2014) *Jobseeker's allowance and employment support sanctions: decisions made to June 2014*. London: DWP. Overall figure includes non-adverse, adverse and reserved decisions

[8] Or disentitlement with respect to intermediate level sanctions (see table 1).

[9] The current data indicates that no non-adverse decisions affecting single parents are made at appeal, though there may be a small number which are suppressed from published data for confidentiality purposes. Only a very small proportion (around 1 per cent) of all other JSA claimants' non-adverse decisions is made at appeal.

[10] For a full description of the parent flexibilities see: <http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/FactSheetsDetail.aspx?FactSheetid=32&ref>

[11] Coleman, N. & Riley, T. (2012) *Lone parent obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work*. Research report no. 818. London: DWP. See:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf)

[12] Goodwin, V. (2008). *The effects of sanctions on lone parents' employment decisions and moves into employment*. Research report no. 511 London: DWP

[13] Ibid

[14] Scottish Government (2013) *The potential impacts of benefit sanctions on individuals and households*; Watts, B. et al (2014) *Welfare sanctions and conditionality in the UK*. York: JRF

[15] Goodwin, V. (2008). *The effects of sanctions on lone parents' employment decisions and moves into employment*. Research report no. 511 London: DWP

[16] ONS (2013) Welsh households had the least financial debt in 2008/10.

[17] Rabindrakumar, S (2014) *Paying the price: the long road to recovery*. London: Gingerbread. See: <http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/uploads/media/17/9012.pdf>

[18] Goodwin, V. (2008). *The effects of sanctions on lone parents' employment decisions and moves into employment*. Research report no. 511 London: DWP

[19] Cooper, N. et al (2014) *Below the breadline: the relentless rise of food poverty in Britain*.

[20] Coleman, N. & Riley, T. (2012) *Lone parent obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work*. Research report no. 818. London: DWP. See:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf)

[21] DWP (2013) *The Jobcentre Plus offer: final evaluation report*. London: DWP. See: See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf)

[22] Coleman, N. & Riley, T. (2012) *Lone parent obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work*. Research report no. 818. London: DWP. See:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214373/rrep818.pdf)

[23] DWP (2013) *The Jobcentre Plus offer: final evaluation report*. London: DWP. See: See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf)

[24] Griggs, J. & Evans, M. (2010) *Sanctions within conditional benefit systems. A review of evidence*. London: Joseph Rowntree

Foundation. See: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/conditional-benefit-systems-full.pdf>

## Written evidence submitted by the Child Poverty Action Group (SAN0152)

### Executive Summary

1. The way sanctions currently operate amounts to a breach of natural justice, with no opportunity to understand or challenge decisions, and no opportunity to remove a sanction by adjusting behaviour. The sanctions regime does not work: not for the government, not for the labour market, and not for claimants.
2. Specific problems include:
  - inflexibility in the interpretation of conditions,
  - inadequate consideration of claimants' circumstances,
  - poor communication, and
  - error and maladministration by government departments and local authorities.
3. We argue that fixed period sanctions as a whole are not working, and not appropriate. In terms of specific improvements to the regime as it stands, we focus on proposals to:
  - increase access to hardship payments,
  - clarify communications about sanctions,
  - mitigate impacts while sanctions are being reconsidered,
  - improve information sharing within government departments and with Work Programme providers, and
  - address particular issues around the interaction of sanctions and housing benefit.

### Introduction

4. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) has worked for almost 50 years to prevent and relieve poverty among children and families in the UK. We have a wide range of expertise and evidence from which we draw in this submission. Each year, we author and publish *The Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook*, the authoritative guide to social security in the UK; provide specialist advice and training to first tier advisers; coordinate and collate evidence from the National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers; collect evidence and case studies of the impacts of welfare reform in Scotland through the Early Warning System (EWS); and are currently providing frontline welfare rights advice to food bank users in Tower Hamlets.
5. In submitting our evidence, we draw on a number of sources. We refer to CPAG research published in November 2014 with the Church of England, Oxfam and the Trussell Trust, investigating drivers of food bank use,[\[1\]](#) as well as unpublished additional information on sanctions contained in the qualitative interviews for that research. We analyse examples from our welfare rights case files. We cite evidence collected, all since July 2014, for the EWS in Scotland. And we draw on our submission to the independent review of jobseeker's allowance sanctions, in January 2014.[\[2\]](#)
6. Substantial recent increases in the numbers sanctioned suggest a growing issue to investigate. In the year to 30th June 2014, there were 852,665 JSA sanctions after reconsiderations and appeals, compared with 496,771 in the last year of the previous Labour government. This accounts for 6.05% of claimants, the highest proportion since JSA's introduction in 1996. In the year to 30th June 2014, there were 39,591 ESA sanctions after reconsiderations and appeals, more than double the previous year, and, at 0.97% of claimants in the work-related activity group, the highest since ESA sanctions for that group were introduced in 2008. The number of appeals against sanctions being upheld at tribunal is suggestive of a significant problem. An estimated 138,100 JSA or ESA sanctions were overturned in the year to 30 June 2014 via appeals or old-style reconsiderations, not including the unknown numbers of successful requests for mandatory reconsiderations. In the 3 months up to Sept 2013, 87% of challenges were upheld (up from an average of 20% from 2000-2010). More recent data is hard to interpret due to the introduction of mandatory reconsiderations (for which figures are not reported), and the apparent collapse in the number of tribunal decisions.[\[3\]](#)

### Sanctions policy

7. The stated aim of sanctions is to improve employability, through incentivising activity that helps claimants to

move towards or into work. Yet a raft of evidence suggests that sanctions fail in those terms,<sup>[4]</sup> notwithstanding the other problems identified in our submission. CPAG's experience is of sanctions acting to degrade people's human capital in a number of ways, rendering them further from, not closer to, the labour market, and thus less, not more, capable of entering employment. (See 'Problems arising from sanctions' below, paragraphs 24-28.)

8. In these terms, the logic of fixed period sanctions is also questionable. As currently constituted, they aim to change behaviour, but offer no prospect of a reduction or lifting of sanctions when behaviour is judged to have changed.

#### Problems with the implementation of sanctions

9. Sanctions are often applied without adequate consideration of claimants' personal situations, characteristics, or the barriers they face – particularly in relation to their ability to comply with the conditions placed upon them. Across our evidence base, poor communication, error and maladministration are recurring themes. Our welfare rights work with regard to the Work Programme suggests that, while the vast majority of claimants may understand the general requirements placed upon them by the Work Programme or related schemes, these conditions often lack specificity, or can be so unreasonable and/or inflexibly interpreted by advisers that claimants are simply unable to abide by them.
10. Research published by CPAG and partners in November 2014 found that sanctions were a major factor in participants' reasons for food bank use. This came out strongly in in-depth interviews (conducted with 40 participants), and in additional data collected on reasons for food bank use in food banks in Durham, Epsom and Ewell, and Tower Hamlets – where 19 per cent, 23 per cent and 28 per cent respectively of food bank users had had their benefit reduced due to a sanction.
11. The caseload analysis from Tower Hamlets food bank (where a CPAG welfare rights adviser has been helping users since summer 2013, with a total of 178 clients' cases analysed for the research) found that key issues regarding sanctions included lack of information, incorrectly applied sanctions, and sanctions of vulnerable people.<sup>[5]</sup>

**One man interviewed in Tower Hamlets by a CPAG researcher as part of the project (but whose testimony was not published as part of the final report) had been sanctioned, and had his JSA stopped for two weeks, for failing to attend an appointment he received no letter about. His landlord, about whom he has unsuccessfully complained to the council, restricts his access to his letterbox, and he has learning difficulties which mean that he needs assistance to read the letters that he does receive. Explaining what happened when he told the Jobcentre about not having received his letter, he said: 'they said we can't do nothing about it; you will have to sort it out yourself. That's not a very nice thing to say. They know my situation, they know about my illness [he is diabetic] and everything, but they don't really bother'. As a result, he was left unaware of his right to appeal the decision.**

12. The [redacted] has been applied, are frequently unclear about the specific reason for the sanction, and do not as a matter of course explain the process for appealing a decision or for obtaining hardship payments. More broadly, participants in the November 2014 research experienced difficulty obtaining information from the DWP, particularly regarding reasons for a sanction, as a result of multiple decision makers.

13.

The EWS in Scotland provides a number of examples of incorrectly applied sanctions, including:

- A client was sanctioned for missing an appointment with his Work Programme provider. The letter informing him of the appointment arrived at his home on 27th June 2014. It was dated 26th June 2014 and informed him of an appointment which he had to attend on 25th June 2014. Despite showing this letter to Jobcentre Plus staff and being assured a sanction would not be applied, he was subsequently sanctioned.
- The client, who has a three year old and a fifteen year old, was sanctioned for being ten minutes late for an appointment because of problems with public transport. She was assured by the receptionist and an advisor at her Work Programme provider that she shouldn't worry as she would not be sanctioned. Despite this, the client was subsequently sanctioned for three weeks.
- A 19 year old woman failed to attend an appointment with Jobcentre Plus because she had

A client was told she hadn't done enough job search activity (though she disagrees), and that a decision would be made regarding a sanction. After waiting for 2 weeks, she phoned up and was told she had been sanctioned for 4 weeks. After 4 weeks, she received no money, and was told this was because her claim had ended and she needed to reclaim. She reclaimed, but had now lost 6 weeks' JSA rather than 4. After asking to backdate and to reconsider the sanction, she received a letter refusing to backdate.

Among all correspondence, there was no letter giving the period of the sanction, or the right of mandatory reconsideration against it. A further letter disallowed her for failing to sign on, but the sign-on date it gives is the date she was not permitted to sign on, having been told she would probably be sanctioned, and the same date she had already been disallowed for not doing enough to actively seek work. When her adviser phoned the Decision Maker, she was told the client had been disallowed for 2 weeks and sanctioned for a further 2, and should have reclaimed after the first 2 weeks, and been told to do so by the Jobcentre.

It is unclear from the information the client received whether the disallowance was on the grounds of failure to seek work, failure to sign on, or failure to participate in an interview. This, in turn, makes it difficult both to challenge the decision, and for the client to understand the behavioural changes the sanction is supposed to be encouraging.

14. Ultimately, there is clear evidence of very harsh and apparently irrational decision making. It is hard to substantiate whether this approach is officially supported or encouraged, but the type of experience on the ground we describe is common.

### ESA sanctions decision making

15. The processes employed within the DWP in making decisions on sanctions systematically lead to sanctions for ESA claimants being employed readily, and not used as 'a last resort' as is often claimed.
16. When claimants are assigned to the work related activity group (WRAG), in the process of assessment (via work capability assessment, or WCA), a DWP Decision Maker will typically rely on a medical report (an ESA85) detailing the claimant's limitations as assessed under regulations which specify when a claimant is in the WRAG. When a claimant is referred to a Work Programme provider, however, the DWP does not share with that provider either a copy of this report or a summary of its main findings, meaning that the provider is unaware of a claimant's specific difficulties. Thus, they may refer a claimant for a sanction, even where the reason for doing so would otherwise be explained by the claimant's particular difficulties. To compound this problem, the Decision Maker who then considers whether to impose the sanction does not have routine access to the ESA85,

or to the findings of the WCA Decision Maker, and will thus rely on the referral from the Work Programme provider – similarly lacking in information about a claimant’s difficulties. The Decision Maker will write to the claimant asking why they did not participate, but in the absence of a response – an absence which could be explained by the claimant’s difficulties – will proceed and issue a sanction. Examples of difficulties arising from mental health issues, which can lead to assignment to the ESA WRAG, and which could explain a sanctionable behaviour such as missing an appointment and subsequent failure to respond to a Decision Maker’s letter, include:

- Is unable to get to a specified place with which the claimant is familiar, without being accompanied by another person;[6]
- cannot, due to impaired mental function, reliably initiate or complete at least 2 sequential personal actions [planning, organisation, problem solving, prioritising, or switching tasks] for the majority of the time;[7]
- engagement in social contact with someone unfamiliar to the claimant is always precluded due to difficulty relating to others or significant distress experienced by the claimant.[8]

17. The guidance issued to Work Programme providers can potentially mitigate this problem. For example, it stipulates that providers should only refer for a sanction once they have undertaken ‘safeguarding action’ for claimants assessed by the DWP as ‘vulnerable’. Such action might include telephoning the claimant to check why they could not attend. Yet the DWP do not require the provider to inform them of what safeguarding action has been taken or attempted when a referral for a sanction has been made. Thus, in cases where providers have failed to take appropriate action, the DWP has no way of knowing. Since the requirement to take safeguarding action is only in guidance and not a requirement of the law, even when such action has not been undertaken, this does not necessarily mean that a sanction can be overturned.
18. Such legal protections as do exist are undermined by the lack of information sharing described above. There is a legal requirement that a Work Programme provider should only require a claimant to undertake activity which is reasonable in light of their specific problems. However, given that the provider does not have access to the details of a claimant’s specific health problems, they often struggle to assess what is reasonable in a specific case. This problem is compounded as the Decision Maker also has no access to that information, and in practice seeks no evidence from the Work Programme provider as to the specific activity the claimant failed to undertake, and why it was assessed as reasonable in their circumstances.
19. The Work Programme provider is required to have drawn up an ‘action plan’ and issued it to the ESA claimant. This is a document which sets out what work-related activity a claimant has to perform. CPAG have heard of many examples of claimants not being given an action plan. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence of a provider attempting to charge a claimant £10 for access to their action plan under Data Protection Act 1998 rules as if this was a ‘subject access request’. When a sanction is considered, this action plan is a key document: it sets out what action the Work Programme provider required of the claimant, and can be examined to assess whether the actions required were reasonable, and to see whether a claimant had indeed failed to undertake them. However, the action plan is not obtained by Decision Makers when they consider whether to impose a sanction.
20. A sanction for a WRAG claimant is supposed to come to an end a fixed period after a claimant agrees to comply. Provider guidance indicates a claimant should be told when a doubt arises what action they need to agree to undertake in order to be regarded as compliant. That does not seem to occur in most cases. In addition, in many cases, the Work Programme provider does not appear to inform the DWP promptly when a claimant has become compliant, with the result that sanctions remain in force for longer than they should.

### Hardship payments

21. The majority of food bank users in our research who had been sanctioned were not receiving hardship payments. This finding, which came out in in-depth interviews and welfare rights caseload analysis, was reinforced through additional data collection. In County Durham, only 18 per cent of sanctioned food bank users had been awarded a hardship payment. Only one user (of 19 sanctioned) had received a hardship payment in Epsom and Ewell, and only two (out of 25 sanctioned) in Tower Hamlets.
22. This problem in part stems from a lack of awareness of the availability of hardship payments. In the research,

this varied between the food bank locations, from 68 per cent in Durham, to 16 out of 25 sanctioned clients in Tower Hamlets, and 5 out of 19 in Epsom and Ewell. One explanation for this is that information on hardship payments – that claimants can apply, or the process for doing so – is not included in letters sent to those who are sanctioned, and there is evidence that information received about hardship payments from Jobcentres and Work Programme providers is inconsistent.

23. The man in the example from Tower Hamlets above had received a hardship payment only as a result of the intervention of a welfare rights adviser based in the food bank and a council employee who also attended food bank sessions. He says he had received no information or help in applying for one from the Jobcentre.

**One example from the Early Warning System in Scotland is of a pregnant woman with two young children who failed to complete mandatory work activity because she did not have access to a computer. Her sanction was applied on a Wednesday, but she was not informed that she could apply for a hardship payment until the Friday. She was told on the Friday that she would not be able to apply for the payment until the following Monday.**

Problems

24. A failure to provide information on hardship payments can have a significant impact on the payment of housing benefit, leading in some cases to the threat of eviction, and potentially leading to, or exacerbating, problems with debt. Benefit rules dictate that receipt of an income benefit means that the claimant passes the means test for entitlement to housing benefit. The impact of sanctions on housing benefit differs according to the benefit claimed:

- with ESA, the sanction always leaves the claimant with at least £0.10 a week, meaning that entitlement continues during the sanction, so housing benefit is not affected;
- whereas, for JSA, the DWP notifies the local authority that the claimant is no longer receiving JSA, without necessarily revealing that this is the result of a sanction, or how long the sanction will last. While housing benefit rules treat a sanctioned claimant as still in receipt of JSA – so there should be no effect on housing benefit – where a local authority is unaware that JSA has stopped due to a sanction, they cannot apply that rule.

25. Analysis of our caseload identifies a number of problems with how the procedure for JSA works in practice, including immediate termination of housing benefit; non-receipt or acknowledgement of letters, the latter often due to language issues; and a failure on the part of local authorities to allow claimants a month to re-establish their proof of housing benefit eligibility. In each case, housing benefit termination is the result, as a result of maladministration on the part of the local authority or of failure of the claimant to respond adequately to notification. We are pleased the Government is now starting to acknowledge this problem.
26. There is anecdotal evidence of problems with housing benefit caused by sanctions leading to difficulties establishing eligibility for council tax support. In general, the more discretion and localisation in the social security system, the more danger there is that sanctions can have knock-on impacts on other benefits.
27. There is also suggestive evidence that some local welfare assistance schemes (LWAS) use sanctioning as a criterion for refusing support. While it is clear that LWAS should not be providing income replacement – and, in the case of sanctions, hardship payments are a more appropriate mechanism for this – it is inappropriate and potentially damaging to debar claimants from accessing this form of assistance as a result of having been sanctioned, irrespective of the cause of their need to access LWAS. There is also evidence of a similar approach being taken with regard to applications for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), with at least one local authority precluding those who have been subject to ‘certain sanctions’ from obtaining a DHP. We would encourage the Committee to consider the issue of the interaction of sanctions and discretion and localisation in the social security system as a whole.

**Evidence from the EWS in Scotland provides an example of some of the consequences of the housing benefit issue: a client's housing benefit was wrongly stopped because he had been sanctioned. He is accruing rent arrears as a result. He is looking for alternative accommodation, and has been threatened with eviction. The client's daughter stays with him one night per week, but clearly this cannot continue if he is evicted.**

28. Sanctions banks include these relationships.

number 2014 food strategies on food. Yet sure on

**One example from the EWS in Scotland is of a client wrongly sanctioned for six weeks for apparent failure to attend a Work Programme appointment. This was despite the fact that the Work Programme providers had already notified the DWP that he had in fact been at the relevant appointment. The client admitted that he had been forced to break the law in order to feed himself in the meantime.**

### Sanctions data and transparency

29. While data on sanctions made under the new JSA and ESA regimes is now available, it is not easy to access or interpret. According to David Webster, the respected academic who writes extensively on sanctions policy, 'the DWP Tabtool is extremely cumbersome and time-consuming to use and it is not surprising that people have difficulty with it'.<sup>[9]</sup> The lack of data on mandatory reconsiderations means it is impossible accurately to assess the overall proportion of initial sanctioning decisions that were later overturned.
30. Sanctions data are not currently disaggregated according to household characteristics. For example, there is no information available on the number or proportion of sanctioned households which contain children, or regarding disability status, or any other protected characteristic. Parliamentary Questions into this issue have not yielded any further information.<sup>[10]</sup> This is in spite of a very similar Freedom of Information request for London-only data being granted.<sup>[11]</sup>

### Recommendations

31. Our recommendations take into account the government's full acceptance of the Oakley Review's recommendations, which we commend. Our subsequent recommendations assume the implementation of the findings of that review. We also welcome Iain Duncan Smith's commitment in response to the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty to 'do everything we can to make sure that people do not stumble into a process of sanctions'.
32. The rapid increase in numbers being sanctioned requires investigation and remedy. We urge the Committee to ensure in its recommendations that there are no targets or quotas for sanctions – whether official or in practice – and that there is proper training in place for staff about their judicial, decision-making role.
33. There should not be fixed period sanctions. Under such a system, a claimant cannot alter their behaviour and have their sanction removed from this point, undermining the policy objective of encouraging appropriate behaviour.
34. Access should be increased to hardship payments, through making a decision on hardship payment at the same time as a decision to sanction, and ensuring hardship payments are made available to all claimants in the first 14 days of a sanction.
35. Communications about sanctions should be improved. The recommendations of the Oakley Review could be

strengthened by ensuring that a sanction decision is only lawful if the letters sent, and proven to have been received, clearly communicate:

- the reason that a sanction is being imposed (including dates, what the failure was, and why there is not good cause), clearly referring to the specific regulation(s) under which the sanction has been imposed;
- the period for which the sanction will apply;
- whether a hardship payment has been granted, and, if not, set out the process for obtaining one;
- how to challenge a decision, and who to contact.

36. Benefits should not be suspended while a sanction is being reconsidered, and sanctions should not start until 14 days after the claimant has been notified, during which period claimants may challenge the decision. This will serve to mitigate the impact upon claimants while a sanction is being reconsidered.
37. To address the issue of housing benefit claims being impacted by sanctions to JSA, a claimant should be left with at least £0.10 per week of income-based JSA payment to ensure that housing benefit is not affected – as is already the case for ESA sanctions. We welcome the government’s commitment to similar recommendations in the Oakley review, but urge the Committee to monitor the efficacy of its proposed solution.
38. Information about ESA claimants’ specific difficulties should be shared with Work Programme providers and DWP Decision Makers in order to ensure that they are considered when making a sanction referral or decision. The DWP should be more proactive in obtaining details from Work Programme providers of what safeguarding action they have undertaken, and in assessing action plans as part of the decision-making process on sanctions.
39. The availability and presentation of data on sanctions should be improved, in the interests of transparency, and in consultation with stakeholders.

19 December 2014

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[1] ‘Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK’ is attached as an appendix, and available for download at: <http://cpag.org.uk/content/road-food-bank-paved-failures-safety-net>

[2] The full submission is attached as an appendix, and available at: <http://cpag.org.uk/content/independent-review-isa-sanctions-response>

[3] David Webster, ‘Briefing: the DWP’S JSA/ESA sanctions statistics release, 12 November 2014’: <https://paulspicker.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/14-11-sanctions-stats-briefing-d-webster-nov-2014.pdf>

[4] See, for example, a review of the evidence around the effectiveness of sanctions, ‘Welfare sanctions and conditionality in the UK’, 10 September 2014, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/welfare-sanctions-and-conditionality-uk>

[5] For more detail, see ‘Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK’, Chapter 4, pp. 41-44, and Appendix C, pp.112-116

[6] That is, Activity 15(b) of Schedule 2 to the Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI No. 794) applies.

[7] That is, Activity 13(b) applies.

[8] That is, Activity 16(b) applies.

[9] <http://paulspicker.wordpress.com/2013/03/22/jobcentre-sanctions/>

[10] See, for example, answer to Written Question 218538, 17 December 2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-12-12/218538/>; and answer to Written Question 218574, 17 December 2014, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2014-12-12/218574/>

[11] [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/number\\_of\\_claimant\\_households\\_af?nocache=incoming-569411#incoming-569411](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/number_of_claimant_households_af?nocache=incoming-569411#incoming-569411)



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HOME / THE ROAD TO THE FOOD BANK IS PAVED BY FAILURES IN THE SAFETY NET: NEW REPORT

## The road to the food bank is paved by failures in the safety net: new report

*"It seems to be, maybe towards the end of the month, on odd occasions something has gone wrong that we have had to spend some money... and you think "Oh great, we haven't got enough to go and buy our food this month" Heidi, London*

Visiting a food bank should be a last resort: we all hope that if times get hard, the safety net is there to make sure we aren't left without the means to buy food for ourselves or our family. Yet [new research](#) from the Child Poverty Action Group, Oxfam, Church of England and the Trussell Trust has found that failures in the social safety net itself are often the trigger for food bank referrals.

The report finds that, while money is tight for many reasons, including bereavement, relationship breakdown, illness or job loss, issues such as sanctions, delays in benefits decisions or payments or being declared 'fit for work' led people to turn to food banks for support.

- Around a third of foodbank users in the sample were waiting for a decision on their benefits – and struggling in the meantime
- Between 20 and 30% had their household benefits reduced or stopped because of a sanction

Other factors included loss of income due to the 'bedroom tax' or the benefit cap.

The research used 40 in-depth interviews with food bank users, data from over 900 users at three food banks around the country, and detailed analysis of nearly 200 clients accessing one food bank in Tower Hamlets.

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 Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK

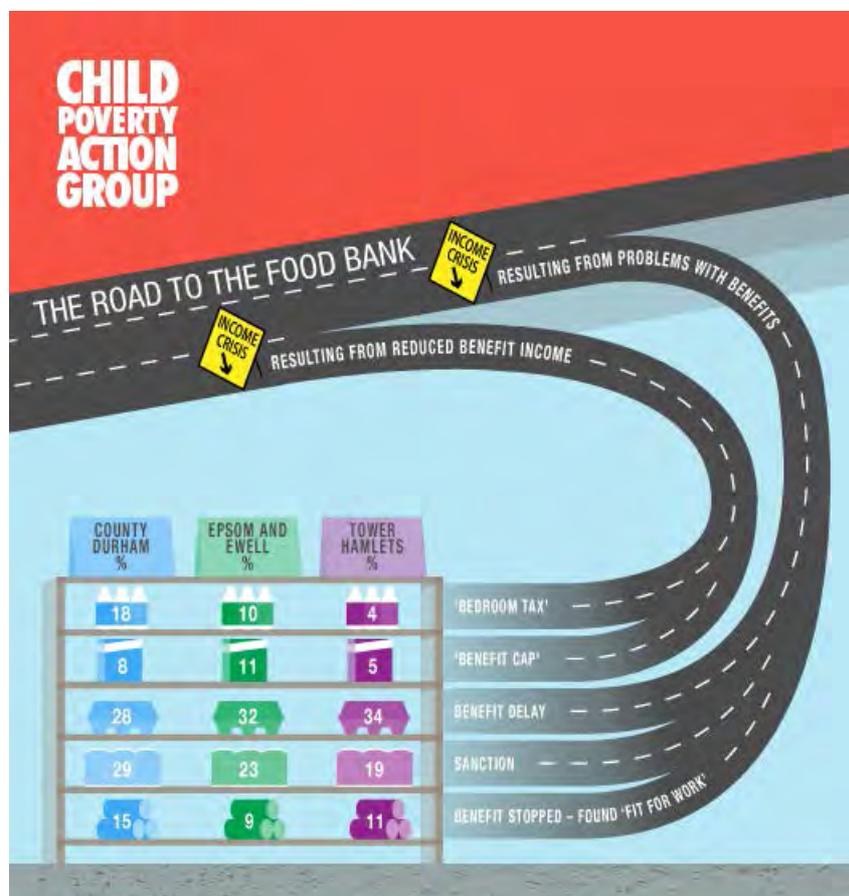
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*"My benefits all stopped because I didn't put down the right job history... That's what's put me behind on everything, so that's why the foodbank has been a godsend:... it can't get no worse than this, it physically can't"*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# EMERGENCY USE ONLY: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK

Use of emergency food aid in the UK, particularly in the form of food banks, has dramatically increased over the last decade.<sup>1</sup> This research, jointly conducted by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust, examines why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use.

Our research used a combination of methodological approaches. We conducted 40 in-depth interviews with clients at 7 food banks in a diverse range of areas across the UK, collected additional administrative data from more than 900 clients at 3 of those food banks regarding the reasons for their referral, and analysed a caseload of 178 clients accessing an advice service at one food bank.

### Summary of key findings

- People interviewed for this research turned to food banks as a last resort, when other coping strategies had failed or were overstretched. Deciding to accept help from a food bank was often difficult, and was described by participants as being ‘unnatural’, ‘embarrassing’ and ‘shameful’.
- Most food bank users were facing an immediate, acute financial crisis – either a complete loss of income or a very significant reduction in their income had left them at crisis point, with little or no money to put food on the table.
- The acute crises people faced could be prompted by a sudden loss of earnings, or a change in family circumstances such as bereavement or homelessness. However, for between half and two-thirds of the people included in this research, the immediate income crisis was linked to the operation of the benefits system (with problems including waiting for benefit payments, sanctions, or reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments.
- The emergency support available to people at a time of crisis was not sufficient to prevent them having to turn to a food bank. Many participants were not aware of the various emergency payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them. Only half (or less) of the users we spoke to knew they could seek support from the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme; very few of those potentially eligible had been awarded short-term benefit advances or hardship payments.

The acute crisis that led the people we interviewed to have to turn to food banks was set against a backdrop of complex, difficult lives. It was common for food bank users to have experienced ill health, bereavement, relationship breakdown, substantial caring responsibilities or job loss. Many lived on constantly low incomes. People with mental health problems appeared to be particularly at risk.

The evidence in this report helps shed light on the factors that are driving food bank use in the UK. Causes of shocks in people’s lives are many and varied, and the social security system is a vital safety net for all of us at such moments. Yet, as the report shows, action is needed to ensure that this safety net continues to operate as intended. Achieving this will help to prevent a life-shock becoming a crisis, and ensure the system offers vital protection for vulnerable people like those we met during this research. Our report paints a picture of the challenging, complex lives many food bank users have, and underlines the need to address these wide ranging issues. But we are also able to point to practical, measured changes in policy and practice that will help reduce the need for food banks, and ensure vital support for people in times of crisis.

The full report is available to download from the websites of the co-publishing partners.

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<sup>1</sup> Downing and Kennedy (2014), *Food Banks and Food Poverty*, London: House of Commons Library.

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## KATH'S STORY 'I THOUGHT THE SYSTEM WOULD PROTECT ME'<sup>2</sup>

Kath lives with her three teenage sons. Her youngest son has several serious medical conditions and requires intensive support. After her partner left 4 years ago, Kath gave up work to become his full-time carer. This left the family finances in precarious financial position:

*'We live very close to the edge... we don't have many things. My 17-year-old needed a passport to get a part-time job and I had to say no. My youngest, who's 14, has never been on a school trip, and I can't afford the art supplies my other son needs for his course.'*

The family were just about managing when their Child Tax Credits were halved without notice. Kath had arranged her finances so that she relied on her tax credits to pay for food and other daily necessities, so the effect was catastrophic.

When Kath contacted HMRC, she was told her credits had been cut because she had failed to tell them that her two older sons were staying in education. Kath says she did update them. She was assigned a case worker and given a number to call, 'and that's where the problem started'.

*'I called them every day all day and couldn't get through. And every time I got put through to the answer machine we got charged. It was awful. I'd go back to the helpline and say "I can't get through", and they said "Well, that's the number". They didn't help at all. It went on for eight weeks.'*

Kath was horrified by how she was treated. *'When our money was stopped, there was no compassion, there was no way to get support.'*

Meanwhile, she was getting into more and more debt: *'We got behind on all our bills; everything just got swallowed up, and my direct debits were bouncing.'*

She became unable to meet the family's basic needs. *'It was freezing cold, there was no wood for the fire, I was on the emergency on the meter and I knew the lights were about to go out, and I had no food.'* To attempt to make ends meet, Kath had to rehouse a much-loved family pet, a decision which she described as *'heart-breaking'*. But this was still not enough: *'I had no money to get my children to school... I was desperate.'*

To compound their problems, her youngest son's conditions mean he needs to eat healthily, which Kath found challenging on a small budget. *'He can't eat fast food; he would have ended up in hospital.'*

Kath and her family survived with the help of donations from her local Citizens Advice Bureau and food bank. It took eight weeks for the decision to cut her Child Tax Credits to be overturned.

She said of her experience: *'I thought the system would protect me. I never thought I would be completely ignored. I feel I was let down hugely. My benefits are my safety net – if they're removed, how are families like ours meant to survive?'*

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<sup>2</sup> Case studies throughout the report come directly from in-depth interviews, and are used with permission. Personal details have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

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## Why do people use food banks?

**Food bank use was usually the result of an immediate income crisis.** For participants in our in-depth interviews, food bank use was primarily in response to an immediate and severe financial crisis: something had happened which had left them without enough income to buy sufficient food for themselves and their families. Most families viewed food bank use as a short-term or emergency measure.

An 'acute' income crisis – a specific, identifiable event which had left the household without any income at all or with their income a dramatically reduced – was the dominant reason people gave for using food banks. Food bank use solely as a result of ongoing, chronic low income, without being attributed to a particular identifiable event, was less common.

Some participants could describe what they would have done without the food bank: relying on family, borrowing or making do. Others reported that they would have been completely bereft without it, or might have resorted to stealing to feed themselves and their families.

Although an immediate, severe financial crisis was often the 'last straw' that had brought people to the food bank it was rarely, if ever, the entire story. Participants' life stories revealed a number of income shocks in their past which had contributed to their current situation:

- **Loss of earnings from employment** can occur for a number of reasons including redundancy, loss of work through ill health, caring responsibilities or delayed wages. Around 11-16% of food bank users at the three food banks where additional administrative data were collected were in households where no one was currently working but which had experienced job loss, for whatever reason, in the last six months.

Income crisis related to job loss seemed to be a particular problem for those with little or no experience of claiming benefits, who were reluctant to claim benefits or found the system difficult to navigate. It could quickly lead to a build-up of arrears and debts, themselves posing a long-term threat to financial stability.

- **Change in family circumstances** Although rarely given as the main reason for turning to the food bank, changes in the family (adults forming or leaving relationships, new babies, or older children moving into or out of the family) can threaten previously established livelihood strategies and trigger a challenging period of change in the process of re-establishing a household (finding new accommodation, securing financial arrangements and registering for changes in benefits).

The frequency of **bereavement** among food bank users was a striking feature of this research. Death of a loved one can have a direct financial impact, through loss of income from the deceased but also job loss (because of time taken to care for the dying person or because the emotional impact on the bereaved leaves them unable to work). Bereavement can also have an indirect effect through its impact on a range of other previously established social networks and survival strategies.

- **Homelessness** This accounts for around 3% of Trussell Trust Foodbank referrals, with additional administrative data collected by the research suggesting that the total proportion may be slightly higher. Suddenly becoming homeless can disrupt income through loss of work or benefits. Equally, other life-shocks, such as losing a job, can lead to homelessness and food bank referral. There were clear examples of participants living in fear of future homelessness as a result of rent arrears which they were building up, or because of suspended Housing Benefit.

Food bank users are not unique in having complex lives. However, it was not uncommon for food bank users interviewed to have experienced several particularly dramatic negative life events, which could be cumulative and compounding. Wider vulnerabilities, often the legacy of previous life-shocks, also played a significant role in determining how well individuals were able to tackle the crisis they were facing.

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**Often attributable to problems with benefits.** Difficulty in navigating the benefit system was a common feature of food bank users' experiences. The benefit system was experienced as complicated, remote and, at times, intimidating, especially for those trying to resolve problems that had occurred with a claim. Lack of clear communication about what help was available or how to access it was particularly a problem for people who had always worked and never claimed benefits before. A number of reasons for 'acute income crisis' were identified which related directly to the administration of main income replacement benefits or tax credits, as follows:

- **Waiting for benefits** Evidence from the additional administrative data shows that around a third of food bank users reported claiming a benefit which had not yet been decided. In County Durham, less than half (47%) of food bank users who reported waiting for benefits said they knew they could apply for a short-term benefit advance (STBA), only 26% of had done so, and only 9% had been awarded the advance. Analysis of welfare advice caseload data from Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that low use of STBAs is attributable to lack of awareness of STBAs, practical barriers to making a request (including lack of access to a telephone; or being advised to use other emergency support, including the food bank, instead), and refusals of STBA claims that were shown to be legally incorrect.

- **Sanctions** Of those food bank users for whom additional data was collected, 20-30% said that their household's benefits had recently been stopped or reduced because of a sanction. This varied between locations: 19% in Tower Hamlets, 23% in Epsom and Ewell, and 28% in County Durham. Themes emerging from the Tower Hamlets Foodbank caseload included lack of clear information about sanctions or hardship payments, sanctions made in error or affecting vulnerable people with health problems, and particular difficulties arising from the impact of sanctions on Housing Benefit.

- **Problems with disability benefits** Analysis of the welfare advice caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed a number of specific problems which can occur with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), including money stopped because of the claimant being found 'fit for work' in an ESA assessment (this affected 9-16% of food bank users included in the additional data analysis). Other problems included difficulties with submitting medical certificates or application forms, and failure to attend medical examinations. The introduction of 'mandatory reconsideration' before submission of an appeal had also contributed to some food bank users experiencing significant periods without benefit payment.

- **Problems with tax credit payments** These had led to dramatic reductions in income for some interview participants, causing real hardship because they had previously been relied upon as a significant proportion of income. These tax credit problems could be difficult to rectify, often resulting in long waits before missing payments are repaid. Analysis of the caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that particular problems can occur for those registering a change in family circumstances, and also for those who are not British or Irish nationals.

**Experienced against a backdrop of ongoing severe shortage or insecurity of income.** Aside from immediate income crisis, many interview participants described the ongoing impact of living on a low income. Long-term low income was sometimes a product of wages being low or unreliable, but was also attributed to low benefit levels. Some families were not receiving benefit they were entitled to, either because they had failed to claim or because they had had claims refused. For others, their income from benefits had been reduced through deductions for repayments or because of recent reforms.

Most participants described how using credit and debt formed part of their immediate coping strategy, but also how repayments of long-term debts had a significant impact on their household's disposable income.

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**Finally, food bank use is made more likely by specific, identifiable vulnerabilities.** In-depth interviews revealed a number of specific factors which appeared to make individuals or families either more likely to be hit by significant life-shocks or less likely to be able to cope with them:

- Experience of living in the particular local area, including lack of access to jobs, shops and services.
- Impact of physical and mental illness on individuals and the wider household, with illness and/or caring responsibilities affecting not only ability to work but also capacity to deal with other crises.
- Difficulty obtaining or proving educational qualifications or skills.
- Problems with housing.
- Isolation or lack of family support.
- Large debt repayments which reduce disposable income at source and potentially lead to spiralling financial problems.

### **RAJA'S STORY JSA SANCTION LEADING TO FOOD BANK USE**

Raja lives in a small flat which he rents from a housing association. He worked as a nurse until 2008 when he was hospitalised with mental health problems; at this time, Raja also lost his home. He made a gradual recovery over the next few years and lived in a series of hostels. He was eventually re-housed to his current home and was able to start work again in 2011.

After losing his job again in 2013, Raja applied for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). His claim took eight weeks to be processed. During this time Raja had to use the food bank for the first time, as he did not have enough money to buy food. His benefits were stopped at the beginning of 2014 because he could not access the system to complete the required job-search activities.

*"Over Christmas for three days I didn't have access to universal job match, as I didn't have access to a computer as everything was still shut, my local library was shut. The day I went to sign on I found I had been sanctioned. It went on for four weeks. It's not at all reasonable. I'm not just talking about myself, but so many people are sanctioned. I didn't even have electricity whilst I was sanctioned as I couldn't afford it, and I ended up at the food bank."*

Raja survived with the help of a crisis payment from Citizens Advice Bureau and food parcels from the food bank. His housing association also supported him in his efforts to find work.

Raja found the Jobcentre to be very unhelpful: he experienced a lack of empathy and support and a lack of information, particularly about whether the JSA sanction would have a knock-on effect on his Housing Benefit. When he tried to question the sanction he was referred to a helpline based in Newcastle, but the advisers were not able to help with his case.

*"I don't think we get enough help from the Jobcentre itself with applying for jobs. My local housing association do help me; they give me a one-to-one and they let me access computers."*

Raja remained positive about the future, and was learning new IT skills at college and applying for low-paid jobs.

*"I think I've now got a part-time job working as a night receptionist so I'm very happy. Working is good for your health; it's good to be doing something. I want to get off benefits. Even though it's minimum wage, I can't wait to get off them. I was on more money when I was a senior nurse but I think anything is better than dole money."*

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## How do food banks fit with wider livelihood strategies?

**Access to emergency payments** – The majority of food bank users were not aware of the availability of Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) crisis payments, and even fewer were receiving them. Experience of our in-depth interview participants was that LWAS were often poorly advertised or difficult to access.

Several in-depth interviews conducted in Scotland, where elements of the social fund were replaced with the Scottish Welfare Fund, also highlighted a lack of awareness of the scheme and practical barriers to take up, including perceived delay in processing applications and lack of affordable local transport to collect awards.

**Wider support services** – for most families, their primary source of emergency assistance was the agency that referred them to the food bank. Referral agencies included welfare rights advice and housing services, homelessness or substance abuse charities, refugee support groups, schools and health services. Referral agencies were usually spoken of very positively, particularly where the food bank referral voucher had formed part of a wider package of help and support.

Users of Trussell Trust Foodbanks also spoke positively about support they received from the food bank itself – particularly the warmth of welcome they received there, the opportunity to talk, and its signposting to other support services.

**Other strategies for managing life on a very low income** – Participants described a range of highly developed financial strategies for managing life on a very low income, including different methods of prioritising expenditure, saving or digging into savings, and selling possessions. Cutting back on food was a common approach.

Borrowing and debt were also an essential part of livelihood strategies. Many participants had borrowed from family and friends, where this was possible, while those whose family were unable or unwilling to help faced particular challenges. Other forms of debt brought higher risks: building up arrears with housing payments and other utilities, or turning to high-cost lenders in desperation.

Phones and internet access played an essential part in families' strategies for survival, allowing them to access the benefit system and stay in touch with vital social support networks.

**Personal strengths** – The people we spoke to showed remarkable fortitude, and often good humour, in the face of very difficult situations. Maintaining a positive mental attitude was mentioned as a strength, with many saying they had to stay strong for other family members. Inter-personal skills, such as communication and friendliness, were often combined with a willingness to help and care for others within and outside their family. Some undertook voluntary work in order to 'give back', others to gain work experience. Similarly, studying was mentioned as both a positive strategy in itself and as a step towards employment.

**Social networks** – For those who had them, social networks played a crucial role in helping individuals and families through crisis. Nuclear and wider family, as well as friends and neighbours, were important for much more than just financial support. Practical assistance, such as help with transport, childcare or filling in forms, was coupled with emotional support. However, social support could have a flipside, with expectations that support would be given in return, or involving relationships which themselves entailed caring responsibilities.

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## Recommendations

For the individuals and families using food banks who contributed to this report, hunger and hard choices between heating, eating, paying bills and servicing debts are real. Crucially, the immediate income crisis which precipitated food bank use was often outside of an individual's control – rather it resulted from a failure of income which they did not instigate, or the effects of which they were unable to reverse.

Participants told stories of complex lives with interlocking challenges. We heard about the ongoing daily grind of living without sufficient income to make ends meet each month, of struggling to find and be able to keep a job, of trying to cope with mental and physical ill health or bereavement. Many of those who are forced to use food banks are living in, or close to, poverty. Offering sustained change for those we came into contact with during the course of this research requires long-term thinking and bold choices. But the promise of a social security safety net that is there to protect people at times of crisis is something that can, and must be, preserved and protected. Food banks, whilst providing a vital and welcoming lifeline to many, should not become a readily accepted part of that formal provision.

The experiences of the food bank users in this study reveal important truths about the impact of problems with our benefit system on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The very real challenges faced by these people are too often being compounded – rather than assisted – by their experience of the benefit system, and by policy choices regarding the support offered to people who are out of work or who cannot work.

Our research has identified a number of specific problems which contribute to food bank use, along with some relatively simple changes which could, potentially, dramatically reduce the numbers of people referred to food banks for these reasons:

### WHAT MIGHT PREVENT PEOPLE FROM USING FOOD BANKS?

1. Improve access to short-term benefit advances: increase awareness, simplify the claim process and improve data collection to identify support needs.
2. Reform sanctions policy and practice: increase access to hardship payments, clarify communications about sanctions, mitigate the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered and address issues for Housing Benefit.
3. Improve the ESA regime: ensure claimants are not left without income whilst challenging a decision made because of missing medical certificates or missed appointments.
4. Sustain and improve access to emergency financial support through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes and the Scottish Welfare Fund.
5. Ensure Jobcentres provide an efficient and supportive service for all clients.
6. Improve Jobcentre Plus Advisers' awareness of, and ability to respond to, mental health problems.
7. Improve access to appropriate advice and support.

The evidence in this report helps shed light on the factors that are driving food bank use in the UK. Causes of shocks in people's lives are many and varied, and the social security system is a vital safety net for all of us at such moments. Yet, as the report shows, action is needed to ensure that this safety net continues to operate as intended. Achieving this will help to prevent a life-shock becoming a crisis, and ensure the system offers vital protection for vulnerable people like those we met during this research. Our report paints a picture of the challenging, complex lives many food bank users have, and underlines the need to address these wide ranging issues. But we are also able to point to practical, measured changes in policy and practice that will help reduce the need for food banks, and ensure vital support for people in times of crisis.

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Our thanks go to the participants in the research (and their families) for being willing to give their time to the project, and for being willing to share their stories and allowing us to share them here. Their identities have been protected by changing their names and, where necessary, key personal details, but all the words quoted are their own. We hope this report does justice to their honesty, openness and bravery.

The research in this report was jointly commissioned by Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), The Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust:



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# Independent review of JSA sanctions: CPAG's response to the call for information

**JANUARY 2014**

CPAG has submitted evidence to Matthew Oakley's review of the operation of the sanctions system for jobseeker's allowance claimants on mandatory back-to-work schemes.

We raise concerns about the limited scope of the review, highlight numerous systemic problems, and make recommendations to help protect claimants.

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Independent review of JSA sanctions: CPAG's response to the call for information

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# **BRIEFING: THE DWP'S JSA/ESA SANCTIONS STATISTICS RELEASE, 12 November 2014**

## **SUMMARY**

The DWP's newly published statistics cover the period April-June 2014. Total numbers of JSA sanctions have started to fall back, reflecting the decline in claimant unemployment. As a proportion of claimants, they have stabilised at the unprecedentedly high levels of about 7% of claimants per month before reconsiderations and appeals, and 6% after. ESA sanctions have risen to all-time highs, reaching an estimated 1.16% of claimants per month before reconsiderations and appeals, and 0.97% after.

Under the new, harsher regime since October 2012, 833,628 individuals have received an average of 1.73 sanctions each. From April 2000 to June 2014, a total of 3,063,098 people received an average of 2.04 sanctions each. Almost 60% of sanctioned individuals received only one sanction, but 21.5% received more than two, and 46,000 received ten or more. These figures do not include sanctions which were reversed on reconsideration or appeal, which often cause as much damage as those that are not reversed.

The DWP has still published no figures on Mandatory Reconsiderations, introduced on 28 October 2013. Mandatory Reconsideration appears to have caused an almost total collapse in appeals to Tribunals. If the statistics are to be believed, there were only 23 Tribunal decisions on JSA and ESA sanctions in the three months April to June, compared to a normal monthly rate of over 1,000. If this is due to delays in decisions, or to the increased burden on claimants, rather than an increase in decisions favourable to claimants, then it is causing further injustice and hardship. In response to media reports of abusive sanctions, the DWP routinely claims that those who disagree with a decision can appeal to an independent tribunal. For practical purposes, this is currently not the case.

The non-reporting of Mandatory Reconsiderations has had the incidental effect of revealing the delays in the former reconsideration system. Over 25,000 claimants receiving reconsideration decisions in May and June had waited at least 6 months. The new figures confirm that JSA claimants' success rates at reconsideration and appeal have risen to their highest-ever levels, with the latter doubling under the Coalition. Far more sanctioned ESA claimants are now asking for reconsideration, but their success rate has halved since October 2012. Overall, ESA Tribunal appeals have had double the success rate of JSA appeals.

In the first half of 2014, not 'actively seeking work' remained the most common reason for JSA sanctions, followed by failure to participate in a training/employment scheme and missing an interview. The only reason to show an increase was voluntarily leaving a job or losing it through misconduct. Statistics back to the 1930s show that this reason always increases during a labour market recovery, because people are more willing to give up a job when it is easier to get another. The big surge in ESA sanctions has been entirely due to 'failure to participate in work related activity'.

The Work Programme continues to deliver more sanctions than job outcomes. Up to 30 June 2014 there had been 545,873 JSA Work Programme sanctions and 312,780 JSA Work Programme job outcomes.

# **BRIEFING: THE DWP'S JSA/ESA SANCTIONS STATISTICS RELEASE, 12 November 2014**

## **Introduction**

This briefing deals with the statistics on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions released by the DWP on **12 November 2014**, which include figures for a further three months, namely April to June 2014.<sup>1</sup> Excel spreadsheet summaries of the DWP's statistics are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions> and the full dataset is in the Stat-Xplore database at <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/default.aspx>.

The DWP has still not resolved the problem that the results of the 'mandatory reconsiderations' for both JSA and ESA sanctions introduced from 28 October 2013 are not included in the database (although the cases to which they relate are included). This means that, over a year after the introduction of this new regime, we still do not know how it is working. It also means that the numbers of JSA and ESA sanctions which still applied after reconsideration (though not after Tribunal appeal) are being slightly overstated for the most recent 8 months. However, the estimated<sup>2</sup> numbers of sanctions *before* reconsideration or appeal are also reported here. They are not affected by non-inclusion of mandatory reconsiderations and give a truer picture of the total impact of sanctions, since they show all the cases in which claimants have had their money stopped. Although successful appellants should get their money back, this is only after weeks or months by which time serious damage is often done.

All statistics relate to Great Britain.

## **Factors influencing the figures**

The figures must be read in the light of the falling numbers of JSA and ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) claimants. The number of JSA claimants fell from 1.548m in February 2013 to 0.967m in June 2014. The number of ESA claimants in the WRAG (who are the only ESA claimants subject to sanctions) peaked at 0.563m in August 2013 but fell back to 0.533m in May 2014 and an estimated 0.527m in June 2014. The fall in JSA claimants is primarily due to improvement in the labour market, while the fall in the WRAG appears to be due both to the reduction in the flow of Work Capability Assessments following collapse of the DWP's contract with Atos, and to the placing of a higher proportion of claimants into the Support Group.

These figures also reflect the impact of the new 'Claimant Commitment' (requiring claimants to spend the equivalent of 35 hours a week looking for work), which was introduced in a rolling programme across Great Britain, running from 14 October 2013 to spring 2014. During April to June 2014 the claimant commitment should have been in operation in all Jobcentres.

**At the end of this briefing there are notes on a few additional recent developments in relation to sanctions.**

## Numbers of JSA and ESA sanctions

The *total numbers* of JSA sanctions before and after reconsiderations and appeals have started to fall back, reflecting the decline in claimant unemployment. But the numbers of ESA sanctions have risen to all-time highs.

*As a proportion of claimants*, the new data confirm that JSA sanctions have stabilised at the unprecedentedly high levels of about 7% of claimants per month before reconsiderations and appeals, and 6% per month after reconsiderations and appeals, which were reached in mid-2013. ESA sanctions have continued their rapid escalation which started in mid-2013, reaching an estimated 1.16% of claimants per month before reconsiderations and appeals, and 0.97% after, in June 2014.

### JSA and ESA sanctions

- There were an estimated 1,030,000 JSA and ESA sanctions in the year to 30 June 2014, *before* reconsiderations and appeals (**Figure 1**). This compares with 564,000 in the last 12 months of the previous Labour government, but is lower than the peak of 1,085,000 reached in the year to March 2014.
- Total JSA plus ESA sanctions in the year to 30 June 2014, *after* reconsiderations and appeals, were 892,252. This is lower than the peak of 935,881 reached in the year to March 2014 (**Figure 2**). Both of these figures are slightly overstated due to the non-inclusion of the results of mandatory reconsiderations.
- An estimated 138,100 JSA or ESA sanctions were overturned in the year to 30 June 2014 via appeals or old-style reconsiderations, *not* including the unknown numbers of successful requests for mandatory reconsiderations. In all these cases the claimant's payments will have been stopped for weeks or months.

### JSA sanctions

- The number of JSA sanctions in the year to 30 June 2014 was 977,000 before reconsiderations and appeals and 852,665 after. This compares with 533,000 before and 496,771 after in the year to 30 April 2010, the last year of the previous Labour government. (**Figures 1 and 2**)
- In the year to 30 June 2014, JSA claimants were sanctioned at the rate of **6.92% per month before reconsiderations and appeals**, and **6.05% per month after**. These are the highest rates recorded since the start of JSA in 1996 (**Figure 3**). The monthly figures suggest that the rate of JSA sanctions has stabilised at around these levels (**Figures 3 and 4**).

### ESA sanctions

- There has been a rapid escalation in the *numbers* of ESA sanctions since mid-2013. In June 2014 there were 5,132 ESA sanctions after reconsiderations and appeals. This is by far the highest monthly figure since sanctions were introduced for ESA claimants in the Work Related Activity Group in October 2008. The figure for the 12 months to

30 June 2014, at 39,591, is also the highest for any 12-month period since ESA sanctions began in October 2008, and compares with 15,926 in the year to 30 June 2013. The DWP has made major downward revisions to its previously published figures for ESA sanctions in January to March 2014, which cannot be explained by reported reconsiderations or appeals (**Figure 5**). However this does not alter the strong upward trend.

- **Although the *rate* of sanctions for ESA WRAG claimants is much lower than for JSA claimants, it continues to rise very fast. From a low of 0.08% per month in June 2011, before reconsiderations and appeals, and 0.06% after, it has risen to 1.16% before and 0.97% after in June 2014 (Figure 4).**<sup>3</sup>

The DWP has not provided any explanation for the increase in ESA sanctions. One factor may have been changing composition of the WRAG (**Figure 6**). The number of people in the Support Group has been growing much faster than the number in the WRAG. The Work Capability Assessment has been much criticised,<sup>4</sup> but on average those it allocates to the WRAG will be fitter than those allocated to the Support Group. This implies that people in the WRAG as a whole have probably been becoming fitter, and this may have led Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme contractors to place more demands on them. However the trend for more people to be allocated to the Support Group goes back much further than mid-2013, so this is unlikely to be more than a partial explanation. Another explanation would simply be that the DWP is making more unreasonable demands on WRAG claimants. This is certainly suggested by the study recently published by Mind and the Centre for Welfare Reform (Hale 2014). This has the disadvantage of being based on a self-selected sample of claimants, but the online survey it reports was conducted in October 2013 to January 2014, which is during the period when the rapid escalation of ESA sanctions has been taking place. It concluded that ‘the mandatory activities within this regime are often inaccessible to disabled people, and it appears that reasonable adjustments are rarely being made to enable participation. Consequently, the application of conditionality and sanctions is frequently inappropriate and unjust’ and that ‘the overall impact of participation in the WRAG is to move people further away from work, instead of closer to it’. This explanation is also supported by the fact that the proportion of sanctioned ESA claimants asking for reconsideration has risen dramatically since the October 2012 changes, from about 20% to about 60%.

## **Repeat sanctions: JSA**

The information published by the DWP on repeated sanctions imposed on the same individuals is very inadequate. Data can only be extracted for repeats during particular time periods, namely the whole period since October 2012, the whole period since 2000, and each individual month. Repeats during a year cannot be extracted. But it is these that trigger the hugely escalated penalties of 13, 26 or 156 weeks brought in by the Coalition in October 2012.

In the 88-week period of the new regime from 22 Oct 2012 to 30 June 2014, 833,628 individuals received 1,444,411 JSA sanctions, after reconsiderations and appeals. This is an average of 1.73 each, showing that multiple sanctions are common. However this is an underestimate of the prevalence of repeats, since sanctions which were reversed on reconsideration or appeal – which often cause severe hardship such as eviction - are not included.

Stat-Xplore can be used to reveal how many people have received multiple sanctions over the whole period April 2000 to June 2014 (**Figure 7**). A total of 3,063,098 people received a total of 6,259,075 sanctions, an average of 2.04 each. Almost 60% (59.9%) of the sanctioned individuals received only one sanction. But over half a million people received two sanctions, and over a quarter of a million received three sanctions. Altogether, 21.5% of sanctioned individuals received more than two sanctions. There were 46,328 people who received ten or more sanctions, on average 13.2 sanctions each. At the time of the Peters & Joyce study (2006, p.39<sup>5</sup>), 73% of sanctioned individuals had only received one sanction since April 2000, while only 10% had received more than two sanctions. For the overall figures for 2000-14 to be so different from the figures for 2000-06, the figures for the periods 2006-14 or 2010-14 must be very different again. It seems likely that in the period 2010-14, something like 50% of sanctioned individuals will have received more than one sanction, and 30% more than two. Once again, all of these figures are underestimates as they do not include sanctions reversed on reconsideration or appeal.

The Explanatory Memorandum to the October 2012 Regulations, which lengthened most sanctions and increased the penalties for repeated ‘failures’, cited Peters & Joyce and claimed (para. 7.1) that ‘Of those who are sanctioned the vast majority receive just one sanction *during their claim*’ (emphasis added). This ignores the fact that a high proportion of unemployed people have repeat spells of unemployment and may be sanctioned during any one of them; and also the fact that the commonest type of sanction, for allegedly not seeking work, involves the DWP deliberately closing the claim, thus ensuring that there cannot be a further sanction during it.<sup>6</sup>

A comparison of the number of sanctions with the number of sanctioned individuals for each month is also revealing (**Figure 8**). This shows that the gap between the two measures has been growing. This is made clearer in **Figure 9**. From 2000 to 2005, the gap was around 1,000. This means that at most around one thousand individuals received more than one sanction in the month. Under John Hutton this figure rose to hit 2,000. But the Coalition has pushed up the number very much more, to 6,000, and then further to hit 12,000 in October 2013. The level in the latest quarter was 7,000.

### **Three-year sanctions**

We do know that the number of people subjected to three-year sanctions since the start of the new regime in October 2012 cannot be greater than 1,767. This is the number of people who have received three or more ‘high level’ sanctions over this period. Three-year sanctions apply to those with three ‘high level’ failures within 12 months.

## **JSA and ESA Reconsiderations and Appeals**

**The introduction of Mandatory Reconsiderations has had a major effect on both the reporting and the operation of the appeal system. There are still no published figures on the numbers of Mandatory Reconsiderations or their outcomes. Moreover, the Mandatory Reconsideration process appears to have caused an almost total collapse in the flow of appeals to Tribunals. If, as seems likely, this is due to delays in deciding Mandatory Reconsiderations, or to the increased burden of the process on claimants, rather to an increase in decisions favourable to claimants, then it is causing further injustice and hardship.**

**The non-reporting of Mandatory Reconsiderations has had the incidental effect of revealing how serious are the delays in the former reconsideration system. The new figures confirm that JSA claimants' success rates at reconsideration and Tribunal appeal have risen to their highest-ever levels, with the latter doubling under the Coalition. Far more sanctioned ESA claimants are now asking for reconsideration, but their success rate has halved since October 2012. Overall, ESA sanction appeals to Tribunal have had double the success rate of JSA appeals.**

### **Reconsiderations**

For JSA sanctions, the number of reconsideration decisions reached an all-time high of 30,862 in October 2013, reflecting rises both in the number of sanctions and in the proportion of sanctioned claimants asking for reconsideration (**Figure 10**). Since then the numbers have declined fast, because the flow of new requests for reconsideration stopped completely on 28 October 2013. This chart only shows the decisions for reconsiderations requested prior to that date. For ESA sanctions, the number of reconsideration decisions actually continued to rise until April 2014, in spite of the lack of new requests after 28 October 2013. This will reflect the very rapid rise in ESA sanctions since mid-2013, which will have put large numbers of requests for reconsideration into the pipeline in the months running up to 28 October. The proportion of sanctioned ESA claimants asking for reconsideration has risen dramatically since the October 2012 changes, from about 20% to about 60%.

**Figure 11** highlights the delays in reconsideration decisions. All of the 18,665 JSA reconsideration decisions and 6,495 ESA reconsideration decisions made in May and June 2014 were at least 6 months later, and possibly much later, than the date of request. Similarly, the 13,243 claimants receiving JSA or ESA reconsideration decisions in April 2014 had all had to wait at least 5 months; 16,625 claimants receiving decisions in March had waited at least 4 months, 17,219 claimants receiving decisions in February had waited at least 3 months, and 17,319 claimants receiving decisions in January had waited at least 2 months. The Oakley report (2014) recommended that the government should set timescales for decisions on sanctions referrals and reconsiderations. The government's response (DWP 2014) accepted this but did not say when timescales will be introduced. These new statistics underline how difficult it will be to establish reasonable timescales; essentially, ministers have driven up the numbers of sanctions without providing the resources necessary to process them.

### **Tribunal Appeals**

According to the DWP statistics, the flow of appeals to Tribunals virtually disappeared in April-June, for both JSA and ESA. There were only 17 recorded JSA and 6 ESA appeal decisions during these three months, whereas since the beginning of the Coalition there had always been over 1,000 JSA appeals per month (reaching 4,500 per month at the peak), although ESA appeals were always few (**Figure 10**). The accuracy of these figures is open to doubt. First, it is clear that there is often late recording of appeal decisions. The November 2014 statistical release shows 270 more appeal decisions for January-March 2014 than did the August 2014 release.<sup>7</sup> Also, the President of the Social Entitlement Chamber, Judge Robert Martin (2014), has stated that the JSA Tribunal appeal intake fell only by about half (53%) from its peak in October 2013 to the month of March 2014. Although not all JSA appeals concern sanctions, the contrast with the 99% fall in sanction appeal decisions over the same period shown in the DWP statistics is surely significant. Finally, it is only a few

months since the DWP had to withdraw statistics relating specifically to Tribunal appeals (see the May 2014 Briefing in this series). However, anecdotal evidence from Tribunal judges and advice agencies confirms that there has been a big fall in JSA sanctions appeals (ESA sanction Tribunal appeals have always been rare). It seems unlikely that this is due to Mandatory Reconsideration producing more favourable decisions for claimants. It is much more likely that the Mandatory Reconsideration process itself is imposing big delays on claimants before they can appeal to a Tribunal, and/or is deterring them from making appeals by adding to the complexity of the process. Judge Martin suggested this to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2014, para. 93-94). Clarification by the DWP is urgently required. In relation to ESA, the Work and Pensions Committee (2014, p. 5) has already recommended that ‘Official statistics showing the impact of MR on the number of appeals and on outcomes for claimants should be published as a matter of urgency’.

In response to media reports of abusive sanctions, the DWP routinely claims that those who disagree with a decision can appeal to an independent tribunal. For all practical purposes, this is currently not the case.

### **Success rates at appeal**

Sanctioned JSA claimants’ success rates at reconsideration and appeal are shown in **Figure 12**. According to the DWP statistics, the success rate for JSA reconsiderations (excluding Mandatory Reconsiderations) has been much higher, at around 60%, in the latest 7 months than it has ever been before. So few JSA sanctions Tribunal appeals have been recorded for April to June 2014 that it is not worth quoting the figures, but the latest statistics confirm that up to March 2014 there had been more than a doubling in the success rate, from 10% to over 20%. These figures are compatible with other evidence that sanctions have become more unreasonable.

Success rates for ESA sanctions reconsiderations are shown in **Figure 13**, for the months where there are sufficient decisions to be worth quoting. This shows that under the new regime since October 2012, there has been a large and steady fall in the proportion of successes, from about 60% to about 30%. Given the increased severity of the penalty (loss of the whole personal allowance rather than just the WRA component) and the increased numbers of ESA sanctions as well, this would have been expected to produce a significant increase in ESA Tribunal appeals. This again suggests that either the Mandatory Reconsideration process has introduced long delays, or Tribunal decisions are being under-reported.

There are so few recorded ESA Tribunal appeals that it is not worth quoting monthly success rates. Over the whole period since October 2008, 31% of these appeals have been successful. This is more than double the rate for JSA Tribunal appeals over the same period (14%).

### **Reasons for JSA sanctions**

**In the first half of 2014, not ‘actively seeking work’ remained the most common reason for JSA sanctions, followed by failure to participate in a training/employment scheme and missing an interview. The only sanction reason to show an increase was for voluntarily leaving a job or losing it through misconduct. Statistics back to the 1930s show that this reason always increases during a labour market recovery.**

**Figure 14** compares the number of sanctions in the first half of 2014 (shown as an annual rate) for each reason with the numbers in 1997, 2003, 2009 and 2013 (these are respectively the first full year of JSA, the low point of sanctions under the Labour government, the last full year of the Labour government, and the most recent calendar year).

In the first half of 2014, ‘Not actively seeking work’ remained the most common reason for a sanction, followed by failure to participate in a training or employment programme, and failure to attend an adviser interview.<sup>8</sup> Comments about these reasons were included in the previous briefing of August 2014.

The only reasons for sanction to have increased in frequency are voluntarily leaving a job or losing it through misconduct. Extensive evidence going back to the 1930s shows that in a period of labour market upturn like the present, people are more likely to leave their job voluntarily because it is easier to get another. This represents no more than a return to normal labour market behaviour after the collapse of mobility at the beginning of the present recession (**Figure 15**). Penalties for dismissal for misconduct behave in a similar way, although with less marked variations. The weakness of the case for treating ‘voluntary leaving’ as a sanctionable ‘failure’ was set out in evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (Webster 2013, para.21).

## Reasons for ESA sanctions

**Although the previously published ESA sanctions figures for January to March 2014 have been revised downwards, the pattern of reasons for sanction remains as previously published. The big surge in ESA sanctions since mid-2013 has been entirely due to ‘failure to participate in work related activity’ (Figure 16).** By June 2014 this reason accounted for 92% of ESA sanctions, the other 6% being for failure to attend a work related interview. This is in contrast to the experience under the Labour government, when the only reason for sanction was failure to attend an interview.

## The Work Programme: Still far more sanctions than job outcomes

- The Work Programme continues to deliver far more JSA sanctions than JSA job outcomes. Up to 30 June 2014 there had been 312,780 JSA Work Programme job outcomes and 545,873 JSA Work Programme sanctions (**Figure 17**).
- A similar comparison cannot be made accurately for ESA claimants, because although the majority of sanction cases under "failure to participate in work related activity" will have been referred from the Work Programme, not all will have been. However, up to 30 June 2014 there had been 17,880 ESA Work Programme job outcomes and 49,181 ESA Work Related Activity sanctions. It is therefore clear that within the Work Programme to date, ESA sanctions greatly exceed ESA job outcomes.

## **SANCTIONS - OTHER DEVELOPMENTS**

### **House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee Inquiry into Sanctions**

On 6 November, the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee announced an Inquiry into 'Benefit sanctions policy beyond the Oakley review'. The terms of reference are at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news/benefit-sanctions-launch/> and submissions are invited by 12 December 2014.

### **Any employee of a Work Programme contractor can now legally give directions to claimants**

The government issued the Jobseeker's Allowance (Work Programme) (Employment Officers) Designation Order 2014 on 6 October. This means that it is now legal for *any* member of staff of a Work Programme contractor to instruct a claimant to take a job or mandatory work experience, on pain of a 'high level' sanction of 13 weeks for a first 'failure', 26 weeks for a second, and three years for a third.

### **Legal Challenge to Westminster City Council's invention of additional Jobseeker sanctions via Discretionary Housing Payments**

*Inside Housing* reported on 21 October that Westminster City Council has made receipt of discretionary housing payments (which supplement Housing Benefit in cases of hardship) conditional on seeking work, thus extending the DWP's sanctions regime to affect a further benefit. The Zacchaeus 2000 Trust has been given permission by the High Court to pursue a judicial review.

### **New Scottish Government Analysis of JSA Sanctions in Scotland**

On 6 November 2014 the Scottish Government published a statistical analysis of *JSA Sanctions in Scotland*, covering the period up to March 2014. It is available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/welfarereform/analysis/Sanctions>.

Previous analysis suggests that variations in sanctions practice across Great Britain are minor, and the findings of this paper are therefore probably applicable to Great Britain as a whole.

### **Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee**

Following its interim report on the new benefit sanctions regime: *Tough Love or Tough Luck?* of June 2014, at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/78114.aspx>, the Committee has continued correspondence with the Employment Minister, Esther McVey. The letters are at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/74658.aspx>

### **Northern Ireland**

The Northern Ireland government has control of social security, subject to a general requirement to maintain parity of provision with the rest of the UK. Recently this

arrangement has come under strain. Sinn Féin has been strongly opposed to Welfare Reform and has blocked the relevant legislation to implement it. As a result HM Treasury is withdrawing funding corresponding to the estimated amount by which Northern Ireland public spending is higher than it would have been if Welfare Reform had been implemented: £87m in 2014/15 and a further £114m in 2015/16; although it has agreed a temporary £100m loan to tide matters over (*Public Finance*, 10 October 2014). This has precipitated a budgetary crisis, although it appears that a compromise has been reached involving substantial concessions by the DWP, described by the relevant Northern Ireland minister as ‘the envy of Scotland and Wales’.<sup>9</sup> These include a reduction in the maximum length of sanction from three to two years, and carrying forward into Universal Credit of existing protections for lone parents on JSA whereby the lack of available childcare provision constitutes “good reason”.

### **Sanctions and the Scottish Independence Referendum**

Readers in the rest of the UK may not be aware what a large role sanctions and other ‘welfare reform’ measures played in inducing 45% of the Scottish electorate to vote to leave the UK. Most (71%) of the variation in the Yes vote share in the Referendum across Scottish local authorities can be explained by the percentage of the population living on means tested benefits or tax credits, as defined in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. No other variable has such a powerful association with the Yes vote. While this is capable of different interpretations, Lord Ashcroft's poll at <http://lordashcrofthpolls.com/2014/09/scotland-voted/> found 10% of referendum voters saying that benefits were among the two or three most important influences on their vote; this is substantial in relation to the approximately 20 percentage point difference between the lowest (35%) and highest (55%) Yes votes. The role of social security changes in promoting disillusion with the Union is also indicated by the frequency of references in the referendum debate to the rise of Food Banks (which is strongly linked to sanctions<sup>10</sup>) and the ‘bedroom tax’. The Work Capability Assessment moving people off Incapacity Benefit/ESA, and benefit sanctions, were also frequently mentioned in voter interviews reported in the media during the referendum campaign. ‘The.... welfare system will be foremost in my mind when I vote. I get treated like a 2nd class citizen..... The sanctions are unbelievable.... (with independence) we’ll never get a Tory government again’ – unemployed, E.Kilbride (*Financial Times*, 9 Sept); ‘My family in Wester Hailes was always Labour but are all voting Yes.... sanctions are a big factor’ – student, Edinburgh (BBC TV News, 9 Sept). The full analysis is in my submission to the Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee for their meeting of 11 November on *Further Devolution of Welfare Responsibilities*, in the meeting papers, Annex F pp. 41-46, at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/46341.aspx>

20 November 2014

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Figure 1

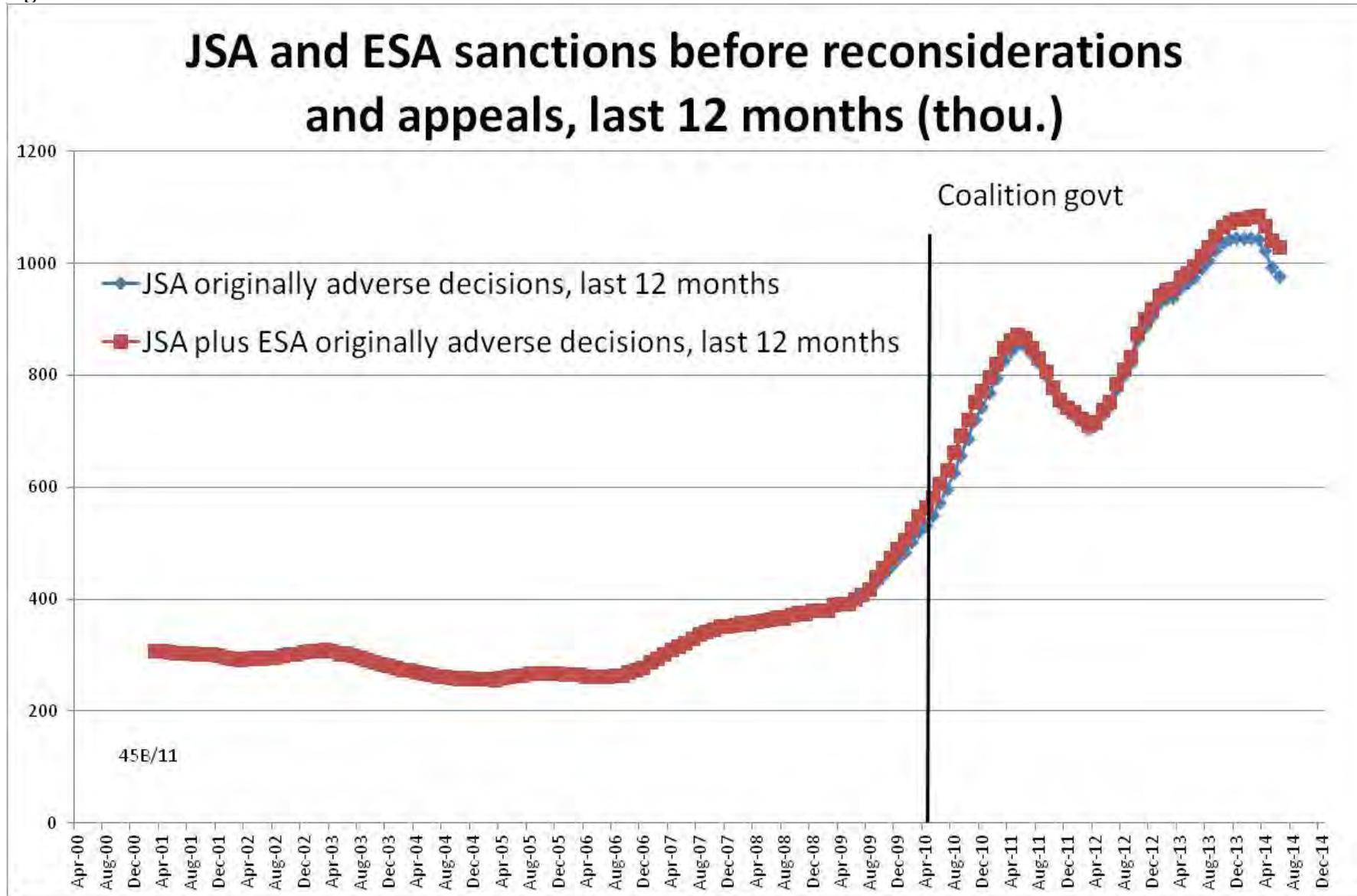


Figure 2

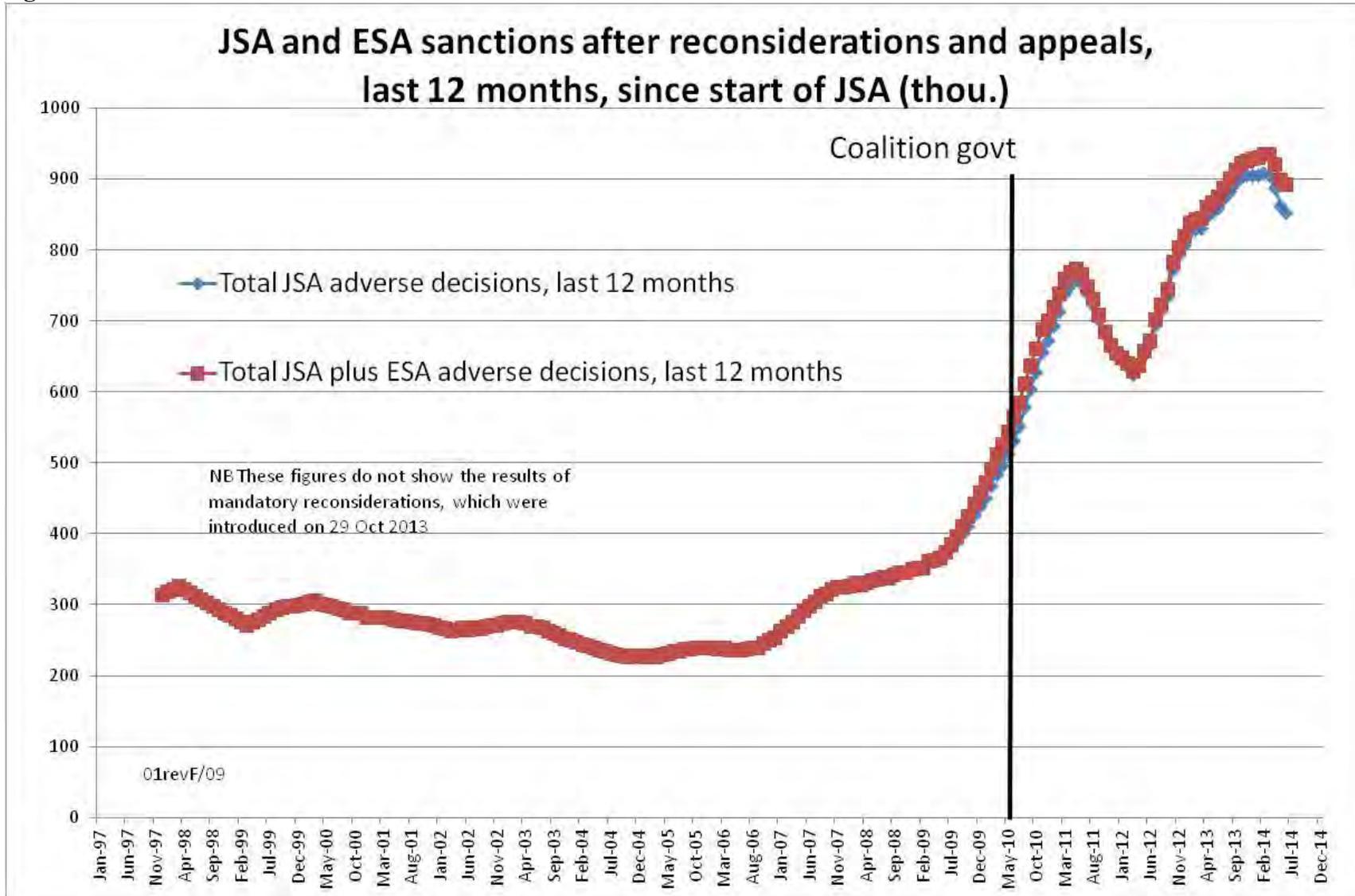


Figure 3

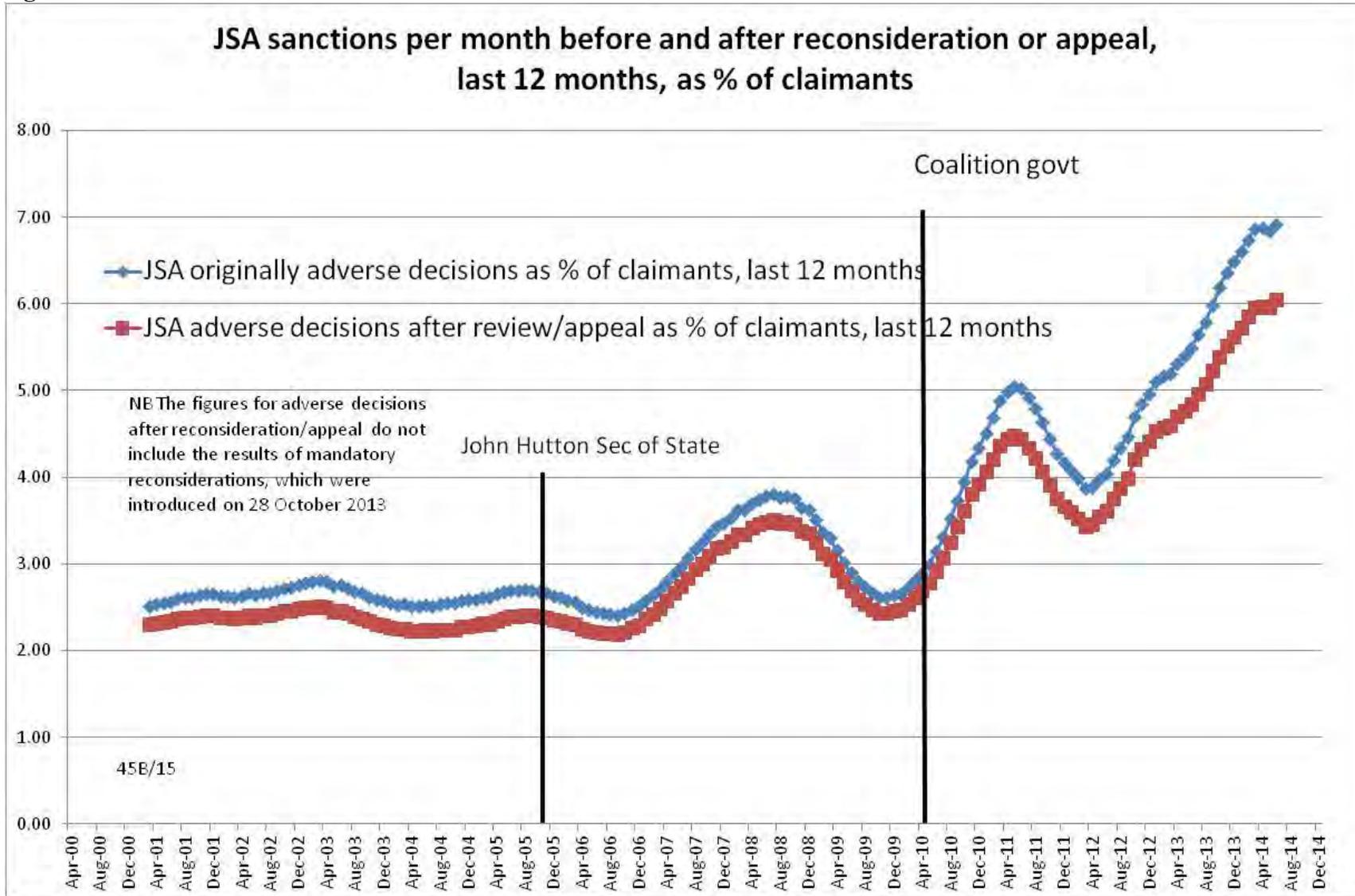


Figure 4

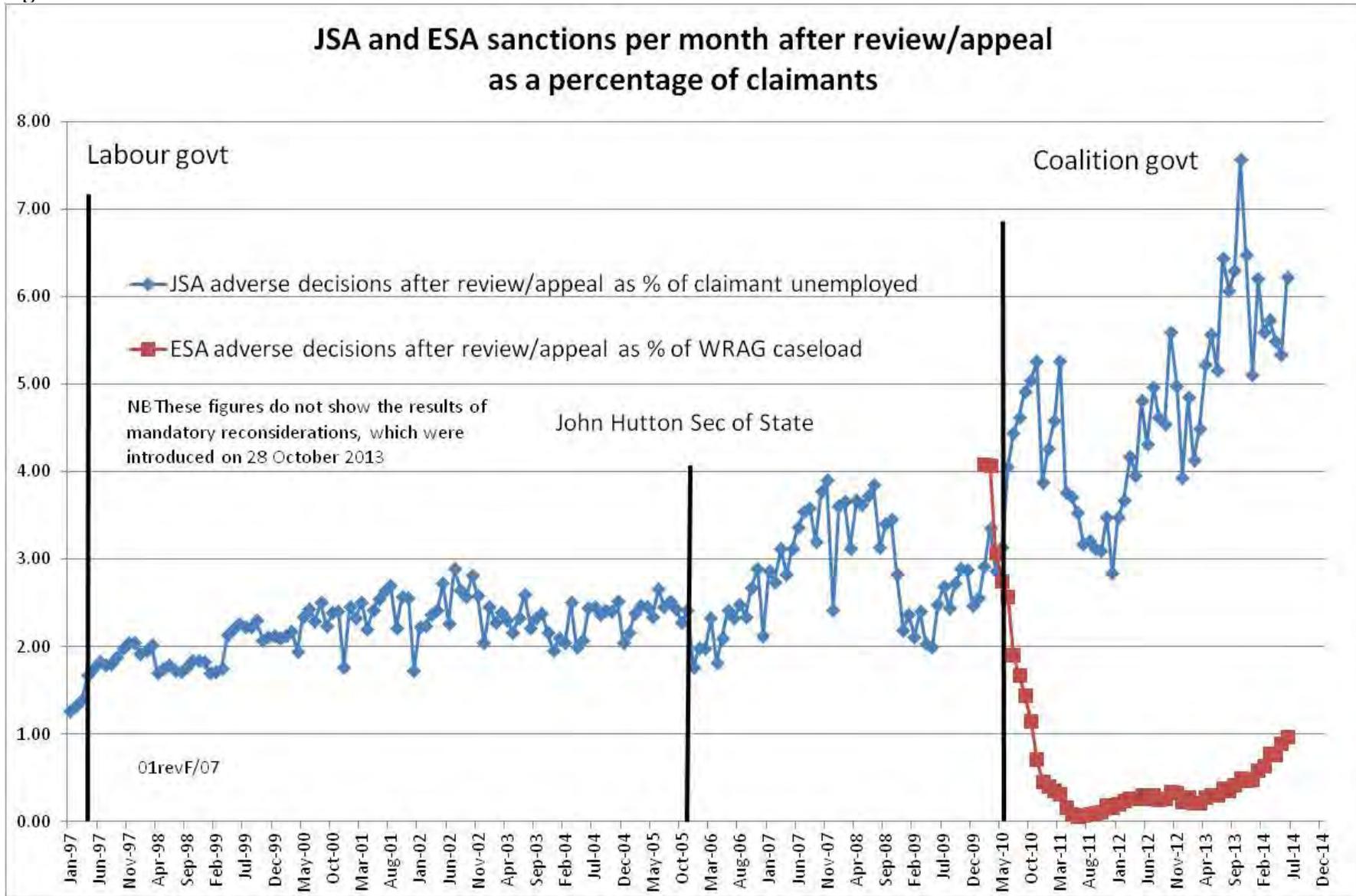


Figure 5

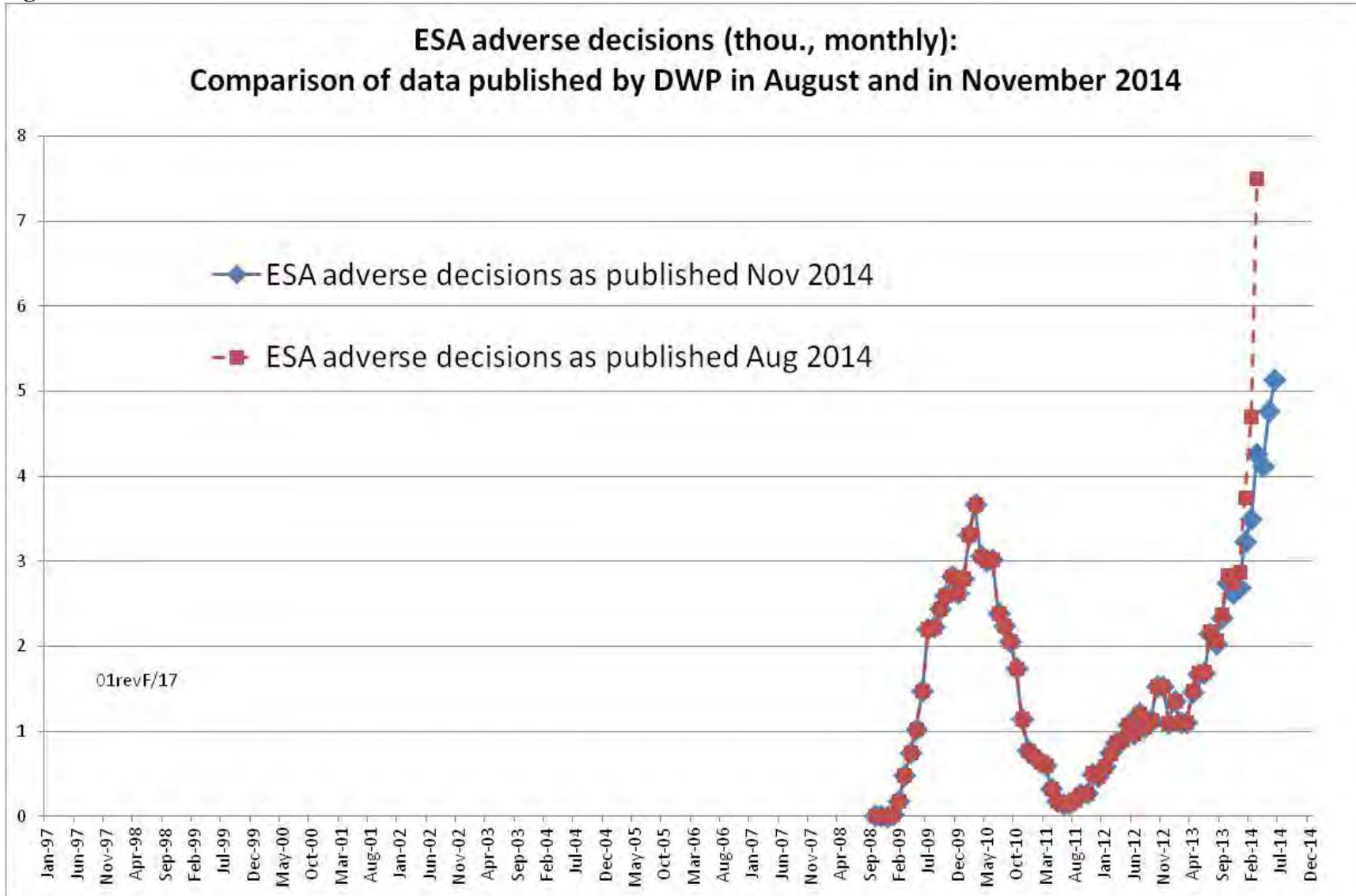


Figure 6

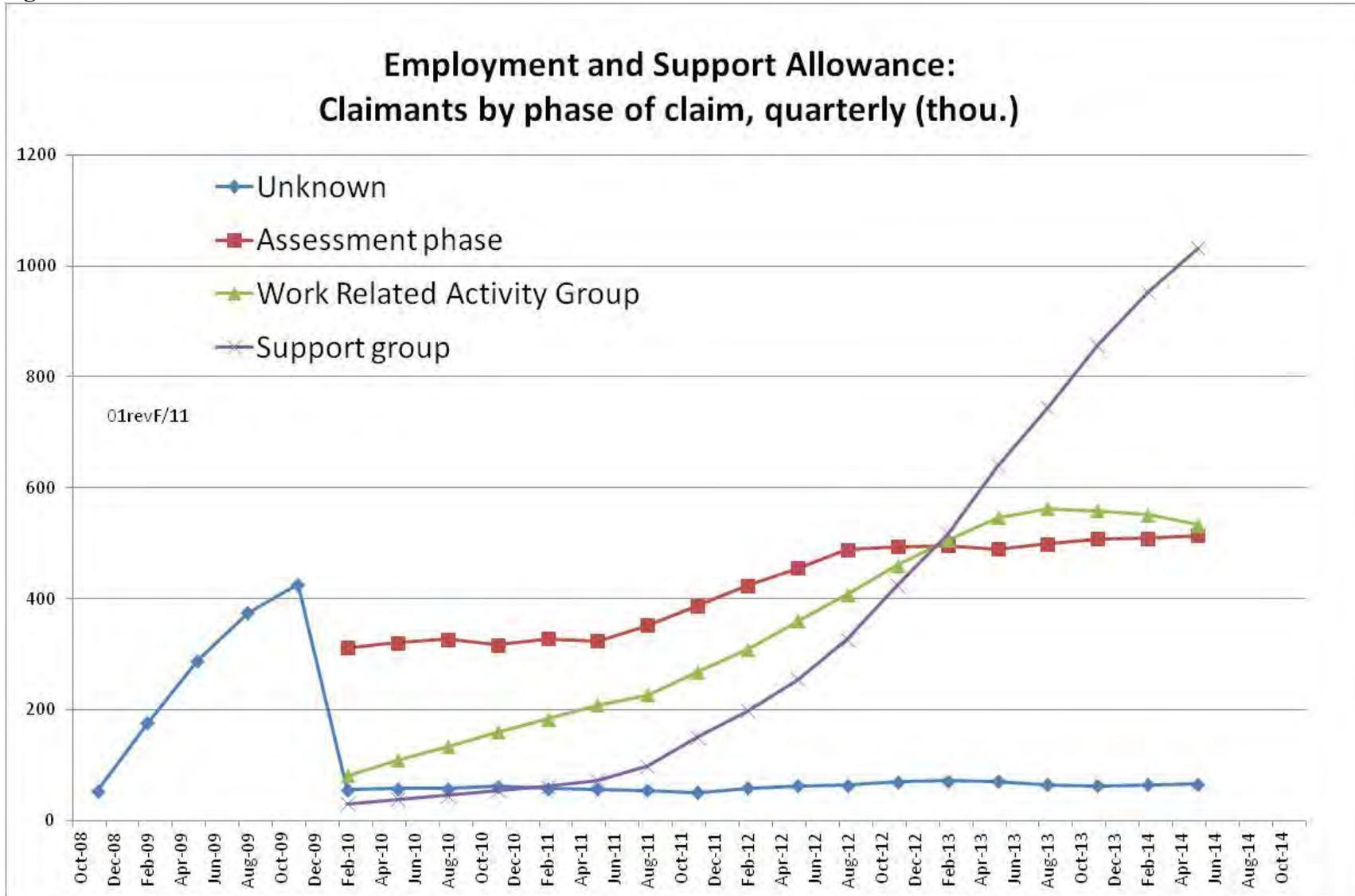


Figure 7

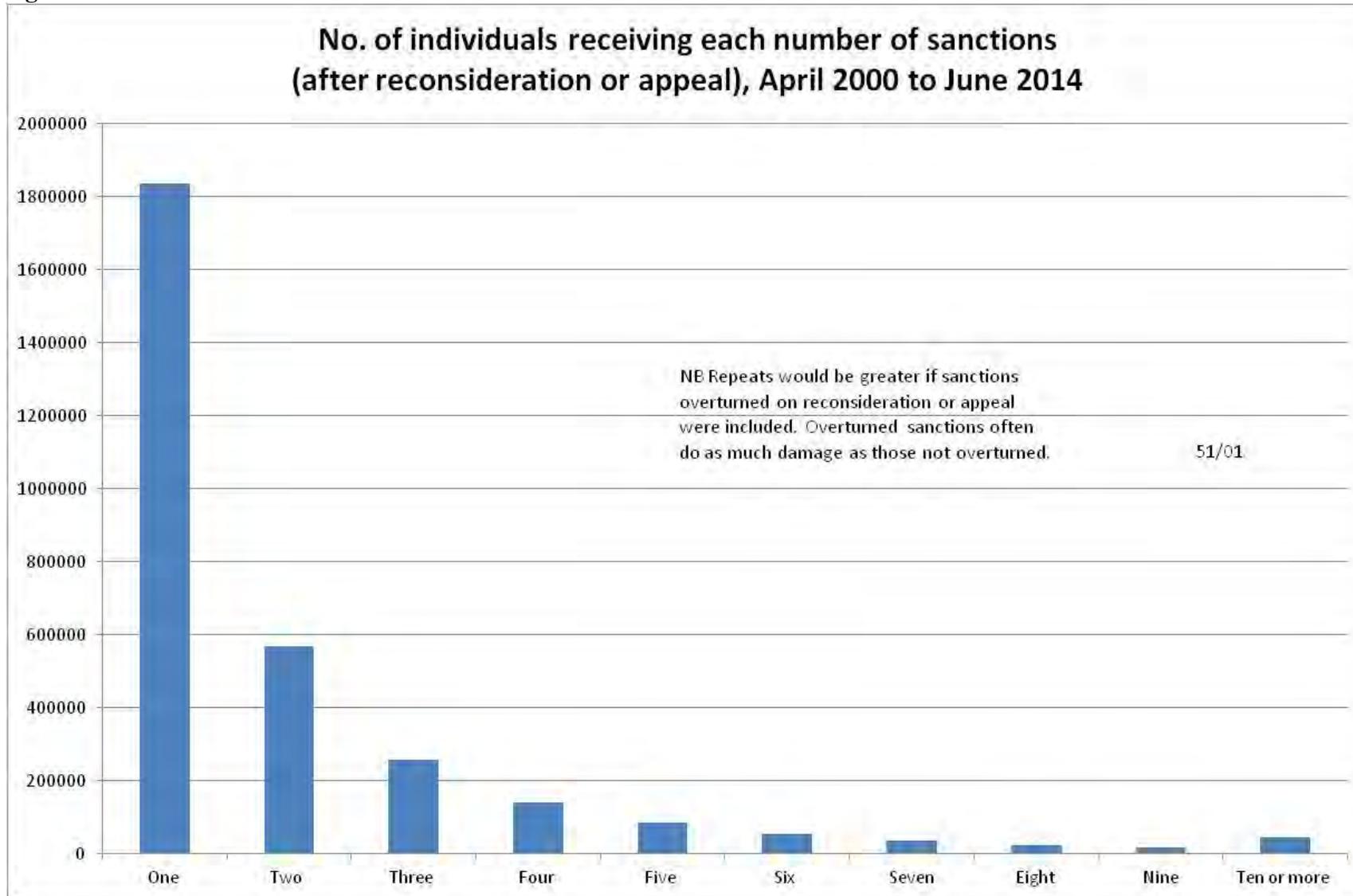


Figure 8

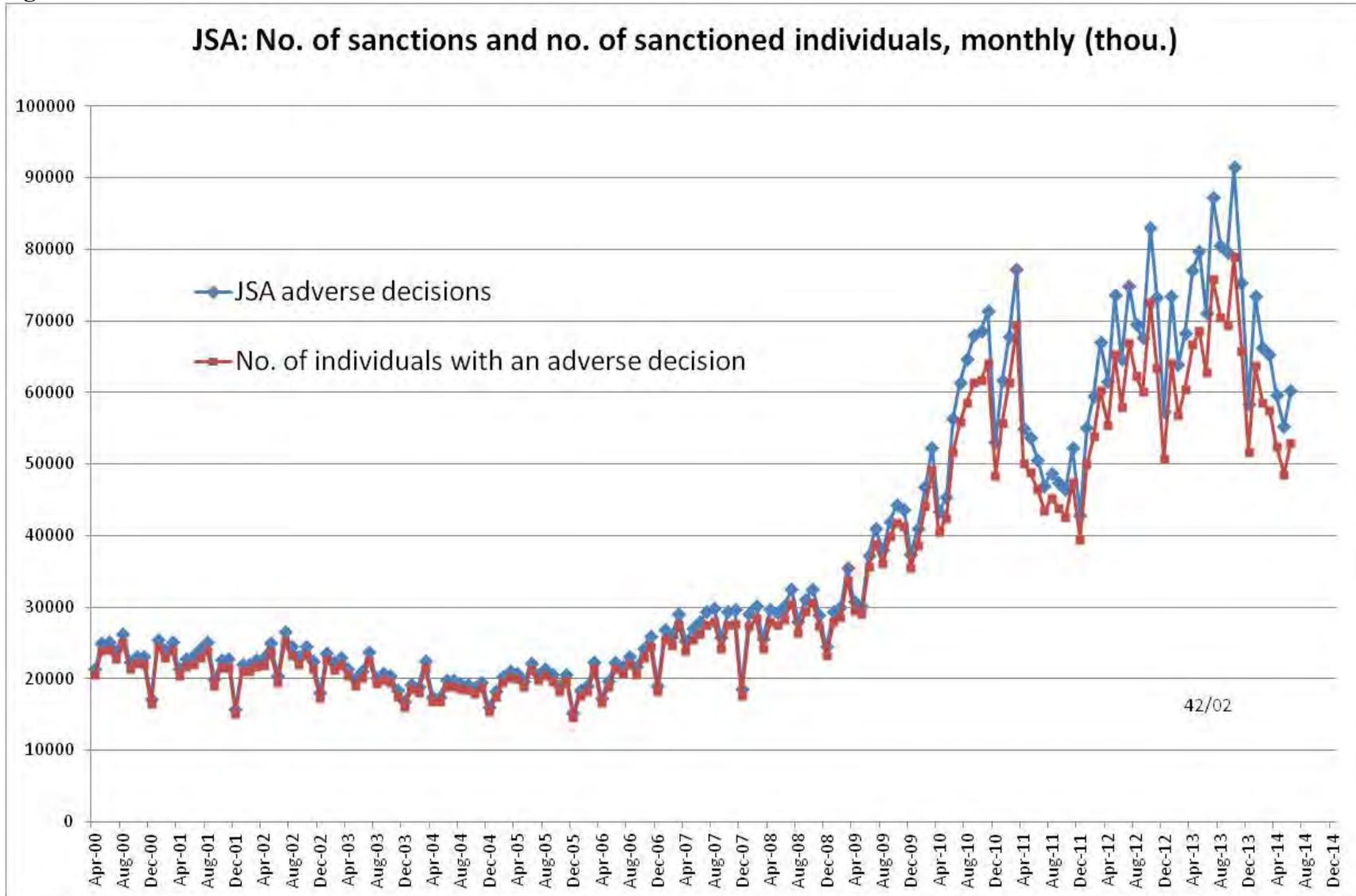


Figure 9

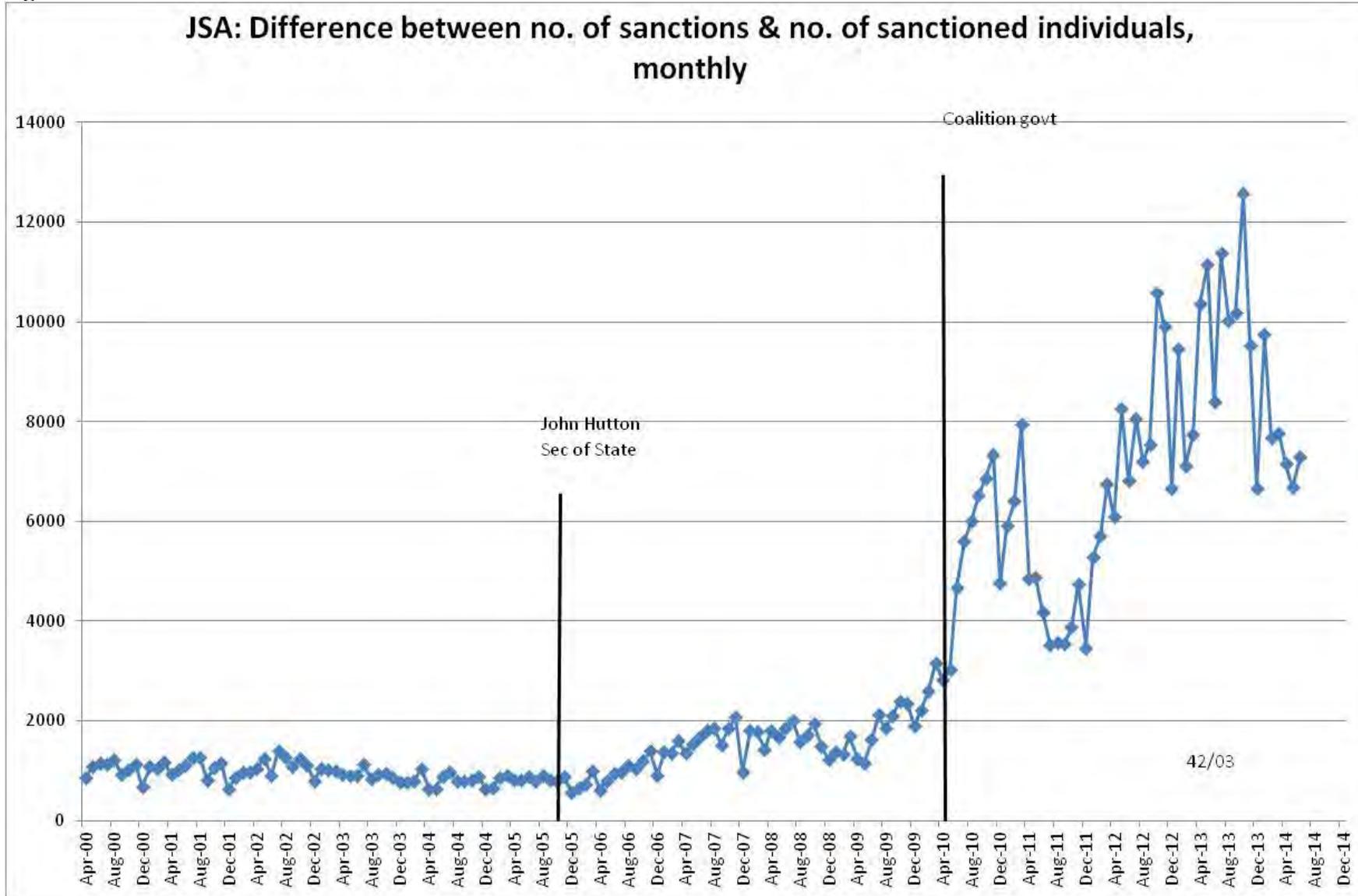


Figure 10

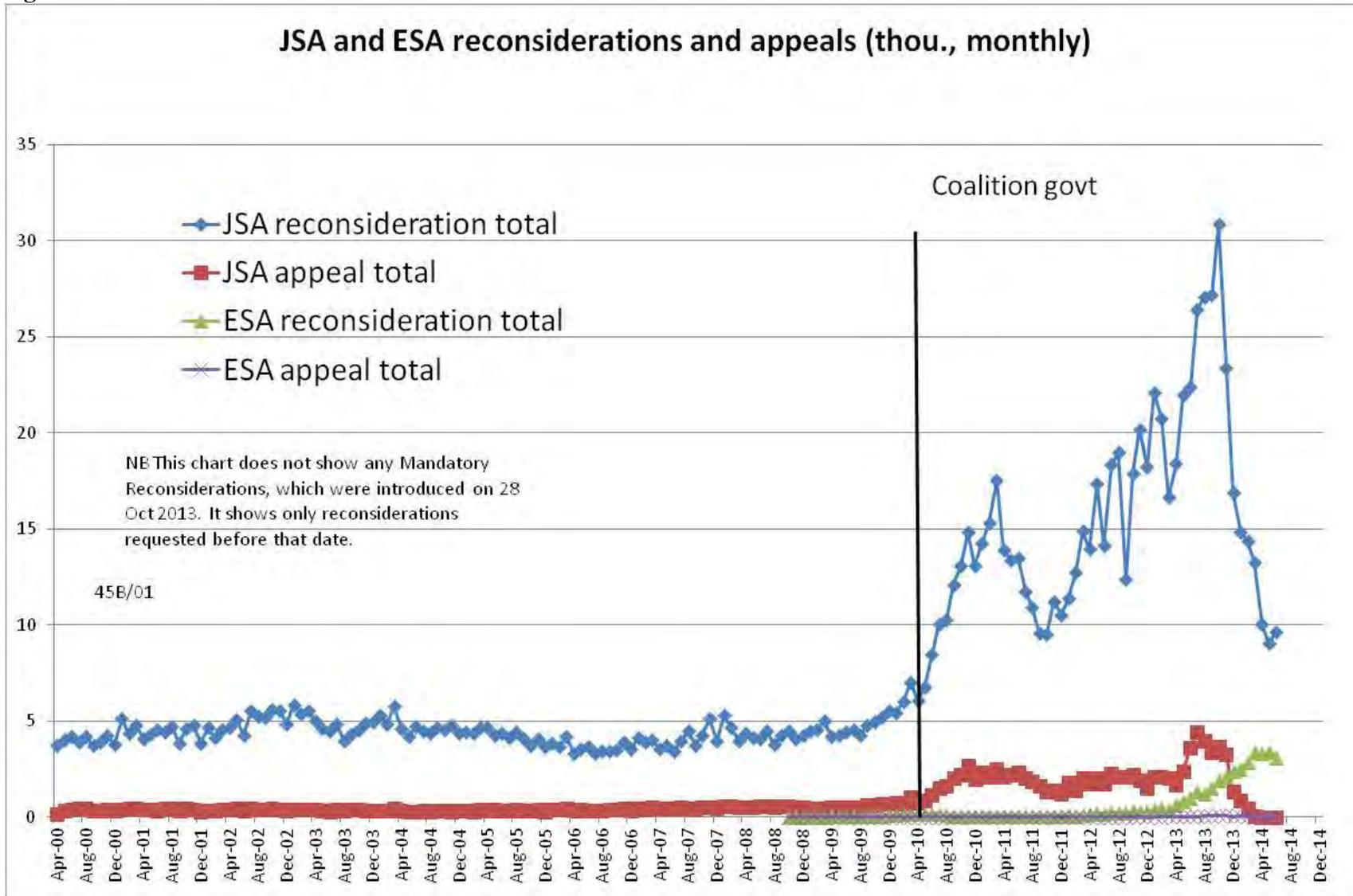


Figure 11

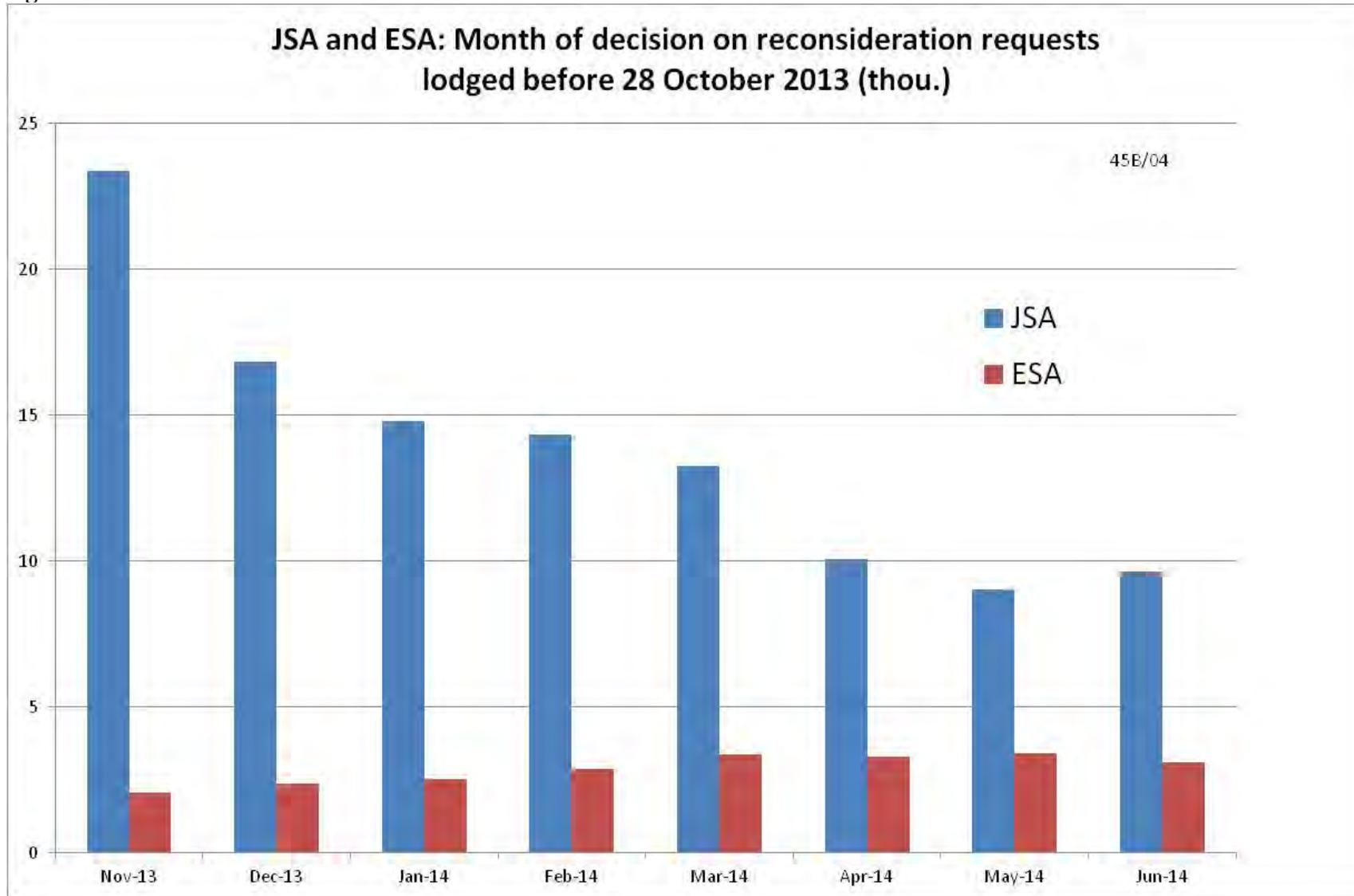


Figure 12

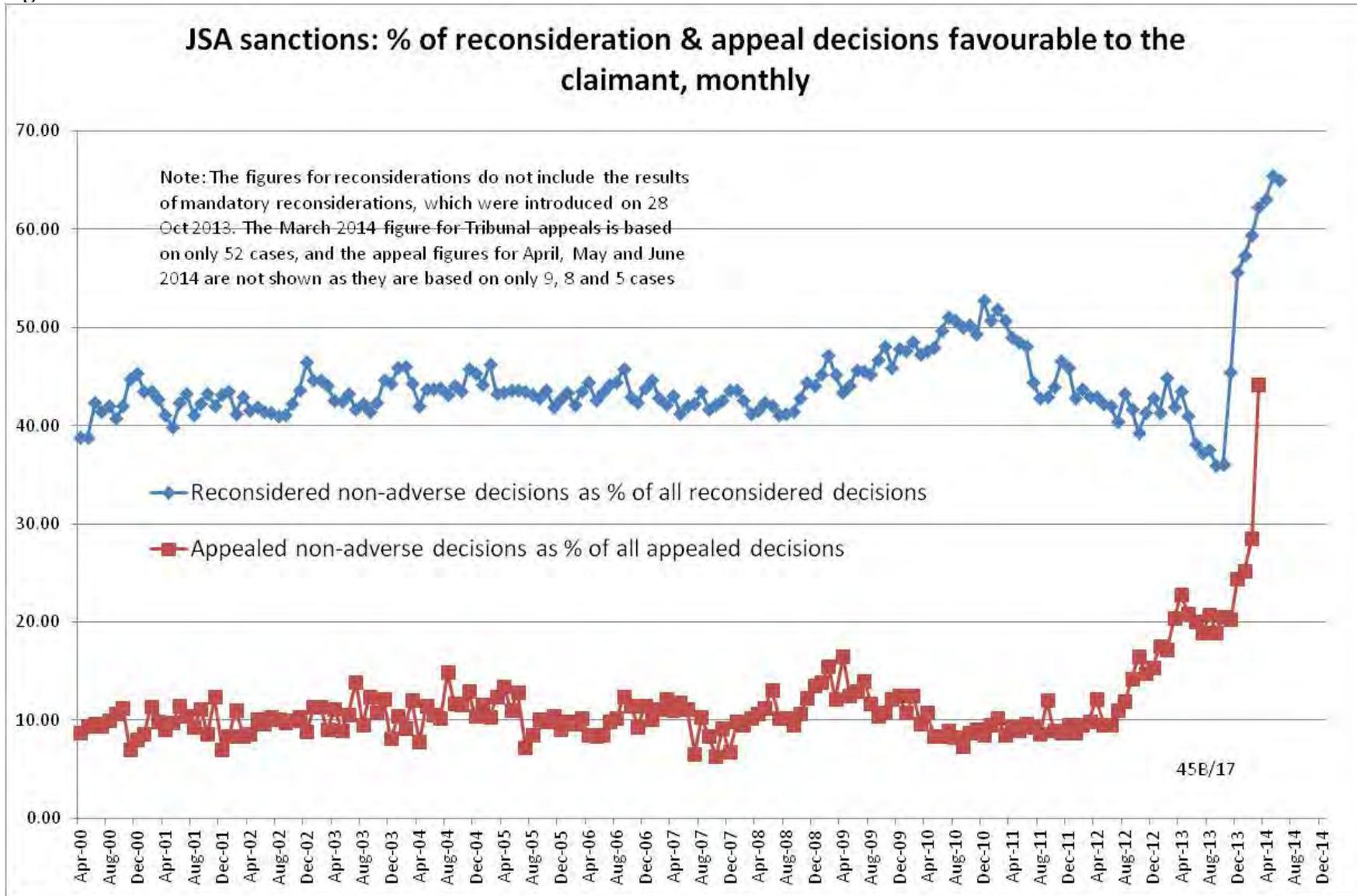


Figure 13

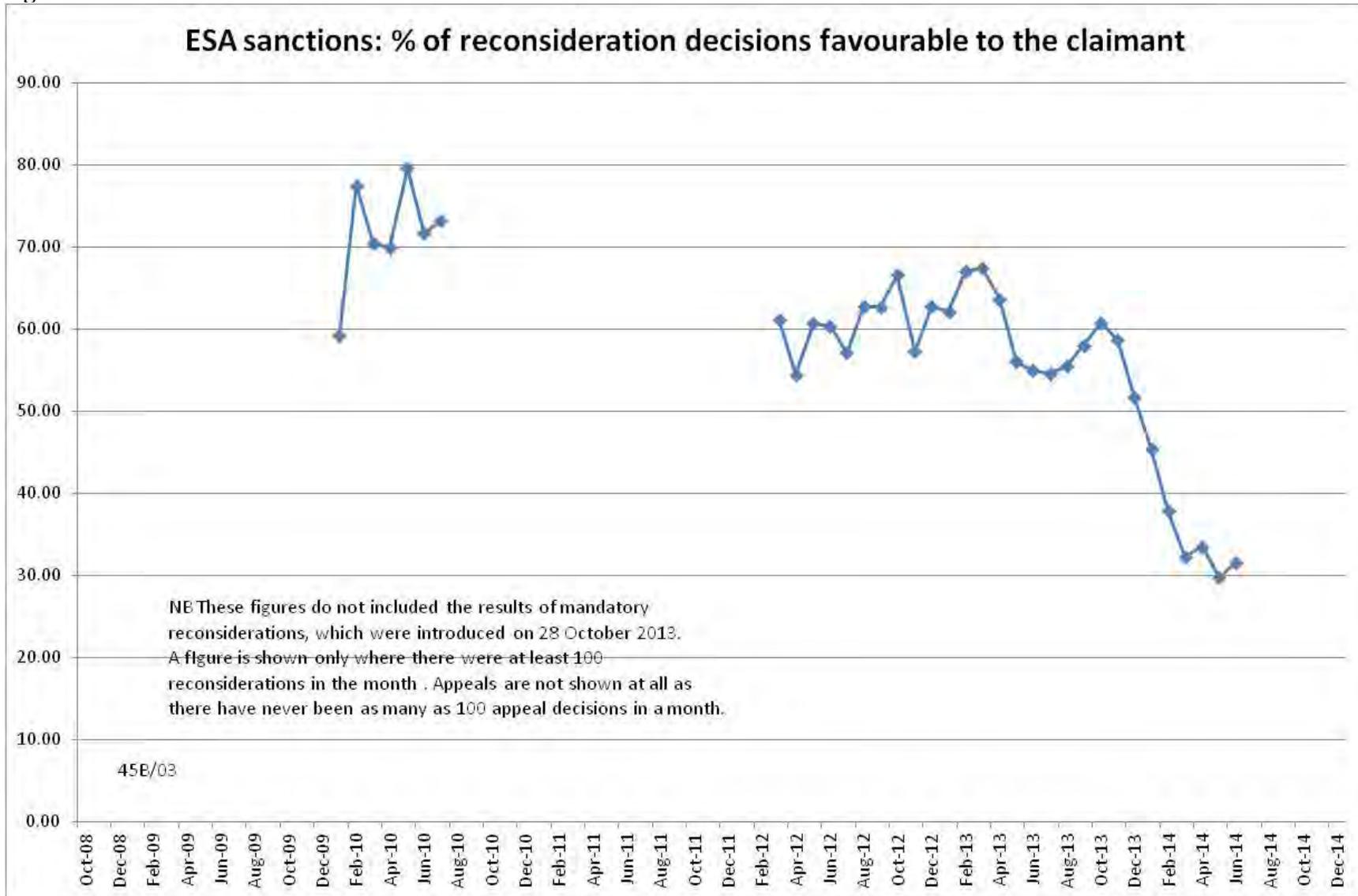


Figure 14

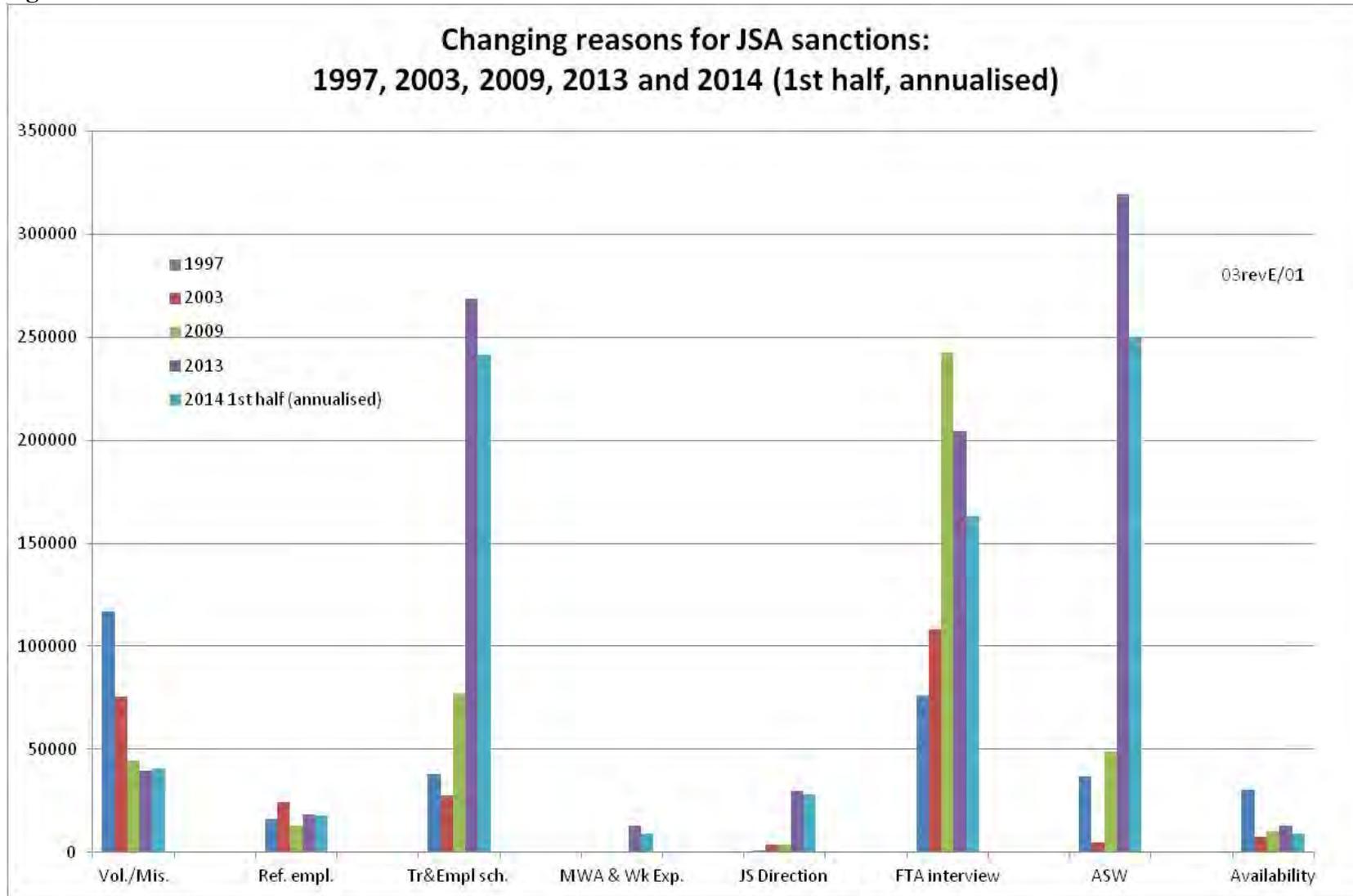


Figure 15

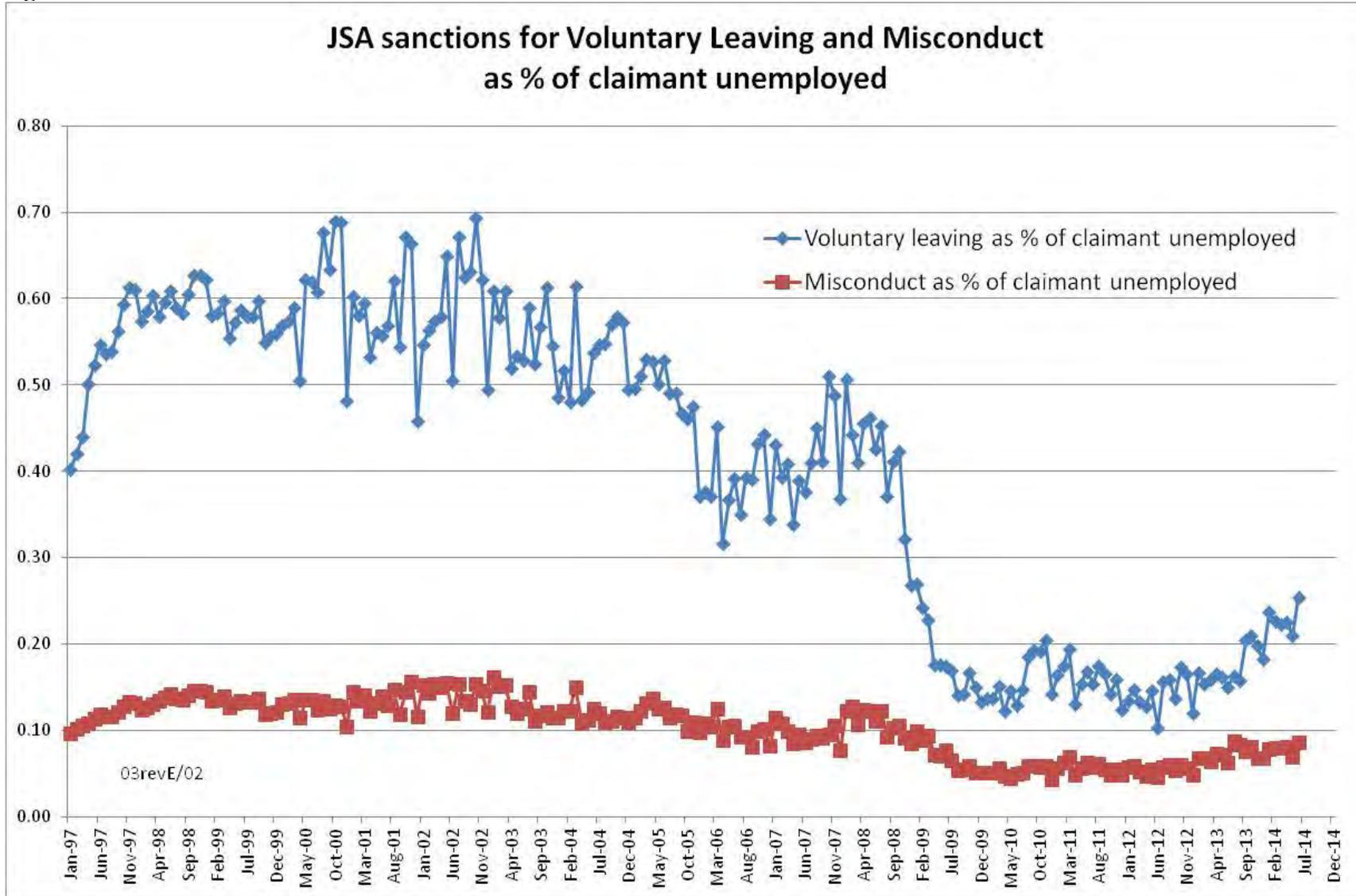


Figure 16

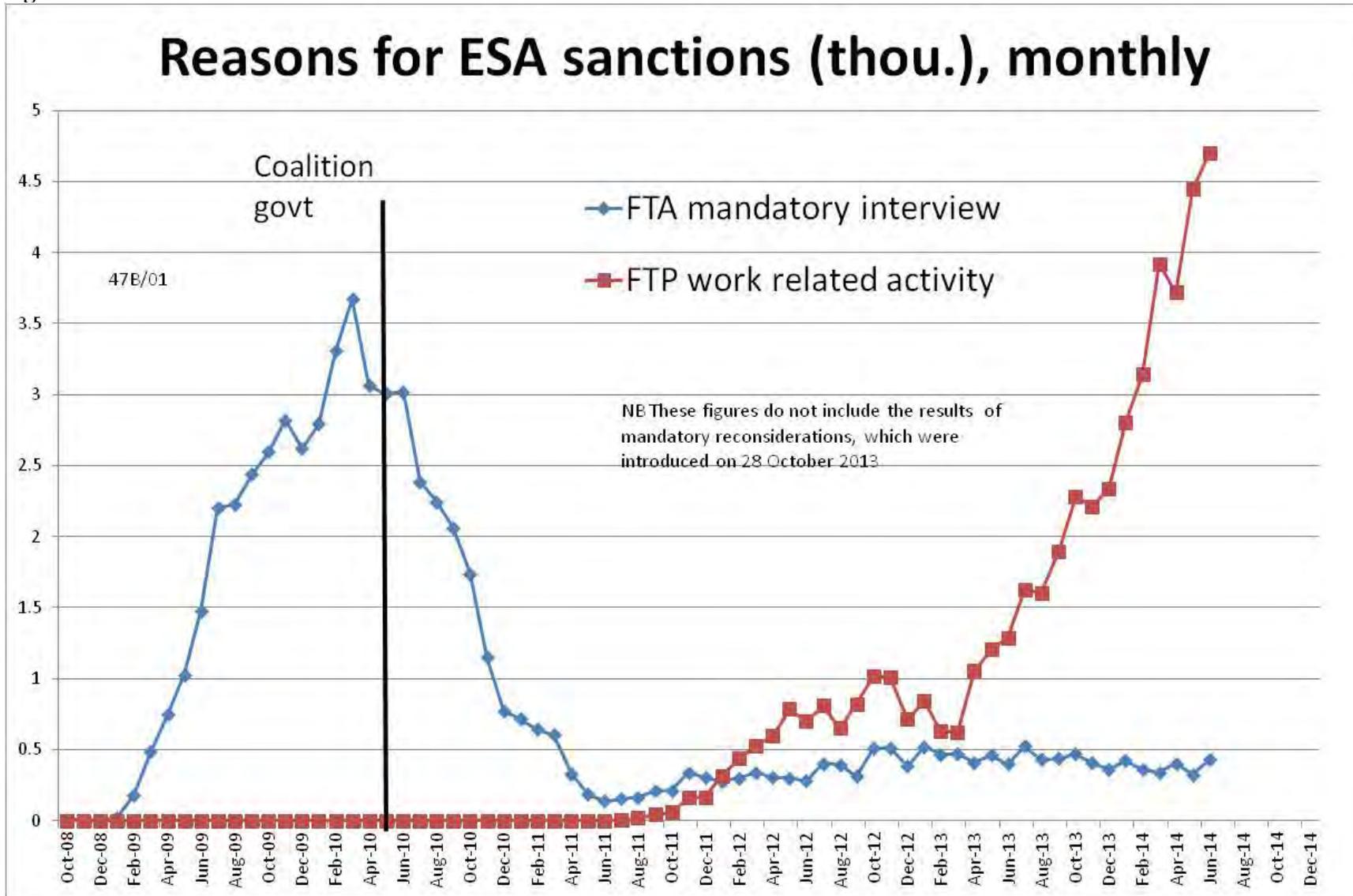
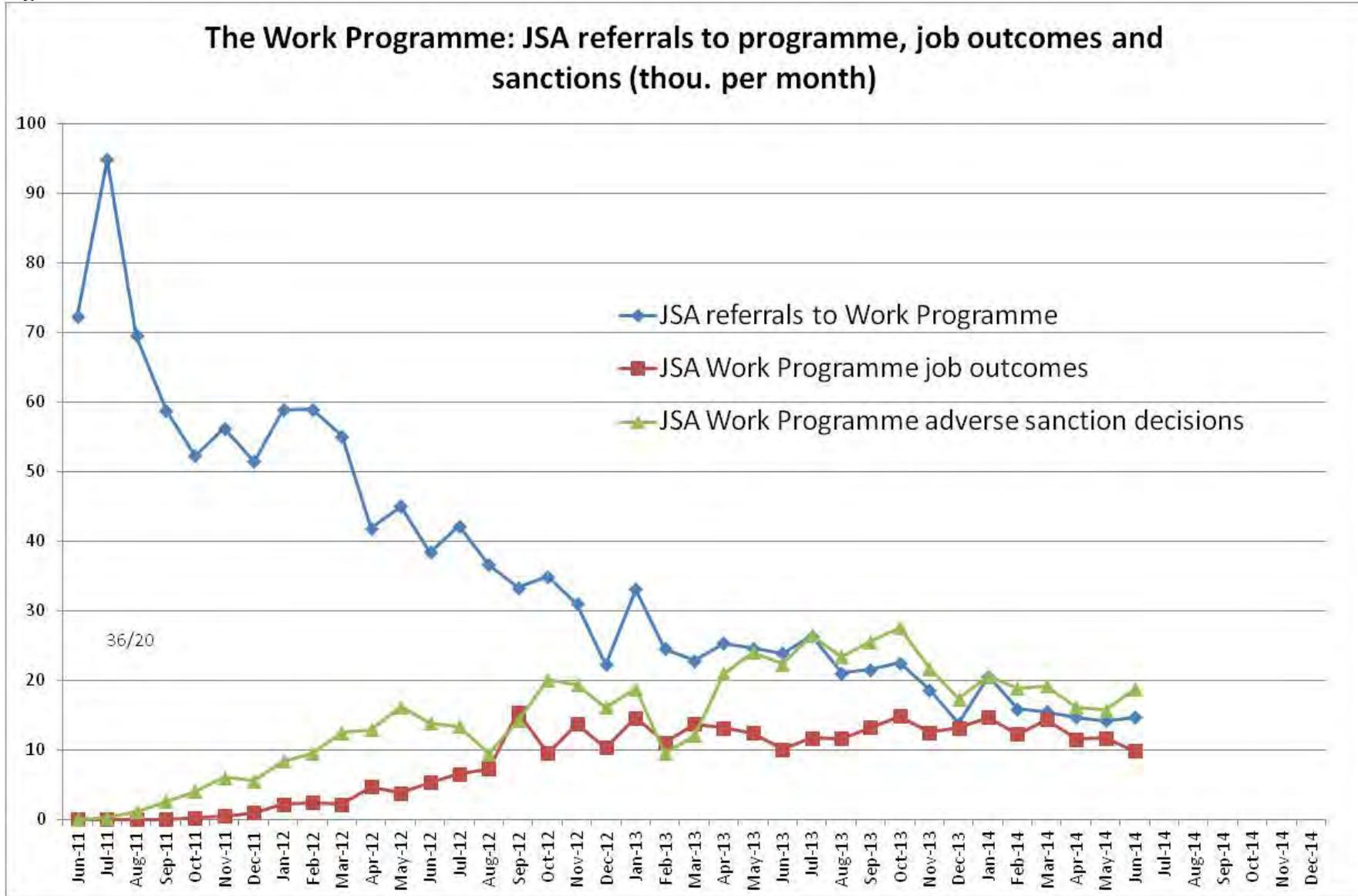


Figure 17



## APPENDIX: Methodological issues

The basic concept of the DWP's statistics on sanction decisions is that each sanction case appears only once in the database, and is given its latest status and attributed to the date of the latest decision on the case. So, for instance, if a decision is made in January 2014 to sanction someone, this decision is reconsidered ('reviewed') in March 2014 with an outcome unfavourable to the claimant and is heard on appeal by a Tribunal in September 2014 with a decision favourable to the claimant, then:

- it appears in the statistics for the first time in January 2014 as an adverse decision
- in March 2014 it changes its status to a reconsidered adverse decision and moves month to be with all the other cases where the latest decision has been made in March 2014
- in September 2014 it changes its status again to an appealed non-adverse decision, and moves month again to be with all the other cases where the latest decision has been made in September 2014.

This should be borne in mind when considering any of the figures on sanctions decisions (as opposed to the figures on sanctioned individuals, which raise different issues). It means, for instance, that the sanction decisions which are shown as having appeal decisions favourable to the claimant made in March 2014 were originally made many months earlier, probably at least 6 months. Reconsideration decisions are normally made much closer to the original decision, but will probably usually be made a month or two later. The statistics are not published until a minimum of about 5 months after the original decision, and therefore most reconsidered decisions will already show their final outcome, but many appealed decisions will change their outcome subsequently to first publication. Overall, since only around one third of JSA claimants (40% for ESA) ask for reconsideration and 3 per cent (1 per cent for ESA) appeal to a Tribunal, the effect of these issues is relatively small, but in general it is best to avoid putting too much weight on figures for individual months. The focus should be on trends.

### Omission of the results of JSA and ESA mandatory reconsiderations

Since 28 October 2013, sanctioned JSA and ESA claimants have not been allowed to appeal to an independent Tribunal without first making an informal appeal to the DWP itself (a 'mandatory reconsideration' or 'decision review'). Previously they could go directly to a Tribunal if they chose to do so.

The November 2014 DWP *Statistical Summary*, p.34 explains that 'mandatory reconsiderations' are recorded on a separate administrative system, and therefore their results are not being reflected in the main sanctions statistics, although where a case subsequently receives a Tribunal decision, this will be included. What this means is that where sanctions have been overturned on reconsideration, this is not showing up in the sanctions statistics, which continue to show these cases as 'adverse decisions'. Therefore while the numbers of originally adverse decisions are correctly shown, the number remaining adverse after reconsideration is being overstated.

This effect is not very large. The *Statistical Summary* estimates it at 2.5%. There is no completely reliable way of correcting for it. However, in this briefing, more prominence is given to the figures for estimated 'originally adverse decisions', i.e. the total number of cases where claimants' money was stopped, whether or not the sanction was eventually overturned on reconsideration or appeal and the money refunded. These figures are not affected by the missing data on reconsiderations. But because of the differences in timing of the different decisions, explained earlier, these figures are not exactly correct for individual months and should only be used to examine trends.

### Success rates at reconsideration

In calculating *success rates for reconsiderations*, the *numerator* is straightforward. It is the number of reconsiderations with a non-adverse decision shown against the month in question. The *denominator*

has to take into account the fact that all cases that go to Tribunal appeal, if they were previously reconsidered, will have had an adverse decision at reconsideration. Here it is assumed that all appealed cases were previously reconsidered, and therefore the number of appeals decided in the given month is added to the total of reconsiderations for the given month to make the denominator.

**Data before April 2000**

The DWP Stat-Xplore series runs from April 2000. For key items, this briefing adds in figures back to January 1997 taken from the paper-based former Adjudication Officers' Decisions series on a comparable basis. Figures can therefore be quoted for the whole of the last Labour government, elected in May 1997, and effectively for the whole of the existence of JSA, which started in October 1996. Data are not quoted for the last quarter of 1996 because for this period there were a substantial number of cases (about 17%) still being processed under the former system.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the fifth in a series of briefings on the DWP's statistics on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions. Earlier briefings were produced in August 2014, June 2014 (for the May 2014 release), February 2014 and November 2013. They should be read in the light of the DWP's statistical revisions, because some of their conclusions are no longer valid. However, much of the data and discussion remains useful, as noted in the present briefing. The earlier briefings are available as follows:

**August 2014:**

<http://paulspicker.wordpress.com/2014/08/24/david-webster-more-figures-on-sanctions-2/>

or

<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/2014/08/annual-number-of-jsaesa-sanctions-has-almost-doubled-under-the-coalition-dr-david-webster/>

**May 2014:**

<http://paulspicker.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/14-05-sanctions-stats-briefing-d-webster-may-2014.pdf>

or

<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/2014/03/the-great-sanctions-debate/#more-179>

**February 2014:**

<http://paulspicker.files.wordpress.com/2014/02/sanctions-stats-briefing-d-webster-19-feb-2014-1.pdf>,

<http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/share-your-views/>

or

<http://refuted.org.uk/2014/02/22/sanctionsstatistics/>

**November 2013:**

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/90156/>

<sup>2</sup> As explained in the Appendix, the numbers of sanctions before reconsideration and appeal cannot be derived with complete accuracy from the information published by the DWP. They have to be estimated.

<sup>3</sup> Published figures for the number of ESA sanctions date from October 2008 whereas those for the size of the Work Related Activity Group date only from February 2010. ESA sanction rates can therefore only be calculated from February 2010. The WRAG caseload for June 2014 has been extrapolated from the figures for Feb and May 2014.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2014) *Employment and Support Allowance and Work Capability Assessments*, First Report of Session 2014–15, HC 302, 23 July

<sup>5</sup> Peters & Joyce's figures on repeat sanctions were taken from the DWP's Sanctions Evaluation Database and referred to all claimants. They were not taken from the sample survey which they were reporting on. Gregg (2008, p.

<sup>6</sup> All other 'intermediate' level sanctions also involve closing the claim.

<sup>7</sup> It is also noteworthy that although the present author attended two sanction tribunal hearings in Glasgow in June with decisions favourable to the claimants, the DWP statistics for GB in June show no such decisions at all.

<sup>8</sup> Included here under 'failure to participate in a training or employment scheme' are failing to participate in the Work Programme, refusing, neglecting to avail, failing to attend, leaving or losing a place on a training/employment scheme, failing to comply with Skills Conditionality, failing to attend a Back to Work session, and failing to participate in any other training or employment scheme.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/minister-speech-nicva-adviceni-october14.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Perry et al. (2014) confirms the estimate emerging from previous evidence that sanctions are responsible for about a quarter of food bank use.

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## WELFARE SANCTIONS AND CONDITIONALITY IN THE UK

Beth Watts et al  
10 September 2014

### SUMMARY >

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Conditional welfare arrangements require people to behave in a certain way to access cash benefits, housing or support services.

These conditions tend to be enforced through penalties or 'sanctions' that reduce, suspend or end access to these goods.

This Round-up considers how effective welfare conditionality is, what the impacts are, how different groups fare, and to what extent it can be morally justified.

It finds that:

- benefit sanctions are disproportionately affecting young people under 25, and there is evidence of severe impacts on homeless people and other vulnerable groups;
- international evidence indicates that benefit sanctions substantially raise exits from benefits, and may increase short-term job entry; but there are unfavourable longer-term outcomes for earnings, job quality and employment retention;
- there are concerns that welfare conditionality can have unintended consequences, including: distancing people from support; causing hardship and even destitution; displacing rather than resolving issues such as street homelessness and anti-social behaviour; and negative impacts on 'third parties', particularly children.

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# WELFARE SANCTIONS AND CONDITIONALITY IN THE UK

Conditional welfare arrangements require people to behave in a certain way to access welfare goods, such as cash benefits, housing or support services. These behavioural conditions tend to be enforced through penalties or ‘sanctions’ that reduce, suspend or end access to these goods. This paper examines the efficacy and ethicality of conditional forms of welfare. It considers existing evidence about how effective welfare conditionality is at achieving and sustaining desired forms of behavioural change; what the impacts are; how different groups fare; and to what extent welfare conditionality can be morally justified.

## Key points

- Behavioural requirements for out-of-work-benefits are the most high-profile form of conditionality, but pronounced strands of conditionality have also emerged in relation to anti-social behaviour, social housing and homelessness policies, particularly in England.
- Sanctions are now used much more frequently within the welfare benefits system. The severity of sanctions has also increased and conditionality is now applied to previously exempt groups (e.g. lone parents, disabled people).
- Benefit sanctions are having a strongly disproportionate effect on young people under 25, and there is also evidence of severe impacts on homeless people and other vulnerable groups.
- International evidence indicates that benefit sanctions (especially severe sanctions) substantially raise exits from benefits, and may also increase short-term job entry; but the longer-term outcomes for earnings, job quality and employment retention appear unfavourable.
- Little evidence is available on the impact of welfare conditionality in other spheres, such as social housing.
- There is qualitative evidence to suggest that, with appropriate support, interventions including elements of conditionality or enforcement may deter some individuals from anti-social behaviour and street-based lifestyles.
- The ‘theories of behaviour change’ underpinning conditionality have been questioned by commentators from both the Right and the Left, particularly with respect to the assumed ‘rationality’ of welfare recipients’ responses to financial sanctions and incentives.
- There are also concerns that welfare conditionality leads to a range of unintended effects, including: distancing people from support; causing hardship and even destitution; displacing rather than resolving issues such as street homelessness and anti-social behaviour; and negative impacts on ‘third parties’, particularly children.

## Authors

Beth Watts, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Glen Bramley and David Watkins, with contributions from the ESRC funded ‘Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change’ project research team.

# INTRODUCTION

This *Round-up* synthesises evidence collected during the initial stages of a five-year Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research study – ‘*Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change*’ – being conducted by six UK universities<sup>1</sup>.

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The study focuses on two key questions:

- How effective is welfare conditionality in promoting and sustaining behaviour change amongst welfare recipients?
- To what extent, and on what grounds, can welfare conditionality be morally justified?

It seeks to establish a comprehensive evidence base on the *efficacy* and *ethicality* of conditionality across a diverse range of welfare service users, including: unemployed people; lone parents; disabled people; social tenants; homeless people; individuals/families subject to anti-social behaviour orders or family intervention projects; offenders; and migrants.

The study is predominantly qualitative in nature, involving a major programme<sup>2</sup> of interviews with senior policy-makers and other influential ‘key informants’; focus groups with frontline workers charged with implementing conditional welfare policies; and repeated in-depth interviews with ‘welfare recipients’. It compares the implementation of welfare conditionality in England and Scotland, and across six case study cities (Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, London, Peterborough and Sheffield).

This *Round-up* synthesises evidence gathered in the first year of the project, prior to the start of the fieldwork. It draws on the following sources:

- current UK and international evidence on the effectiveness and ethicality of conditional forms of welfare;
- a series of policy briefing papers<sup>3</sup> detailing the application of conditionality to the eight welfare recipient groups above;
- statistical analysis of available quantitative data on the volume and trends in the application of benefit sanctions and other aspects of welfare conditionality<sup>4</sup>; and
- a theoretical mapping of key concepts associated with welfare conditionality.

## What is ‘welfare conditionality’?

Welfare recipients are subject to various forms of ‘conditions’ when accessing state support, including the following (adapted from Clasen and Clegg, 2007):

- **Conditions of category:** entitlements are conditional on membership of a defined category of support (e.g. being unemployed, disabled, homeless, etc.);
- **Conditions of circumstance:** eligibility criteria exclude or include individuals on the basis of their circumstances (e.g. passing a means test or demonstrating a particular level of need);
- **Conditions of conduct (i.e. behavioural conditions):** demand for particular patterns of behaviour from welfare recipients.

The recent shift towards a much greater emphasis on conduct conditionality is the main focus of this *Round-up* (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). While the application of sanction-backed behavioural

conditions within the benefits system are often seen as the 'archetypal' form of welfare conditionality, increasingly conditional approaches have also emerged in other areas of social policy, including in relation to social housing, homelessness and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Behavioural conditions tend to be enforced through the use of penalties that reduce, suspend or end access to benefits, housing or other welfare 'goods', though conditional welfare arrangements may also combine sanctions with support and/or incentives to enable and encourage welfare recipients to behave in particular ways. Relevant interventions range from overt 'punishments' – such as the withdrawal of benefits, eviction from social housing, or the imposition of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) – to broader forms of 'social control' that seek to change behaviour through a more subtle mix of 'nudging', 'persuasion' and/or 'social pressure' (Dolan, et al., 2012; Grant, 2012).

## Conditionality in welfare benefits

### The evolution of conditionality in welfare benefits

Conditionality has been a longstanding feature of welfare benefit entitlements in the UK. Access to unemployment benefits, for example, has always been conditional on recipients being involuntarily unemployed and available for work. However, the scope and scale of *behavioural* forms of conditionality, as well as the severity of the sanctions applied for failure to comply with the required conduct (e.g. attending appointments with employment advisers), has increased substantially since the 1980s. Some particular groups - notably lone parents, sick and disabled people, offenders and some categories of migrants - have also been targeted for specific conditionality measures.

A series of social security reviews conducted by the Conservative Government (1979–1997) led to the introduction of a 'stricter benefit regime' from the late 1980s and culminated in the introduction of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in 1996, a pivotal change which intensified monitoring of **unemployed** claimants' job-seeking behaviour. The incoming Labour Government in 1997 adopted a 'work first' and 'work for all' approach, embracing JSA's monitoring of claimants' job search activities, backed up by benefit sanctions in cases of non-compliance. A range of measures were also introduced to 'make work possible' and 'make work pay', including increased financial support for childcare, as well as the introduction of the National Minimum Wage, increased levels of Child Benefit, and tax credits to assist low-income families.

These 'enabling' measures were implemented alongside an expansion in the reach of work-related conditionality to previously exempt groups, with **lone parents** – previously subject to 'light' if any conditionality – increasingly targeted (Whitworth and Griggs, 2013). Compulsory 'Work Focused Interviews' for lone parents on Income Support (IS) were introduced from 2001. Lone Parent Obligations (LPO), implemented from 2008, have seen an incremental reduction in the age threshold of the youngest child that enables lone parents to qualify for IS, rather than the much more conditional JSA; by 2012, this threshold had been lowered to age 5. Under LPOs, lone parents deemed able to work are treated in broadly similar terms to other JSA claimants, albeit that some LPO 'flexibilities' have been incorporated to recognise the responsibilities involved in caring for a child. Also in 2008, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was introduced to replace Incapacity Benefit (IB) and IS for **sick and disabled people**, with this benefit embracing more conditional elements (and the use of sanctions) for those deemed capable of 'work-related activity'.

The current UK Coalition Government has further intensified benefit conditionality. Initially, this included a dramatic increase in the use of *fixed length sanctions* (imposed for failure to satisfy work-related activity requirements), while *varied length sanctions* (associated with 'voluntary unemployment') and *entitlement sanctions* (related to benefit eligibility), which previously dominated, tended to decrease or remain static, although the recession may have affected these as well (e.g. fewer people leave jobs voluntarily when job opportunities are scarce). Under a new JSA sanctioning regime introduced in October 2012, the maximum sanction – for repeated 'high level' non-compliance – is now complete withdrawal of benefits for three years. Claimants in the 'work-related activity group' (WRAG) of ESA also face more stringent sanctions under a new regime introduced in December 2012: those who fail to comply with the conditions for receiving the benefit now receive an open ended sanction, followed by a fixed period sanction when they re-comply. The sanctionable amount has increased to 100 per cent of the work-related activity component of benefit for a single claimant (from 50 per cent for the first four weeks and 100 per cent thereafter under the previous regime).

The Work Programme (WP) – introduced in 2011 – consolidates previous employment programmes and contracts out responsibility for employment support to private companies and third-sector bodies, with a significant ‘payment by results’ element. **Offenders** who claim JSA now enter the Work Programme from ‘day one’ of their prison release, rather than 9 or 12 months after starting claiming as for other groups (Ministry of Justice (MOJ), 2010; Fletcher *et al.*, 2012). In addition, any individual claiming JSA within thirteen weeks of leaving custody will be mandated to the Work Programme. These developments reflect policy-makers’ ambition to help unemployed offenders into work as a means of combatting recidivism, and were given further impetus by a landmark Government data-sharing project which revealed that a substantial proportion (26 per cent) of claims for out-of-work benefits in England and Wales at 1 December 2010 were made by ‘offenders’ who had received at least one caution or conviction between 2000 and 2010 (the equivalent figure for JSA specifically was 33%), with 5 per cent of claims made by offenders who had been released from prison during the same period (MOJ & DWP, 2011).

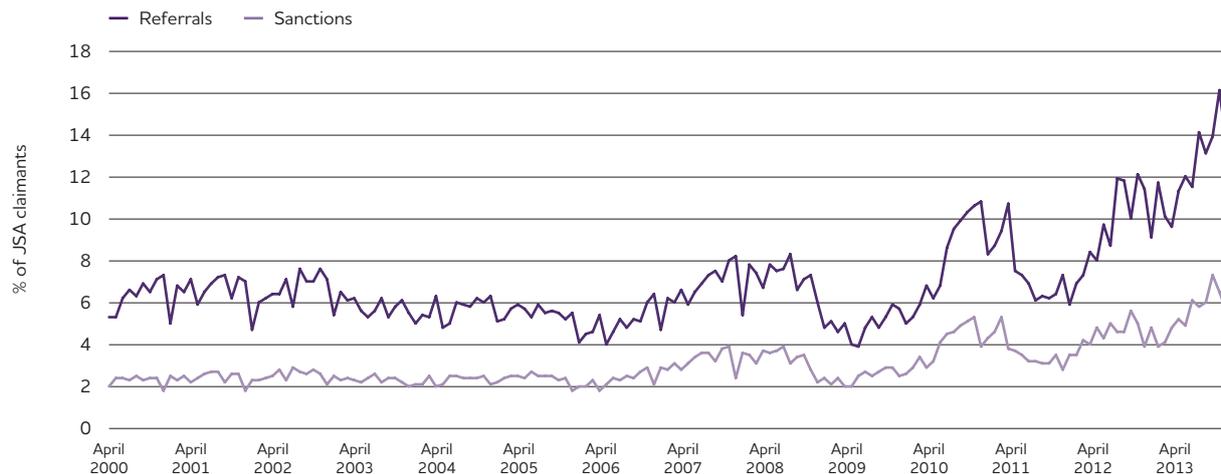
Recent and ongoing UK immigration and asylum policy has strengthened the long-established link between **migrants’** legal status and widely divergent rights to residence, work and welfare (Dwyer *et al.*, 2011). Alongside ‘stratified conditions of eligibility’ (Morissens and Sainsbury, 2005) the notion of ‘earned citizenship’ has become more prevalent, with permanent residence and access to full rights to work and welfare increasingly conditional on migrants demonstrating economic self-sufficiency. Most recently, the UK Government has introduced new measures to further limit European Economic Area (EEA) nationals’ rights to access benefits. These include a minimum earnings threshold, a ‘genuine prospect of work test’ and restrictions on entitlement to Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit for newly arrived EEA ‘jobseeker’ nationals (BBC, 2014b; Kennedy, 2014).

The roll out of Universal Credit further extends the scope and strictness of the conditionality regime. Individual ‘Claimant Commitments’ (now in place in most Job Centre Plus offices) increase job-seeking expectations for most claimants, with the default requirement that claimants treat looking for work as their full-time job. In addition, claimants of Universal Credit who are in work but on a low income are to be subject to conditionality for the first time. Those whose weekly gross earnings fall short of a ‘conditionality threshold’ (equivalent to around 35 hours work per week paid at national minimum wage rates) will be expected to meet the threshold by working more hours and/or increasing their pay rate, finding a second job to supplement their income, or getting a new job with better wages; otherwise they are potentially subject to sanctions (DWP, 2010; Dwyer and Wright, 2014). The Minister for Employment recently announced a big change in the nature of benefit conditionality, with new jobseekers set to face *pre-claim* behavioural requirements including preparing a CV, setting up an email address and registering on the Government’s new jobs website ‘Universal Jobmatch’ (DWP, 2014).

### Statistical evidence on the use of sanctions within welfare benefits

Statistics on the rates of ‘referrals’ of JSA claimants for sanctioning, and ‘adverse decisions’ resulting in actual sanctions, indicate four phases over recent years: relative stability from 2000–2006; a pulse of increased referrals and sanctions through 2007 and 2008; then an increasing use of referrals and sanctions after the Coalition Government took up office in 2010 (see Figure 1); finally, after dropping back in 2011, sanctions have surged upwards to higher levels through 2012 and 2013. Overall, monthly sanctions rates have risen from about 2 to 2.5 per cent of claimants in this earlier period, to around 3.5 per cent in 2008, and 5 per cent in 2010–11, and again to around 6 per cent by late 2013 (actually peaking at 7.3 per cent in October 2013).

**Figure 1: Monthly Referral and Sanction rates 2000–2013 – % of all JSA claimants**



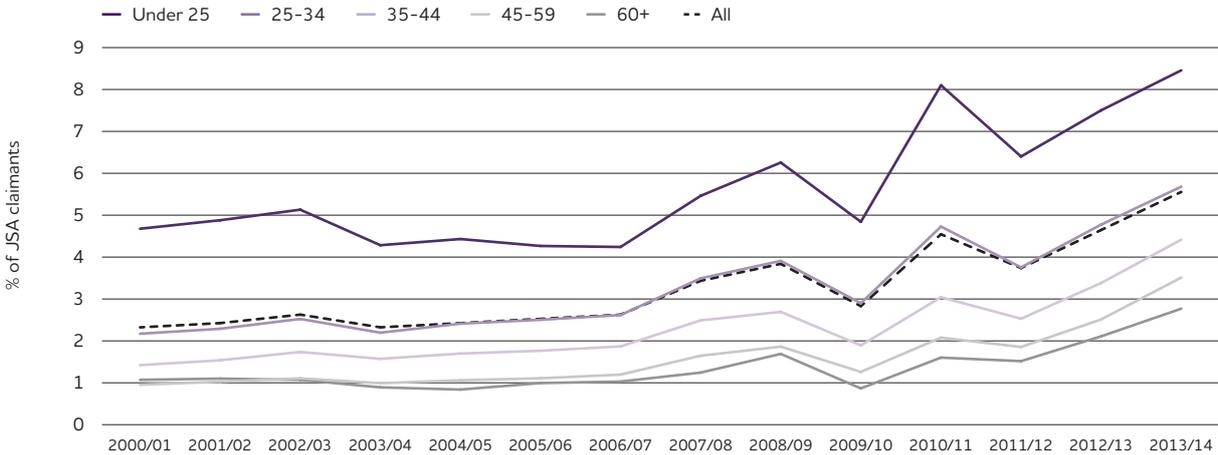
It has been argued (Webster, 2014c and personal correspondence) that the 2007–08 spike reflected a ministerial and policy change to strengthen conditionality at that time. Much higher general unemployment following the onset of recession from 2008 through to 2010 led to a fall in the rate of sanctions. Given that conditions in the labour market then did not significantly alter for a couple of years, the big pulse in referrals and sanctions in 2010–11 appears mainly to reflect the policy impact of the change of Government (see Webster 2013a, 2014c). In this light, the subsequent falling back in 2011–12 is somewhat surprising, but appears to have resulted from the introduction of the WP, and the shifting of the supervision of many claimants to WP contractors. By 2013 referral and sanctions rates had once again risen, exceeding those in 2010 (also note the growing gap between referral and sanction rates, discussed further below).

The number of sanctions issued by WP providers has escalated rapidly, with over 290,000 issued in 2013, up from 185,000 in 2012 and over double the level issued by equivalent programmes before 2010 (MacInnes *et al.*, 2013; Oakley, 2014). Between the introduction of the new sanctions regime in October 2012 and September 2013, almost one million individuals were referred for sanctioning, and more than half a million (528,000) received an adverse decision.

Recent statistics show a substantial escalation in the JSA sanctions applied to vulnerable groups, specifically lone parents and disabled people (BBC, 2014a). There is also evidence that those with complex needs, such as homeless people, have been disproportionately affected by intensifying welfare conditionality (Crisis, St Mungo's and Homeless Link, 2012; Homeless Watch, 2013). Recognition of this has prompted an easing of work requirements for some recently homeless JSA claimants, as long as they take reasonable steps to find accommodation<sup>5</sup>. Some minority ethnic groups may also be disproportionately affected (Scottish Government, 2013, Bramley *et al.*, forthcoming; see also Webster, 2013a), which could reflect issues around language, understanding and communication (Peters and Joyce, 2006; Dwyer, 2009). The recently published independent review of sanctions applied to JSA claimants through mandatory back to work schemes, undertaken by Matthew Oakley on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), identified particular difficulties faced by the most vulnerable claimants (e.g. those with limited understanding of English or learning disabilities). Advisers involved in the review identified “a ‘vulnerable’ group who tended to be sanctioned more than the others because they struggled to navigate the system” (Oakley, 2014, p.35). These patterns are consistent with the international evidence, especially from the US, that the most vulnerable claimants are at greatest disadvantage within highly conditional systems, for example, those with mental health problems or low levels of qualifications or work experience, as well as ethnic minorities (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003; Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Schram *et al.*, 2009).

However, what is most clear from the available UK statistical evidence is that young people are more severely affected by the rapid growth in benefit sanctions than other age groups. As Figure 2 indicates, the recent escalation of sanction rates applies to all age groups. But the under-25 group has had a consistently higher sanction rate than other age groups, and individuals in this group account for 41 per cent of all sanctions issued under the new regime from October 2012 to December 2013. Figure 2 confirms that sanctioning is now a significant risk for an under-25 JSA claimant, affecting 8 per cent of claimants in this age group per month in 2010–11 (averaged over this financial year), and rising to 8.4 per cent in 2013–14 (part-year).

**Figure 2: Monthly adverse decisions as % of all JSA claimants**



Again, this heightened sanctioning risk for younger people is consistent with international evidence, particularly from the US (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003), and has been apparent in the UK for some time (Peters and Joyce, 2006). One explanation that has been offered is that younger claimants have a more ‘relaxed’ attitude to sanctioning as a result of the financial safety net provided for some by their families (Peters and Joyce, 2006, p. 17). Less reassuringly, it has also been suggested that they may be more likely to live in insecure or chaotic circumstances that make it difficult for them to comply with the strictures of the welfare system, and/or have less experience in how to navigate a highly conditional system (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, forthcoming; YMCA, 2014). It is also possible that some direct or indirect discrimination within the welfare system is placing young people at particular risk of financial penalties.

Worryingly, a recent sharp rise in reserved/cancelled decisions<sup>6</sup>, particularly the latter, appears to relate largely to errors in the paperwork submitted by WP contractors to DWP (Webster, 2014c). More broadly, there are increasing concerns about the levels of ‘wrongful sanctioning’, both in terms of the impact on ‘innocent’ claimants and the cost of appeals processes to the State (Miscampbell, 2014b; Oakley, 2014), though (for reasons that aren’t entirely clear (Adler, 2013)) independent tribunal appeals are made by only a very small number of sanctioned claimants (on average 3.1 per cent of sanctioned claimants appealed to tribunals in 2013, Webster, 2014d)<sup>7</sup>. Adler (2013) raises broader concerns about the significant discretion accorded to frontline staff in imposing sanctions and the (increasingly) limited means of redress available to sanctioned claimants.

In the recent review of sanctions referred to above, Oakley argues that an effective sanctioning system must offer those who are sanctioned “easily accessible and understandable recourse to appeal, and potential redress”, and acknowledged the confusing and complex nature of the current system, recommending various ways the system can be made clearer for claimants.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the scope of the Oakley review was limited to issues of communications and process, and to claimants mandated to back to work schemes (HM Government, 2013, see also Webster, 2014a). However, Oakley does refer to wider issues noted in the evidence submitted, including the effectiveness and proportionality of the sanctions regime; the quality of sanctions decisions and employment support; and the application of sanctions through Jobcentre Plus (the majority of sanctions) and to ESA

claimants (Oakley, 2014).<sup>9</sup> While the number of sanctions issued to ESA claimants is relatively small in comparison with JSA sanctions, there is now a discernible upward trend in both the number and rate of ESA claimants who are sanctioned. The rate of sanctions for ESA WRAG claimants has risen from a low of 0.06 per cent per month in June 2011, to 0.69 in November 2013 and an estimated 0.86 per cent in December 2013. This amounted to 4,789 ESA sanctions in December 2013, the highest monthly figure since sanctions were introduced for this group in 2008 (Webster, 2014d).

### The impact and effectiveness of conditions and sanctions within welfare benefits

While some would argue that the ‘punishment’ of non-compliers (Webster, 2014b) and achieving reductions in welfare expenditure (Griggs and Evans, 2010) have now emerged as additional key objectives, the main stated goal of conditionality within the benefit system is to influence claimants’ behaviour by incentivising them to actively seek work and move off benefits (Miscampbell, 2014b).

Based on a systematic review of international evidence, Griggs and Evans (2010) conclude that:

*“... sanctions for employment-related conditions (full-family sanctions in the case of US welfare systems) strongly reduce benefit use and raise exits from benefits, but have generally unfavourable effects on longer-term outcomes (earnings over time, child welfare, job quality) and spill-over effects (i.e. crime rates).” (p.5)*

Evidence from the US makes clear that the very severe sanctions applied in some states have produced substantial declines in welfare programme caseloads (see also Mead, 2011), but the US evidence for positive effects on job entry is far weaker, and with respect to earnings, is on balance negative. European evidence on the short-term effects of actually imposed sanctions on unemployment benefit claimants demonstrates a consistent and substantial increase in employment entry rates and/or reduced unemployment durations, particularly when sanctions occur early in a claim (Muller & Steiner, 2008; Hofmann, 2008). However, while data on longer-term impacts is scant, a key study in Switzerland which considered the effect of both the threat and imposition of sanctions found that they lowered the likelihood of sustainable employment and incomes over time (Arni *et al.*, 2009). Evidence on the wider ‘spill over’ effects that can be directly attributed to sanctions appears very limited, but one UK study identified an unfavourable impact on local property-related crime rates (Machin and Marie, 2004). The evidence on child welfare is likewise far from definitive, but some work in the US suggests raised levels of child safety concerns associated with welfare sanctions (Paxson and Waldfogel, 2003).

While severe sanctions (particularly immediate full-family sanctions in US) appear to have the most dramatic impacts on benefit exits, there is evidence from the Netherlands that less severe sanctions can be effective in increasing transition rates from welfare to work (Abbring *et al.*, 2005 and see Webster, 2014b).

Also highly relevant to the question of the effectiveness of welfare sanctions in ‘driving’ behavioural change (Miscampbell, 2014b) are the findings from a wide range of studies reviewed by Griggs and Evans (2010) about claimant knowledge and understanding. Evidence from both the UK and US indicates that, while welfare recipients are usually aware that penalties are part of the system, they often have little knowledge of when they could be imposed or how they could be avoided or reversed, implying that claimants are often “...effectively being punished for a lack of understanding rather than (deliberate) non-compliance.” (p.6). The recent independent review of the operation of JSA sanctions raised similar concerns, in particular around the poor understanding of the sanctioning system among the most vulnerable claimants (Oakley, 2014, see also DWP, 2013a). It appears that very few make an active choice not to meet the conditions of benefit receipt (Goodwin, 2008; see also Scottish Government, 2013).

Material hardship is commonly reported by sanctioned claimants across the developed world, particularly those with dependents and/or no other source of income (e.g. from savings or family/friend/partner support) (Griggs and Evans, 2010). While in the UK sanctioned claimants are able to apply for a reduced level ‘hardship payment’, these awards are discretionary and subject to stringent access rules, with only about one quarter of sanctioned JSA claimants actually receiving them

(Webster, 2014b). The Oakley review has recently raised concerns that the most vulnerable claimants find it hardest to access hardship payments, in part because “only those claimants that asked about help in Jobcentre Plus were told about the hardship system” (Oakley, 2014, p.38). The review recommended that clear information about this system be included in all sanction-related letters sent to claimants. Depending on local access rules, sanctioned claimants facing hardship may also be able to access support through local welfare support schemes (which replaced key elements of the national Social Fund from April 2013), but DWP funding for these schemes will end in 2015 (DCLG, 2013).

Welfare reform and benefit sanctions have been identified as key factors driving demand for food banks by low-income people across the UK (Sosenko *et al.*, 2013; Lambie-Mumford, 2014). A recent survey of housing associations in Scotland reported significant levels of hardship amongst sanctioned tenants, including “where sanctions are leaving tenants destitute, with no money for rent, fuel or food” (SFHA, 2014, p.2). While no systematic research has been undertaken to establish the extent of destitution caused by sanctions in the UK, light should be shed on this issue by a study recently commissioned by JRF on *Destitution in the UK* (due to report in late 2015). Linked to these material impacts, sanctions and conditionality have also been associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes, increased stress and reduced emotional wellbeing (Dorsett, 2008; Goodwin, 2008; Peters and Joyce, 2006; Griggs and Evans, 2010).

UK-specific evidence on the effectiveness of welfare conditions and sanctions in achieving their ultimate stated goal – getting claimants into sustainable employment – is sparse. A qualitative study of the impacts of mandatory WFLs and associated sanctions on lone parents concluded that “the sanctions regime appeared to have a negligible impact upon the labour market behaviour of the lone parent customers involved in this study” (Goodwin, 2008, p.61). A more recent study, however, assessed the impact of the LPO and compared this to earlier interventions targeting lone parents (ISER/DWP, 2013). It found that the impacts of LPOs were “considerably higher” than the estimated impacts of these alternative approaches, and in particular LPOs were “clearly much more effective at moving lone parents off out-of-work benefits and into work” than interventions involving less conditionality (p.75). However, as with other research in this area, it is hard to separate out the distinct impacts of higher levels of support, intensifying conditions, and/or greater exposure to sanctions. The study found LPOs to be less effective among younger lone parents and parents of older children, with the explanation offered that these groups are typically less work-ready or experienced. That said, there are indications from one UK-based study (in Northern Ireland) that intensifying job search monitoring can, on its own, reduce registered unemployment levels, independent of adjustments in benefit sanctions or other aspects of the conditionality regime (McVicar, 2010).

Earlier UK studies exploring the intermediate outcomes of benefit sanctions on securing compliant claimant behaviour indicate mixed results (Griggs and Evans, 2010). On the one hand, the threat of sanctions was found to be instrumental in persuading some claimants to participate in work programmes (Joyce *et al.*, 2005), or to step up job search activities, especially following a penalty (Peters and Joyce, 2006). However, other claimants were unwilling or unable to comply regardless of the consequences, and it was suggested that sanctions could have counter-productive ‘scar effects’ in generating hostility towards services and/or more negative views about work (Dorsett, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2005). Fletcher (2008), for example, argues that benefit sanctioning may strengthen the hostility of offenders towards authority, propelling them further away from the benefit system and mainstream institutions.

International evidence (from Australia and the Netherlands in particular) suggests that performance-based contracting of employment programmes improves the short-term job prospects of participants by 5 to 10 per cent, and there is also some limited evidence that contracting out these services can be cost efficient (Finn, 2008). Current official statistics make clear, however, the limited success of the current UK WP in achieving positive employment outcomes. Data issued in June 2013 shows that only around one in seven JSA claimants achieved a ‘Job Outcome’ within 12 months following their referral to the programme, and only around one in 25 ESA claimants (DWP, 2013b). That said, there has been some improvement in outcomes since the inception of the scheme and some contend it is too soon

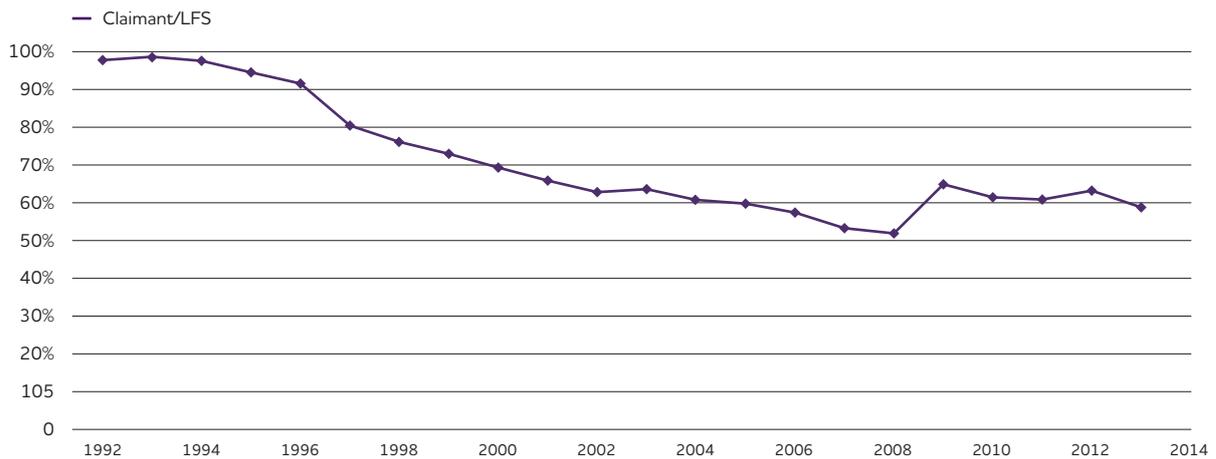
to judge its performance (Holmes and Oakley, 2013). The picture is least encouraging for vulnerable groups far from the labour market, and some have suggested that WP prime contractors are making an economic decision not to focus their efforts on the most disadvantaged claimants, such as homeless people, despite the higher premium attached to achieving successful outcomes in these cases (Crisis, St Mungo's, & Homeless Link, 2012; Sanders, Teixeira and Truder, 2013). This corresponds with international evidence (Finn, 2008) and UK evidence from the early evaluation of the programme (Newton *et al.*, 2012; Rees *et al.*, 2013) suggesting a degree of 'cherry picking' by providers to focus on cases most likely to succeed. That the current system is failing those with 'multiple disadvantages' has recently been acknowledged by the think-tank Policy Exchange, who have called for a radical overhaul of Jobcentre Plus and employment support (Miscampbell, 2014a).

There have been longstanding concerns in the UK about large numbers of exits from unemployment and sickness benefits to 'unknown destinations' (Blyth, 2006). The recent spike in 'cancelled' sanctions decisions may be further evidence that increasing numbers of claimants may be simply leaving the JSA system, deterred by the general rigour of the conditionality regime, without necessarily entering paid work (Bramley *et al.*, forthcoming; Finn and Goodship, 2014; SFHA, 2014), although these cancelled decisions may reflect other factors including administrative errors by WP contractors. It is in this light that the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2014a, p.31) has recommended that benefit off-flow targets (a key performance measure for Jobcentre Plus) be immediately replaced with 'off benefit and into work' measures. The Government have rejected this recommendation, on grounds of the impracticality and cost of collecting such data within the present system, but they are exploring plans to pilot employment-related performance measures under Universal Credit (House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2014b).

Indirect evidence that the tightened sanctions regime is reducing benefit use without concomitant entry into employment can be found by comparing the claimant-based unemployment count with the 'official' survey-based unemployment measure<sup>10</sup> (Bramley *et al.*, forthcoming). In 1995, claimant unemployment was nearly as high as the survey-based rate (94%). Following the introduction of JSA, it fell to 75 per cent in 1998 and continued to fall to 62 per cent in 2002 and to 51 per cent by 2008. These sustained falls may have reflected the general improvement in employment conditions in this period, but it also seems likely that the sanctions regime and active job search requirements associated with JSA will have contributed to this downward trend. The ratio then jumped sharply to 64 per cent in 2009, at a time when general unemployment was rising rapidly in the economic crisis, with both sets of figures rising by 600,000 or 2 percentage points. Since then, the ratio has fallen again, particularly in 2010, and then again in 2013.

Clegg (2008) discusses the general relationship between claimant and survey-based (ILO) unemployment, based on data and estimates going back to the 1970s. Various reasons for divergences are discussed and, in particular, it is argued that people move from defining themselves as 'active' (even if unemployed) in favourable labour market periods to 'inactive' in recessionary conditions, and vice versa. This has the effect of increasing the gap between survey/ILO unemployment in 'good times' and reducing it in recessions. This effect explains the upward movement shown in Figure 4 in 2008–09, and some part of the fall in 2012–13. However, Clegg is silent on the reasons for the very large, and historically unprecedented, increase in the gap between ILO and claimant unemployment in the period to 2007, largely sustained through the subsequent Great Recession. We would argue that it is likely that the increasing level of sanctions is 'driving' people off JSA, or is discouraging them from applying in the first place. This latter point has echoes of the US experience of deliberate 'diversion' from welfare via the 'hassle' associated with making benefit claims (Finn and Goodship, 2014; Mead, 2014).

**Figure 3: Ratio of claimant unemployed to survey-based unemployed 1992-2013**



This is clearly a highly contentious area and, as Griggs and Evans (2010) comment, there is a need for much more evidence on: the impacts of benefit conditionality and sanctions in the longer term (e.g. on income and work sustainability); the range of exit destinations (formal or informal work, education, re-partnering, caring roles or 'disconnection' from both work and welfare); and differential impacts by claimant characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, health and migration status). Unravelling the distinctive impacts of the job search conditions themselves, the sanctions regime that enforces them, and any accompanying forms of support, would be especially valuable. Specifically in the UK, evidence on the patterns and duration of any hardship associated with dramatically increased use of sanctions would be important, particularly where it impacts on third parties, such as children.

### Conditionality in anti-social behaviour policy

Tackling ASB has been a key priority for successive UK and Scottish governments, with a tendency for the scope of ASB-related conditionality to broaden in terms of the people, behaviours and geographic areas covered. As well as requiring local authorities and social landlords to tackle ASB, the 1997–2010 Labour governments substantially increased the range and forms of legal and non-legal mechanisms available to do so, as part of a 'triple-track' approach of prevention, support and enforcement (Respect Task Force, 2006). ASBOs were a key new intervention made available to local authorities, the police and registered social landlords. These civil orders aim to protect the public from behaviour that causes, or is likely to cause, 'harassment, alarm or distress'. They require that individuals desist from, or adhere to, particular behaviours ('behavioural' conditions) and/or proscribe them from entering defined areas ('geographical' conditions), and are effective for a minimum period of two years. Envisaged as a balanced and supportive intervention, ASBOs were intended to be delivered through Individualised Support Orders, though these were not widely used in practice. Breach of an ASBO is a criminal offence, carrying a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

Other key mechanisms introduced to tackle ASB have included:

- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (normally between a young person and their parent/guardian, their landlord, school or the police): these voluntary and non-legal mechanisms seek to codify the rights, responsibilities and required actions of individuals and agencies.
- Parenting Orders: POs can be imposed by a court when a 10 to 17 year old is convicted of an offence; is subject to an ASBO; where a Child Safety Order is made; or where a parent has been convicted of failing to ensure the child attends school. They require parents to attend counselling or guidance sessions and failure to engage with this support can result in a fine of up to £1,000.

- The pilot of Housing Benefit Sanctions (2007–2009) introduced a mechanism for households to be sanctioned for failure to engage with support, though in practice no sanctions were used in the pilot period (Flint *et al.*, 2011).
- Dispersal Orders: these enable the police to disperse groups of two or more people from particular areas, where their presence or behaviour has resulted in – or is likely to cause – a member of the public to be harassed, intimidated, alarmed or distressed.
- Family intervention projects: FIPs became a key strand in response to ASB in the late 2000s and continue to be so under the current Government’s ‘Troubled Families Programme’ which requires local authorities to identify their most troubled families and redesign their services to intervene early and ‘turn their lives around’. FIPs seek to address the underlying causes of ASB in families through holistic, whole-family interventions. Though the emphasis has tended to be on support and *voluntary* engagement, engagement in such projects can be a condition of families remaining in social housing tenancies (Batty and Flint, 2012).

Data on the use of these various mechanisms in practice is patchy. Where available, it suggests a decline in the use of several interventions: the use of ASBOs has declined in England and Wales<sup>11</sup> from a peak of 4,122 in 2005 to only 1,329 in 2012 (Ministry of Justice, 2013). There has also been a substantial (53 per cent) fall in the number of POs in England and Wales since 2009–10 (from 1,026 to 486 in 2012–13) (Youth Justice Board/Ministry of Justice, 2014). On the other hand, the use of FIPs appears to have increased over time (Department for Education, 2011), with recent figures showing that at March 2014 almost 100,000 families had been supported under the Troubled Families Programme (DCLG, 2014).

The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (which received Royal Assent on 13 March 2014) consolidates and further extends legal powers around ASB, replacing ASBOs with Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance (IPNAs) and Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs); broadening the range of behaviours that may be defined as ‘anti-social’; lowering thresholds and burdens of proof; increasing requirements for positive behaviours and extending the geographical reach of interventions.<sup>12</sup> Implementation of this new framework may prompt a renewed surge in ASBO-like interventions following their recent decline. There has also been a focus on enabling social (and private) landlords to respond to and manage ASB, including proposals to widen grounds to evict households where members have been convicted of other offences, including those relating to the riots. In Scotland, there has been a particular emphasis on promoting positive behaviour through mentors and role models and through proactive engagement with support. Scotland has also expanded the capacity of social landlords to respond to ASB, a trend that continues under the current Housing (Scotland) Act (see below).

Overall, evidence on the effectiveness of ASB-related forms of conditionality is uneven and inconclusive. There is a lack of robust evidence evaluating the effectiveness of ASBOs and the available evidence reaches mixed conclusions. In a review of ASBO use in Scotland based on four in-depth case studies, DTZ and Heriot-Watt University (2007) found that in 27 per cent of cases examined, it was considered that there had been an improvement in perpetrator behaviour following an ASBO being granted. In 29 per cent of cases there had not (though this does not preclude future improvements).

Ministry of Justice data suggests that a fairly high proportion of ASBOs are breached – around 30 per cent within a year of being issued. ASBO breaches are particularly common among under-18s, with over two-thirds of 10 to 17 year olds having breached their ASBO at least once by the end of 2012, compared with around half of adults subject to an ASBO (Ministry of Justice, 2013). As DTZ and Heriot-Watt University (2007) note however, that an ASBO has been breached does not necessarily indicate that it has had no positive behavioural impact: in around a third of cases where improvements in behaviour were recognised, the individual had been subject to further complaints about their behaviour or had breached the ASBO.

It is key to recognise here that ASBOs are intended to relieve communities affected by ASB. This is best achieved by changing the behaviour of the 'perpetrator' of ASB, but may also be pursued by removing the perpetrator from a particular area (e.g. through eviction from a social housing tenancy or by legally enforceable requirements that the perpetrator not enter certain areas, see above). In this latter case, ASBOs potentially *displace* rather than resolve behavioural issues, albeit that this may offer some very welcome relief to longstanding victims (DTZ and Heriot-Watt University, 2007).

The provision of support is generally considered to be an important component of ensuring the long-term success of ASBOs, though related supportive interventions have been underused in practice (Squires, 2008). Perhaps related to this, ASBOs remain a highly contentious policy tool for achieving behaviour change (Flint, 2006; Millie, 2009 and Squires, 2008), with calls for more supportive, preventative and less stigmatising responses to ASB rather than enforcement-based interventions (Squires and Stephen, 2005; DTZ and Heriot-Watt, 2007).

The evidence base concerning the effectiveness of FIPs is particularly contentious (see Batty and Flint, 2012, for an overview), not least due to the close connection between FIPs and the Coalition Government's Troubled Families Programme<sup>13</sup>, and in particular Louise Casey's controversial personal study of troubled families (DCLG, 2012a). A second DCLG publication provided a somewhat more robust account of the existing evidence base (DCLG, 2012b) and suggested that evaluations of interventions had largely been positive (e.g. Lloyd *et al.*, 2011), including in reducing anti-social behaviour (and consequently, reducing eviction). The report identified five key family intervention factors linked to success: a dedicated worker; practical hands-on support; a persistent, assertive and challenging approach; considering the family as a whole and gathering the intelligence; and a common purpose and agreed action. The report was criticised however for failing to acknowledge wider structural or societal factors that impact on the effectiveness of FIPs (e.g. poverty or overcrowded or low-quality accommodation) or the impacts of austerity measures on services that FIPs access for their users (such as funding cuts to voluntary organisations). It has been argued that assessing the effectiveness of FIPs requires a complex approach, which takes account of the multiple goals (crisis management, stabilisation, 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes) these interventions pursue (Batty and Flint, 2012). Such assessments are rendered yet more complex by the diversity of approaches between FIPs in terms of ethos, resources and the balance between support and sanctions (Flint and Hunter, 2010; Flint *et al.*, 2011; Flint, 2009, 2011).

## Conditionality in social housing

Although social housing tenancies have always had an element of conditionality, security of tenure has been considered an essential element of social housing since it was formally introduced in 1980 with bi-partisan support (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2008). Nonetheless, both national policy rhetoric (particularly in England) and local practice reveal a range of ways less secure social housing tenancies may potentially be used to influence the behaviour of tenants considered 'anti-social', 'welfare dependent' or otherwise deemed to have problematic lifestyles or patterns of conduct (Flint and Nixon, 2006).

In England, new forms of social tenancies have been introduced that delay security of tenure for new tenants until satisfactory completion of a 'probationary' period. New flexibilities were also introduced under the Localism Act 2011 that enable social landlords to offer fixed-term (minimum of two years), renewable tenancies to all new social tenants, with Government guidance suggesting that decisions regarding renewal may take into account income, employment status, under-occupancy and behaviour (Garvie, 2012). Ending security of tenure for new social tenants is ostensibly aimed at ensuring the efficient allocation of scarce housing to those most in need (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2013), but at the same time social landlords are being encouraged to give longer tenancies to employed people or those who contribute positively to their neighbourhoods (DCLG, 2010). Moreover, Government has indicated that it would like to see a higher priority given in social lettings to ex-service personnel, working households and others making a 'community contribution' (DCLG, 2012). This indicates a shift away from need and back towards behavioural forms of 'deservingness' in the allocation, and retention, of social housing in England.

The implications of these recent policy changes for ‘conditionality’ in social housing in England are complex. Fixed-term tenancies could potentially be a powerful new tool for “disciplining the poor” (Marsh, 2013), but this does depend on the extent to which social landlords decide to adopt the fixed-term tenancy regime in practice, and how ‘behaviourally-focused’ the tenancy renewal criteria adopted locally turn out to be. The limited available evidence suggests that tackling under-occupation is the most widely favoured objective among those (mainly Conservative) local authorities adopting the new fixed-term regime in their published tenancy strategies (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2013). A recent online survey of housing associations found that half of the 48 organisations which responded either had already introduced fixed-term tenancies or were considering doing so (Rallings, 2014). Nonetheless, given the likely time and resource implications, it has been argued that aggressive deployment of the new powers is likely to seem unattractive to social landlords at the point when detailed tenancy review procedures need to be implemented (Fitzpatrick and Pawson, 2013).

The conditionality agenda appears to have very little purchase within social housing in Scotland, beyond the concerns noted below with respect to ASB, and there continues to be a strong presumption in favour of social housing providing a secure ‘home for life’. The recently passed Housing (Scotland) Act includes measures to give social landlords more flexibility in how they allocate their stock, but the most contentious proposal in this regard – to allow them to take applicant age into account – has been dropped. A proposal to introduce an initial (probationary) tenancy for all new social housing tenants – envisaged as an additional means of addressing ASB – was dropped at an earlier stage after vigorous campaigning from voluntary organisations (Shelter Scotland, 2013). The Housing (Scotland) Act nonetheless includes a range of other measures focusing on ASB within the social rented sector, reflecting a common theme north and south of the border. This includes allowing a minimum period to be put in place before anti-social tenants are eligible for social housing, allowing landlords to use Short Scottish Secure Tenancies for applicants and tenants with a history of ASB, and simplifying evictions for tenants convicted of a serious offence. However, the focus in Scotland is on sustaining tenancies, and the Act also includes new tenants’ rights for eviction cases to be reviewed.

Across the UK, evidence about the effectiveness of, or even the implementation of, increased conditionality in the social housing sector is sparse. Little is known about the use of fixed-term or probationary tenancies, far less the extent to which they are employed to impose conduct conditions beyond the core landlord concerns with regard to payment of rent and desistance from ASB. Virtually nothing is therefore known about their effectiveness in promoting and sustaining behavioural change. In part, this reflects the diversity of practice in the sector, with social landlords and local authorities utilising different forms of tenancies and incentive schemes, and little centralised collation of practice. In Australia, specifically New South Wales, where the fixed-term social tenancy regime is longer-standing, there is little evidence of ‘positive’ impacts on tenant behaviour, and in fact some indications that tenancy reviews which take income into account in assessing continuing eligibility might be counter-productive with respect to labour market participation (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2013).

In both England and Scotland, softer ‘non-binding’ measures – such as Good Neighbour Agreements, incentive schemes and Household Ambition Plans (Croucher *et al.*, 2007, Marsh, 2013) – are also employed by some social landlords to encourage ‘good’ behaviour on the part of social tenants. However, again it is not clear how widespread such approaches are, nor how assiduously they are monitored and implemented in practice.

## Conditionality in homelessness policy

Shifts towards more conditional, interventionist and enforcement-based approaches that seek to change people’s behaviour are also evident in homelessness policy. Uniquely, some groups of homeless people in the UK have legally enforceable rights to rehousing (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2009). This right has always been conditional on applicants meeting various criteria, including being ‘unintentionally homeless’, but policy shifts initiated in the early 2000s sought to further ‘responsibilise’ those in housing need. Homeless applicants are now expected to consider all ‘housing options’ for resolving their situation rather than simply access their statutory entitlements (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012). Despite substantial differences in the statutory homelessness framework in the two jurisdictions, this emphasis on ‘housing options’ has signalled a recalibration in the relationship between state and citizen, with the

former taking on a more 'activist' role in encouraging the latter to behave as active 'house seekers' rather than passive welfare recipients (Pawson, 2007). There is evidence that this has prompted a more creative, problem solving approach on the part of many local authorities, which may better meet the needs of homeless applicants than simply processing their case through the statutory system (Pawson *et al.*, 2007). However, there are enduring concerns that substantial declines in levels of statutory homelessness in both England and Scotland since the introduction of housing options may mean that some local authorities are 'diverting' homeless people away from claiming their statutory entitlements (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2012). In England specifically, provisions of the Localism Act 2011 which allow for 'compulsory' (i.e. without applicant consent) discharge of the main homelessness duty via the offer of a private sector tenancy may be acting as a disincentive to homelessness applications in some parts of the country (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2013).

At the same time, policies and services addressing the most extreme and visible form of homelessness – rough sleeping – have seen an escalation in the use of enforcement-based, coercive and interventionist approaches in England (there remains little appetite for such approaches north of the border). Policies combining 'care' and 'control' in line with an ethic of 'tough love' can be traced back to the late 1990s when improvements in the accessibility and quality of services were accompanied by increased expectations that rough sleepers actively engage with support (Fitzpatrick and Jones, 2005). A renewed emphasis on tackling a 'hard core' of rough sleepers – in particular those engaged in related street activities of begging or street drinking – emerged in the early 2000s. An array of tools have been promoted by central government, including:

- arrests: under the Vagrancy Act 1824 begging and persistent begging are arrestable offences, as is rough sleeping if the individual has been directed to a 'free place of shelter' and failed to take this up;
- ASBOs: these civil orders (see above) have been issued to those engaged in street activities;
- Controlled Drinking Zones such as Designated Public Places Orders (DPPOs), within which individuals refusing to comply with police requests that they stop drinking or surrender alcohol for confiscation can be arrested and fined;
- 'designing out': manipulating the built environment to make it less conducive to rough sleeping and other street activities (e.g. removing seating, installing 'spikes' and gating off certain areas);
- and diverted giving schemes: campaigns that seek to encourage the public to give to charity rather than giving money directly to those who beg.

There has also been a trend towards 'interventionist' approaches in support services, which increasingly expect homeless people to engage with support and/or alter their lifestyle and behaviour. Street outreach services have increasingly adopted 'assertive' approaches which explicitly seek to persuade homeless people to move into accommodation, rather than merely ameliorate their experiences sleeping rough (Parsell, 2011). Hostel improvement programmes have encouraged staff to take a more proactive approach to moving people on from homelessness into settled accommodation (Jones and Pleace, 2010). More recently, following the roll-out of 'No Second Night Out' principles across England, local authority funded services are increasingly requiring 'new' rough sleepers to engage with a 'single service offer' (this sometimes comprising 'reconnection' to another area); failure to comply can leave them ineligible for support from other participating agencies (Homeless Link, 2014; see also Johnsen and Jones, forthcoming).

These trends have been paralleled recently by increasing interest in – and some small-scale and localised development of – initiatives that relax requirements around service user engagement and behaviour change, particularly for 'entrenched' rough sleepers with multiple and complex needs. 'Housing First', for instance, enables service users to access settled housing, but *choose* the level and manner of their engagement with support (Johnsen and Teixeira, 2010; Johnsen, 2013; Busch-Geertsema, 2013). Approaches based on 'personalisation' – including personal budgets – seek to engage people with support more on their 'own terms' rather than those dictated by the state or service in question (Hough and Rice, 2010; Brown, 2013).

The use of enforcement-based and interventionist responses to rough sleeping and street culture have generated considerable controversy, largely in the context of limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of such initiatives. There are indications that, when accompanied by intensive tailored support (and practice in this regard varies substantially), the use of ‘hard’ enforcement measures (e.g. ASBOs) can in some circumstances lead to positive behavioural outcomes (e.g. desistance from ASB and engagement with drug treatment programs and other services) for people living in desperate, even life-threatening circumstances (Fitzpatrick and Johnsen, 2009; Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007, 2010). Enforcement in these instances can act as “a ‘crisis point’ prompting reflection and change” (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007, p.54), albeit that it can also have the capacity to undermine the wellbeing of individuals targeted by displacing them from sources of support or diverting them into more dangerous or damaging activities (e.g. sex-work or acquisitive crime).

The reasons why such approaches ‘work’ for some homeless people but not others are at present poorly understood (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007) and in this sense, such approaches represent a high-risk strategy for this vulnerable group. ‘Softer’ forms of enforcement – such as controlled drinking zones and ‘designing out’ – while often viewed as effective from the perspective of the local community and residents, do not appear to benefit the individuals targeted (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007).

## Justifying and contesting conditionality

The fundamental case for ‘conduct conditionality’, and certainly welfare sanctions, is “rooted in the concept of reciprocity” (Miscampbell, 2014b, p.8). This is the *contractualist* idea that, in return for welfare assistance, claimants must do all that they can to find work and cease their dependence on benefits. We can also see (fainter) echoes of this contractualist notion in other welfare spheres, for example, the requirement that homeless people ought to do all that they can to resolve their own housing problems under housing options, and in some of the instruments that are used in ASB programmes to define the responsibilities of perpetrators.

This concern with reciprocity is closely allied to *communitarian* notions of citizenship that focus on the mutually-reinforcing responsibilities citizens owe to each other. It also links to a particular conceptualisation of ‘fairness’ or *social justice* which is intolerant of ‘free riding’ and sees ‘deservingness’ as a key moral criterion for the allocation of societal goods, with deservingness defined primarily in relation to preparedness to make a societal contribution via paid work.

There are also a range of *utilitarian* arguments in favour of conduct conditionality, which stress its efficiency in promoting overall societal well-being and ensuring that the best possible use is made of finite resources. Some of these utilitarian arguments relate to the financial costs to society as a whole (and taxpayers in particular) of, for instance, having large numbers of people receiving welfare benefits or the pressure placed on a limited social housing stock by high levels of statutory homelessness. There are also non-financial utilitarian arguments in favour of intervening to tackle, for example, ASB in the interests of the rest of society, and in particular to protect the well-being of those directly affected.

Finally, some justifications of welfare conditionality take a quite different tack, focusing on *paternalist* justifications that welfare conditionality, even benefit sanctions that are acknowledged to cause short-term hardship, are in the long-term best interests of welfare recipients as it encourages them to free themselves from poverty and welfare dependency. Paternalist arguments are critical to the case for conditional and enforcement-based interventions on homelessness, and to a lesser extent with respect to ASB, where the vulnerabilities and complex needs of many of those involved are recognised by at least some stakeholders. Conditionality from this perspective serves not only to protect people from the consequences of their own poor decision making, but also promotes a (different) conceptualisation of *social justice* by operating to benefit the least advantaged.

Those who oppose conditionality, particularly in welfare benefits, tend to do so on interconnected ‘moral’ and ‘empirical’ grounds. The moral case against sanctions – and welfare conditionality more broadly – tends to be rooted in a rights-based vision of *social citizenship* that is unconditional, at least with respect to the meeting of fundamental needs. In this view, regardless of people’s ‘culpability’, the

status of citizenship should guarantee access to a minimum standard of welfare as a matter of right. Advocates of *human rights* expand this approach to argue that unconditional welfare rights should be made available to all, citizens and non-citizens alike, on the basis of shared human needs and frailty (Dean, 2013). These approaches are clearly irreconcilable with a contractualist or communitarian notion of citizenship that makes access to rights conditional on first fulfilling responsibilities. This disagreement reflects people's fundamental moral and political values and cannot be resolved via an appeal to evidence. In practice, however, it seems that even those with a strongly contractualist perspective tend to favour some sort of basic 'subsistence' standard of living that would be protected regardless of people meeting their social obligations, ensured in the social security setting, for instance, through hardship payments that prevent extreme hardship (Miscampbell, personal correspondence).

However, opponents of conditionality also dispute a wide range of the empirical claims or assumptions underpinning conditional approaches.

First, conditional welfare approaches rest on the assumption that the problems they seek to address are fundamentally *behavioural* in nature and are therefore amenable to remedy through a mix of incentives and sanctions (mainly the latter). This has been forcefully rejected in some quarters, with critics arguing that the root causes of, for example, 'entrenched' and/or intergenerational unemployment (Shildrick *et al.*, 2012), or economic inactivity amongst sick and disabled people (Lindsay and Houston, 2011), lie not in individual patterns of conduct, but in societal-level factors, such as barriers to workforce participation and weak demand for labour.

Second, another key assumption underpinning the perspectives of advocates of conditionality – that people will, on the whole, respond in an *economically rational* manner to sanctions and incentives (Miscampbell, 2014b) – has also been brought into question. Behavioural economics has highlighted that human decision making occurs in conditions of uncertainty, often under pressure, relying on 'rules of thumb' rather than rational calculations (Dawney and Shah, 2005; Darnton, 2008), with human preferences being multiple and contradictory, rather than consistent and ordered, and extending well beyond the economic (see also Hoggett, 2001; Lukes, 2005). These accounts suggest that welfare recipients may respond to conditionality in ways that depart radically from policy-makers' expectations. For instance, it has been suggested that offenders may "be less responsive to sanctions because they could be accustomed to deprivation" (Newton *et al.*, 2012, p.83), and that homeless people with complex needs may fail to respond 'rationally' as they do not comprehend the consequences of their actions (or inactions) with work-related and other programmes (DrugScope and Homeless Link, 2013). Interestingly, criticism about the naiveté of the rational economic model is not confined to the Left. For example, Mead (2014) has argued that:

*"As to the essence of conditionality, it's not economic. It's about authority. What gets recipients to work in America is chiefly being told clearly that they have to work. Economic payoffs are secondary."*

Recognition of the limits of economic incentives in driving behavioural change may explain the emphasis on exerting "social pressure" (or "public shaming" (Webster, 2014b, p.7)) on non-compliant benefit claimants in proposals recently put forward by Policy Exchange, by paying their benefits via a pre-paid 'yellow card' as a "non-financial sanction" (Miscampbell, 2014b).

Third, there are concerns about the practical prospects for enhancing the *well-being* of targeted groups via conditional approaches related, for example, to the kind of employment that sanctions may 'activate' people into. In the UK, the 'low-pay, no-pay' cycle has been highlighted as particularly acute (Shildrick, *et al.*, 2010; Wright, 2012), undermining the paternalist case for benefit conditionality, albeit that those in low-paid work are still likely to be *less* poor than those reliant on out-of-work benefits (Goulden, 2014). Another relevant example would be the controversy over the 'high risk' nature of enforcement measures designed to combat street culture activities: while in some cases these measures prompt positive behaviour, in other instances they may displace the problem and drive vulnerable people away from support (Johnsen and Fitzpatrick, 2007, 2009).

Fourth, critics point to the evidence of material and other forms of *hardship* endured not only by those directly subject to benefit sanctions, but also those ‘diverted’ away from benefits altogether who may become ‘disconnected’ from both work and welfare. Opponents of conditional approaches see them as punitive, disciplinary and iniquitous, ‘punishing the poor’ by holding them to standards of conduct not required of more advantaged groups (Dwyer, 1998; Deacon, 2004; Manchester CAB, 2013; Standing, 2011).

For some, however, this is at heart a moral argument that, notwithstanding the evidence about the consequences of sanctions, the use of sanctions is morally justified because they uphold core societal norms of reciprocity and (a particular conception of) fairness. Whether or not this argument is deemed compelling will depend on one’s personal political outlook and values.

## Conclusion

This *Round-up* has provided an overview of policy developments, trends, key debates and available evidence concerning conditional approaches to welfare. Though benefit sanctions are the most prominent form of welfare conditionality, increasingly conditional, interventionist and enforcement-based elements have emerged in other social policy realms, particularly in relation to ASB, social housing and homelessness. In addition to an expansion in scope, some forms of conditionality (in particular benefit sanctions) appear to be more frequently used now than in the past, with the severity of sanctions and range of behaviours covered having also increased. There is strong evidence that benefit sanctions are having disproportionate effects on particular groups, especially vulnerable people and younger age groups.

Sanction-backed conditionality regimes do seem to reduce benefit use by both lowering benefit take-up and speeding up benefit exit, as has been most dramatically illustrated in the case of the US. But concerns remain about the destinations of those who exit benefits, and in particular about whether increasing numbers are becoming ‘disconnected’ from both work and welfare. There is some European evidence (though little that is UK-specific) that benefit sanctions can shorten periods of unemployment and raise short-term job entry rates, but the evidence available on their longer-term impacts is much more limited, and on balance negative, suggesting that benefit sanctions may lower the likelihood of sustainable employment and incomes over time. Moreover, the current evidence base does not enable one to untangle the relative impacts of the job search conditions themselves, the sanctions regime that enforces them, and any accompanying forms of support. There is a notable lack of empirical evidence in either the UK or elsewhere on the effectiveness of conditionality in other spheres, particularly in the case of social housing. There are indications, however, that when combined with appropriate support, initiatives that include conditional or enforcement-based elements may lead to positive behavioural outcomes in relation to street-based lifestyles and ASB. Nonetheless, across all of these realms of welfare conditionality there are a range of concerns about unintended (and less intended) consequences, particularly the hardship faced by those excluded from benefits, services and/or support as a result of failing to meet behavioural requirements.

## About the ESRC project

The future stages of the ESRC project will provide a wealth of qualitative evidence on the medium to longer-term impacts of welfare conditionality on the behaviour of a wide range of welfare recipient groups. The study will allow us to provide an in-depth account of the ‘rational’ or otherwise nature of recipients’ responses to the combination of behavioural conditions, penalties, support and incentives found in the modern welfare system, and also how the individuals charged with administering conditional welfare interventions interpret and implement these measures. The interrelationship between various forms of conditionality across different social policy arenas and interventions will also be explored. The distinct policy frameworks in Scotland and England will provide scope for considering the impact of different approaches on the experiences of key groups subject to welfare conditionality. The normative and empirical data generated will also help to inform debates on the extent to which, and on what terms, welfare conditionality might be considered morally justifiable.

## About this paper

This *Round-up* draws on an ongoing study *Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change* (ESRC Grant number ES/K002163/1) and was written with contributions from members of the wider project team: Professor Peter Dwyer, University of York; Professor Del Roy Fletcher, Sheffield Hallam University; Professor John Flint, University of Sheffield; Professor Sarah Johnsen, Heriot-Watt University; and Dr Sharon Wright, University of Glasgow. More information on the project can be found at: [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk)

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## Endnotes

- 1 University of Glasgow, Heriot-Watt University, University of Salford, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Sheffield and the University of York.
- 2 See [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk)
- 3 Summaries of these briefing papers can be found at [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk)
- 4 This forthcoming paper will be available at [www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk)
- 5 See <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Easement%20Regulations%20Guidance.pdf>
- 6 Decisions are 'cancelled' when the claimant is no longer claiming JSA at the time of the referral, or the paperwork for the referral has not been properly completed. Decisions are 'reserved' when the claimant has stopped claiming between the time of referral and the time of decision. In this latter case, people may have left JSA before a sanction can be imposed on them, but the sanction will apply if they re-claim a benefit.
- 7 Since October 2013 those wishing to appeal an adverse decision are required to request internal 'reconsideration' prior to appeal to a tribunal. The stated aim is to try to help resolve disputes without an appeal, and this seems likely to depress further the number of such appeals that are made.
- 8 The government have accepted and are already implementing a number of Oakley's recommendations: see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-independent-review-government-response>
- 9 To access evidence submitted to the review by a range of organisations, see <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/oakley-sanctions-review-responses-other-organisations>
- 10 This is based on the Annual Population Survey (alias Labour Force Survey) using the ILO definition of unemployment and seeking work.
- 11 No centralised data on the use of ASBOs is available in Scotland.
- 12 See <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2013-14/antisocialbehaviourcrimeandpolicingbill.html>
- 13 See <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-troubled-families-turn-their-lives-around>

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This summary is part of JRF's research and development programme. The views are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the JRF.

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## Independent review of jobseeker's allowance sanctions

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CPAG's response to the call for information

January 2014

Child Poverty Action Group  
94 White Lion Street  
London N1 9PF

## Introduction

1. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) works to prevent and relieve poverty among children and families with children. We have particular expertise in the functioning of the social security system through our welfare rights, training and policy work. Each year we author and publish *The Welfare Rights Handbook*, the authoritative guide to social security in the UK, provide specialist advice to first tier advisors, and are currently providing frontline welfare rights advice to food bank users in London.
2. In putting together this submission we have drawn on three key sources of information: analysis of our welfare rights case files; evidence provided to us by over 60 welfare rights advisors attending CPAG training sessions at the National Association of Welfare Rights Advisors (NAWRA) annual conference in December 2013; and two in-depth interviews with individuals who were sanctioned in 2013 while on the work programme.
3. However, before providing evidence in response to the specific questions posed by the independent reviewer in his call for information, we provide some comments on the remit of the review.

## Terms of reference of the review

4. CPAG is concerned that the terms of reference for this review appear to be narrower than what is required by legislation.
5. The legislative basis for this review is set out in section 2(1) of the Jobseekers (Back to Work Schemes) Act 2013. This provides as follows:

*The Secretary of State must appoint an independent person to prepare a report on the operation of the provisions relating to the imposition of a penalty during the period of a year beginning with the day on which this Act comes into force, so far as that operation relates to relevant penalties.*

Section 2(4) goes on to state that:

*In this section “penalty” means a penalty that may be imposed for —  
(a) failing to participate in a scheme within section 17A(1) of the Jobseekers Act 1995, or  
(b) failing to comply with regulations under section 17A of that Act;  
“relevant penalty” means a penalty that, but for section 1 of this Act, would not be or would not have been lawfully imposed on a person.*

6. It is clear, then, that the intention of Parliament was that the review should focus on the operation of the Act, that is, on sanction decisions which would not be or would not have been lawfully imposed but for the 2013 Act. This refers to every sanction decision made in connection with a failure to participate in the Work Programme or similar scheme in the period from 20/05/2011 (when the Work Programme was introduced) to 12/02/2013 (when lawful regulations<sup>1</sup> requiring claimants to participate in schemes were first made - the predecessor

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<sup>1</sup> The Jobseeker’s Allowance (Schemes for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) Regulations 2013 No. 276

regulations<sup>2</sup> having been held to be unlawful in the *Reilly and Wilson* litigation<sup>3</sup>). There were approximately 330,000 sanction decisions that had either been made or stockpiled in order to await the Act in the relevant period.<sup>4</sup> The call for information in connection with this review clearly recognises this.<sup>5</sup>

7. However, the call then goes on to state that only information about the following features of the sanction process should be given:
  - *To what extent do JSA claimants understand that when they are referred to a 'back-to-work' scheme (such as the Work Programme) their benefit may be sanctioned if they don't take part?*
  - *To what extent does a claimant's failure to meet their conditions arise from them not having a sufficient understanding of what is expected? Are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?*
  - *Do sanctioned claimants understand why they have been sanctioned, and if not are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?*
  - *Do sanctioned claimants feel informed throughout the sanctions process, and if not how could their awareness be improved?*
  - *To what extent are sanctioned claimants aware of the help available to them from Jobcentre Plus? For instance are they aware of how to appeal a decision or how to seek help through hardship payments? Are there ways in which this could be made clearer to them?*<sup>6</sup>
8. The scope of the review identified in these paragraphs focuses only on the communication issues around sanctions. Strikingly, none of the questions focus on the quality of the sanction decisions themselves; whether or not the 330,000 sanction decisions were rendered unlawful not for reasons of the Act but rather because the Secretary of State failed in his public law duty to give a claimant sufficient information about the scheme before making a decision to refer a claimant to a scheme (the point identified by the Supreme Court in *Reilly and Wilson*); or the quality of information issued specifically to those whose sanction decisions had been stockpiled to await the coming into force of the Act.
9. It is our view that there is nothing in section 2 of the Act to justify the limited scope of the inquiry. Parliament has provided for a review into the *operation* of the Act. That, in our view, requires looking at the 330,000 decisions which were "legalised" by the Act and issues linked to these decisions such as how many of those claimants have appealed, how long after their sanctionable failure occurred was their sanction decision notified, and how specifically was that delay explained.
10. Putting these serious concerns aside for one moment, however, we now turn to answer the specific questions raised in the call for information.

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<sup>2</sup> The Jobseeker's Allowance (Employment, Skills and Enterprise Scheme) Regulations 2011 No. 917

<sup>3</sup> *Reilly and Wilson v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2013] UKSC 68

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/impact-assessments/IA13-07.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/256044/jsa-sanctions-independent-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/256044/jsa-sanctions-independent-review.pdf) 4

<sup>6</sup> *ibid* 3

### Understanding of conditions imposed

11. Our review of the evidence suggests that while the vast majority of claimants may understand the general requirements placed upon them by the work programme or related schemes, these conditions often lack specificity, or can be so unreasonable and/or inflexibly interpreted by advisors that claimants are simply unable to abide by them.
12. One common problem is that claimants are often given unreasonable notice of a requirement to attend an interview. In part, this stems from the fact that messages are often sent out by text via a computer, which can suffer from back up and therefore delivers the information at a very late stage. Organising childcare, transport and the like often prove overwhelmingly difficult in such circumstances.
13. The lack of flexibility displayed by some advisors was illustrated vividly by the experience of our interviewees. L was required to attend an interview with his advisor at a certain time, but was 10 minutes late due to unexpected road works. He was unable to advise the office during his journey as he had no credit on his phone. He signed in on arrival at the office, waited another 15 minutes for his advisor, and was then subject to significant verbal abuse for arriving late. He was subsequently sanctioned. Likewise J had moved home after threats of violence and was offered only phone support from her work programme provider. She was threatened with a sanction if she did not pick up the phone as soon as the advisor called.

### Understanding that a sanction has been applied

14. Failure to understand that a sanction has been applied is an endemic problem in the current system. In our conversations with over 60 welfare rights advisors, almost all had seen clients who had either received vague and ominous letters, had no notice before a sanction was applied, or had received often incomprehensible communications.
15. To begin, it is common for claimants to receive a letter indicating that 'a doubt has arisen with your claim' and that 'your benefit may be suspended while we consider a sanction'. This vague-sounding letter is clearly unsatisfactory, as is the fact that benefits are often withdrawn before a formal decision has been made.
16. It is also widespread for claimants to receive no notice that their benefits have been sanctioned before the fact. Our review suggests that claimants often remain in ignorance of the reason for a sanction for anything ranging from a week to three months. As well as being at odds with the public law principle that those affected by an administrative decision must be informed, this undermines the very rationale of the conditionality regime which aims to link a sanction with prescribed behaviour.
17. Finally, our review evidences the fact that it is commonplace for claimants to receive contradictory and confusing information about when and why they have been sanctioned. Consider, for example, a claimant who attended a CPAG advice session while visiting a food bank. This client had received two letters, the first indicating he may be sanctioned, the second, dated one day before the first, indicating he was being sanctioned because of 'failure to attend'. The second letter did not specify the date that he failed to attend, and indicated that his JSA would be withheld from a point that pre-dated the two letters. It was, in the words of the advisor, 'incomprehensible'.

18. The claimant was unable to understand what he had been sanctioned for, and the advisor was hard-pressed to take instructions in the face of such incoherence. The claimant also received a further letter addressed to another claimant who presumably did not receive any communication.

#### Understanding of options available after being sanctioned

19. At least one of the standard letters informing JSA claimants that they have been sanctioned does not make reference to the possibility of claiming hardship payments. In addition, the advice given to those who subsequently do realise they may be able to apply for this support is often erroneous. Our interviewee L, for example, only received information about hardship payments from a friend, was told when first applying that hardship payments were not available 'unless you go to a food bank', and on application was refused when Jobcentre Plus would not furnish evidence that L was fulfilling his employment conditions.
20. In contrast, standard communications do appear to provide sanctioned claimants with information on the right to request a revision and to appeal a decision. In practice, however, both are very difficult options to pursue, particularly at a point when claimants are struggling to survive in the absence of financial support. Again, our review turned up extensive evidence of the challenges faced by those who seek a revision or appeal. In particular, there is a clear lack of information and advice available to help claimants navigate the labyrinthine processes.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

21. Numerous systemic problems have been highlighted in the course of this review as follows: that while claimants usually understand the obligations placed on them by the work programme and related schemes, such requirements are often unreasonable or inflexibly interpreted, often to the point of being unlawful; that claimants are often not informed that they have been sanctioned, or are informed in a way that even trained welfare rights advisors cannot understand; and that informing claimants that they could apply for hardship payments is not standard practice.
22. Given this, CPAG makes the following recommendations:
  - a. That procedures be changed so that it is unlawful to sanction without a letter;
  - b. That this letter must specify clearly the date and nature of the alleged breach of requirements and make clear what action the claimant must take, and by when, to avoid a sanction being applied;
  - c. That this letter always advises claimants of the possibility of applying for hardship payments;
  - d. That JCP must proactively consider hardship payments;
  - e. That the law be changed to ensure that an independent challenge can be made to a decision before a sanction is imposed;
  - f. In the absence of e., that where a dispute arises over whether a claimant can or cannot fulfil a condition of the work programme, that this is reviewed internally by DWP prior to a sanction to avoid a sanction being applied erroneously.

For further information, please contact Lindsay Judge, Senior Policy and Research Officer at [ljudge@cpag.org.uk](mailto:ljudge@cpag.org.uk) or on 020 7812 5205

Child Poverty Action Group is a charity registered in England and Wales (registration number 294841) and in Scotland (registration number SC039339), and is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England (registration number 1993854). VAT number: 690 808117

# Social Policy

Paul Spicker: commentary and updates

SOCIAL POLICY POSTS

PAUL SPICKER

OPEN ACCESS MATERIAL

MARCH 22, 2013

## Jobcentre sanctions

[The Guardian](#) reported yesterday that Jobcentres are being set targets for the imposition of sanctions, despite assurances to Parliament that no such targets existed. Yesterday I was at a forum where we were told about examples of sanctions in Clydebanks, including

- a claimant sanctioned for one month for confessing that he had not looked for work on Christmas Day and Boxing Day;
- a claimant sanctioned for a month for appearing five minutes late for interview;
- a claimant sanctioned because the firm he had been referred to had not received a referral and sent him straight back to the Jobcentre to check.

*I've not done well with the DWP tabtool on this topic and in the process of trying to milk the statistics I've ended up with more on the floor than in the bucket. David Webster's helpful comments, below, explain about where to find the statistics I missed.*

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Written by [Paul Spicker](#) — Posted in [Social security](#) — Tagged with [sanctions](#), [unemployment](#)

# 5 comments

MARCH 22, 2013 - 11:51 PM



David Webster

Thank you for this very useful posting about what has become a national scandal.

In fact the DWP does report how many sanctions are being imposed. This information is on its Tabtool at <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>. This shows that in the year to October 2012, 778,000 sanctions were imposed; on average, 4.23 per cent of all unemployed claimants were sanctioned each month. This is three times the level in the year to October 2005, when there were 244,000 sanctions, equating to an average of 2.44 per cent of JSA claimants each month. This monthly rate of course results in much higher percentages of claimants being sanctioned over time. A recent Freedom of Information request to DWP (2012-5156, available at [http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/PQ\\_FOI/foi/2013/2013-5156.pdf](http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/PQ_FOI/foi/2013/2013-5156.pdf)) forced them to admit that of all people who had claimed JSA in the 5 years to March 2012, no less than 19 per cent had been sanctioned. Sanctioning has gone completely crazy. Does anyone really think that one fifth of unemployed claimants are so irresponsible that they deserve to be reduced to destitution?

To get the monthly figures, go to the webpage given above, scroll down and click on 'Click here for JSA Sanction & Disallowance Decision Stats'. Then, in the first box, select in turn 'Referrals for varied length sanctions', 'Referrals for fixed length sanctions' and 'Referrals for entitlement decisions' (you will have to go through the whole process three times and then add the results for these three types of sanction together). On the next screen, in the box 'Analysis', click on 'Thousands'. Then in the next box, the vital thing is to select 'Time series' – this will mean you get the month-by-month figures. Carry on down, selecting the particular information you want from the boxes. You will end up with month-by-month figures for every month starting with April 2000 and currently taking you to October 2012. Statistics for November 2012 onwards, showing the results of the even crueller regime introduced by Messrs Duncan Smith, Hoban and Freud from 22 October 2012, will

be published in May.

Incidentally, there is nothing new about HM Government cheating claimants out of unemployment benefit on spurious grounds. For instance, in the late 1980s there were plenty of cases where claimants, when asked what wage they wanted, were told that they could not state 'the going rate' but must name a figure. They would then be told that this wage was too high and they were placing an unreasonable restriction on their availability, so they would lose their benefit. Plus ça change!

Reply

MARCH 25, 2013 - 11:52 AM



David Webster

Thanks Paul, but the position is better than you say. You can indeed use the DWP Tabtool to get the number of actual sanctions, not just referrals for sanction. Follow the steps set out in my previous comment. Then, after choosing 'Time Series', in the next box select 'Whether a decision was Adverse'. Carry on down and this will give you the actual number of sanctions. You can also get the numbers of cases in which the claimant was not sanctioned, or where they were successful on internal appeal to DWP ('Reconsideration'), or in very rare cases on formal appeal to HM Courts & Tribunals Service or its predecessors. Lots of other information is available too.

However the DWP Tabtool is extremely cumbersome and time-consuming to use and it is not surprising that people have difficulty with it. An example came last week in the House of Commons debate on 19 March on the government's Jobseekers Back to Work Bill which retrospectively legalises their illegal sanctions in relation to unpaid work placements. One of the few Labour MPs to make a worthwhile contribution to the debate (and one of only 44 Labour MPs to vote against the Bill), John MacDonnell (Hayes & Harlington), said (col. 857) 'In 2009, 139,000 jobseeker's allowance claimants were sanctioned. By 2011, the number had nearly tripled to 500,000, and it has risen again this year.' However, in this calculation he only included 'varied length' and 'fixed length' sanctions, and left out 'entitlement decisions'. These latter are dominated by sanctions for failing to 'actively seek employment'. This is one of the most popular methods by which DWP cheats claimants of their benefits – for several examples see the recent Scottish CAB Briefing at <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/voices-frontline-jsa-sanctions>. Once these sanctions are added in, John MacDonnell's figures become: 2009, 442,920 sanctions; 2011, 668,800 sanctions. As noted in my previous comment, in the last 12 months for which data are available, this total had risen further to 778,000. In other words, the Tabtool is so opaque that even someone like John MacDonnell who to his credit does understand the nature of this benefits scandal is led to seriously understate the problem.

Reply

AUGUST 1, 2013 - 7:16 PM



Sara Watson

Hello. I'm posting here because I'm trying to obtain some data for a paper investigating the political consequences of increasing punitiveness in the UK welfare system. I first wanted to thank David for his post about the DWP Tabtool; it helps a lot! I was also wondering if David (or any readers of this blog) know if it is possible to use the Tabtool to obtain time series figures on sanctions by Local Authority District? It appears

you can get current figures by LAD, but I can't quite work out whether/how one can obtain these over time. Also, would anyone happen to know if time series figures are available for sanctions relating to the Income Support and Incapacity Benefit/ESA programs? I'm interested in how much sanctions have increased in programs other than JSA. Many thanks!

Reply

AUGUST 1, 2013 - 11:59 PM



[David Webster](#)

Hi Sara

Unfortunately you cannot use the Tabtool to get time series data on sanctions at local authority level. I assume this is because given the present design of the Tabtool, any such tabulation would be very large – around 60,000 cells even for a single variable (c.400 LAs x 151 months). All you can get is cumulative data for the whole period April 2000 to the latest month, currently October 2012. However DWP will have the data, so you could ask them for it, either informally or through Fol.

Data on ESA sanctions are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/series/employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions>

Data on Income Support for Lone Parents sanctions are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-and-income-support-for-lone-parents-sanctions>

Good luck!

AUGUST 8, 2013 - 12:26 PM



sonia bagheri

Let assume for the sake of children human rights argument that the both decisions made by the respondent were correct and I was fit to work and I was not seeking employment actively.

The question is that can a lone parent who is fit to work and “unwilling” to actively seek employment be denied benefits without breaching the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

In other words, Can the state force a lone parent to work by denying her/him access to the social security.

The answer is negative as it is the parent's fault not the child's fault. The child should be protected in any case. For this very basic rights, a lone parent used to receive the Income Support up to the child's sixteen birthday. It is of course a good idea to help a lone parent to come out of poverty by training and employment. But the government does not provide help and assistance but to deny them access to social security.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly abbreviated as the CRC, CROC, or UNCRC) is a human rights treaty to which Britain is a signatory. This treaty is setting out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right of children to social security in article 26, stating that:

1. States Parties shall recognize for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realisation of this right in accordance with their national law.
2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstances of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

#### Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Reply

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## Employment and Support Allowance:Written question - 218538

Q Asked by [Stephen Timms](#) (East Ham) [N]

Asked on: 12 December 2014

Department for Work and Pensions

 218538

### Employment and Support Allowance

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many households with dependent children claiming employment and support allowance have been sanctioned since December 2012; and how many such households have subsequently had their sanction rescinded.

A Answered by: [Mr Mark Harper](#)

Answered on: 17 December 2014

The information as requested is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

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Q Asked by [Stephen Timms](#) (East Ham) [N]

Asked on: 12 December 2014

Department for Work and Pensions

 218574

### Jobseeker's Allowance

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many people in households with dependent children claiming jobseeker's allowance have been sanctioned since October 2012; and how many such people have subsequently had their sanction rescinded.

A Answered by: [Esther McVey](#)

Answered on: 17 December 2014

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## Number of claimant households affected by JSA and ESA sanctions in London

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**From: Steve Kerr**

**22 August 2014**

Dear Department for Work and Pensions,

Please provide information on the number of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimant households with dependent children (at 31 May 2013), where the claimant has received an adverse sanction decision (by level of sanction for JSA) between 22 October 2012 and 31 May 2013 for JSA and 3 December 2012 and 31 May 2013 for ESA, in London.

If it is possible within the cost limit, please provide a breakdown for each of the four London Jobcentre Plus districts.

Thanks  
Steve



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**22 August 2014**

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**6 October 2014**



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The Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England,  
Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust

# Emergency Use Only

## Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK

Authors: Jane Perry, Martin Williams, Tom Sefton and Moussa Haddad



The research in this report was jointly commissioned by  
Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), The Church of England, Oxfam GB and The Trussell Trust



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---

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**The Church of England** plays a vital role in the life of the nation, proclaiming the Christian gospel in words and actions. Its network of parishes and 41 dioceses cover the country bring a vital Christian dimension to the nation, as well as strengthening community life in numerous urban, suburban and rural settings.

<https://churchofengland.org>

**Child Poverty Action Group** is the leading national charity working to end poverty among children, young people and families in the UK.

<http://www.cpag.org.uk>

**Oxfam GB** is a member of Oxfam International, an international confederation of 17 organizations networked together in more than 90 countries, as part of a global movement for change, to build a future free from the injustice of poverty.

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk>

**The Trussell Trust** is a Christian charity that runs a network of over 400 UK foodbanks which provide emergency food and support to people in crisis.

<http://www.trusselltrust.org>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### EMERGENCY USE ONLY: UNDERSTANDING AND REDUCING THE USE OF FOOD BANKS IN THE UK

Use of emergency food aid in the UK, particularly in the form of food banks, has dramatically increased over the last decade.<sup>1</sup> This research, jointly conducted by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust, examines why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use.

Our research used a combination of methodological approaches. We conducted 40 in-depth interviews with clients at 7 food banks in a diverse range of areas across the UK, collected additional administrative data from more than 900 clients at 3 of those food banks regarding the reasons for their referral, and analysed a caseload of 178 clients accessing an advice service at one food bank.

#### Summary of key findings

- People interviewed for this research turned to food banks as a last resort, when other coping strategies had failed or were overstretched. Deciding to accept help from a food bank was often difficult, and was described by participants as being ‘unnatural’, ‘embarrassing’ and ‘shameful’.
- Most food bank users were facing an immediate, acute financial crisis – either a complete loss of income or a very significant reduction in their income had left them at crisis point, with little or no money to put food on the table.
- The acute crises people faced could be prompted by a sudden loss of earnings, or a change in family circumstances such as bereavement or homelessness. However, for between half and two-thirds of the people included in this research, the immediate income crisis was linked to the operation of the benefits system (with problems including waiting for benefit payments, sanctions, or reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments.
- The emergency support available to people at a time of crisis was not sufficient to prevent them having to turn to a food bank. Many participants were not aware of the various emergency payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them. Only half (or less) of the users we spoke to knew they could seek support from the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme; very few of those potentially eligible had been awarded short-term benefit advances or hardship payments.

The acute crisis that led the people we interviewed to have to turn to food banks was set against a backdrop of complex, difficult lives. It was common for food bank users to have experienced ill health, bereavement, relationship breakdown, substantial caring responsibilities or job loss. Many lived on constantly low incomes. People with mental health problems appeared to be particularly at risk.

The evidence in this report helps shed light on the factors that are driving food bank use in the UK. Causes of shocks in people’s lives are many and varied, and the social security system is a vital safety net for all of us at such moments. Yet, as the report shows, action is needed to ensure that this safety net continues to operate as intended. Achieving this will help to prevent a life-shock becoming a crisis, and ensure the system offers vital protection for vulnerable people like those we met during this research. Our report paints a picture of the challenging, complex lives many food bank users have, and underlines the need to address these wide ranging issues. But we are also able to point to practical, measured changes in policy and practice that will help reduce the need for food banks, and ensure vital support for people in times of crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> Downing and Kennedy (2014), *Food Banks and Food Poverty*, London: House of Commons Library.

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## KATH'S STORY 'I THOUGHT THE SYSTEM WOULD PROTECT ME'<sup>2</sup>

Kath lives with her three teenage sons. Her youngest son has several serious medical conditions and requires intensive support. After her partner left 4 years ago, Kath gave up work to become his full-time carer. This left the family finances in precarious financial position:

*'We live very close to the edge... we don't have many things. My 17-year-old needed a passport to get a part-time job and I had to say no. My youngest, who's 14, has never been on a school trip, and I can't afford the art supplies my other son needs for his course.'*

The family were just about managing when their Child Tax Credits were halved without notice. Kath had arranged her finances so that she relied on her tax credits to pay for food and other daily necessities, so the effect was catastrophic.

When Kath contacted HMRC, she was told her credits had been cut because she had failed to tell them that her two older sons were staying in education. Kath says she did update them. She was assigned a case worker and given a number to call, 'and that's where the problem started'.

*'I called them every day all day and couldn't get through. And every time I got put through to the answer machine we got charged. It was awful. I'd go back to the helpline and say "I can't get through", and they said "Well, that's the number". They didn't help at all. It went on for eight weeks.'*

Kath was horrified by how she was treated. *'When our money was stopped, there was no compassion, there was no way to get support.'*

Meanwhile, she was getting into more and more debt: *'We got behind on all our bills; everything just got swallowed up, and my direct debits were bouncing.'*

She became unable to meet the family's basic needs. *'It was freezing cold, there was no wood for the fire, I was on the emergency on the meter and I knew the lights were about to go out, and I had no food.'* To attempt to make ends meet, Kath had to rehouse a much-loved family pet, a decision which she described as *'heart-breaking'*. But this was still not enough: *'I had no money to get my children to school... I was desperate.'*

To compound their problems, her youngest son's conditions mean he needs to eat healthily, which Kath found challenging on a small budget. *'He can't eat fast food; he would have ended up in hospital.'*

Kath and her family survived with the help of donations from her local Citizens Advice Bureau and food bank. It took eight weeks for the decision to cut her Child Tax Credits to be overturned.

She said of her experience: *'I thought the system would protect me. I never thought I would be completely ignored. I feel I was let down hugely. My benefits are my safety net – if they're removed, how are families like ours meant to survive?'*

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<sup>2</sup> Case studies throughout the report come directly from in-depth interviews, and are used with permission. Personal details have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

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## Why do people use food banks?

**Food bank use was usually the result of an immediate income crisis.** For participants in our in-depth interviews, food bank use was primarily in response to an immediate and severe financial crisis: something had happened which had left them without enough income to buy sufficient food for themselves and their families. Most families viewed food bank use as a short-term or emergency measure.

An 'acute' income crisis – a specific, identifiable event which had left the household without any income at all or with their income a dramatically reduced – was the dominant reason people gave for using food banks. Food bank use solely as a result of ongoing, chronic low income, without being attributed to a particular identifiable event, was less common.

Some participants could describe what they would have done without the food bank: relying on family, borrowing or making do. Others reported that they would have been completely bereft without it, or might have resorted to stealing to feed themselves and their families.

Although an immediate, severe financial crisis was often the 'last straw' that had brought people to the food bank it was rarely, if ever, the entire story. Participants' life stories revealed a number of income shocks in their past which had contributed to their current situation:

- **Loss of earnings from employment** can occur for a number of reasons including redundancy, loss of work through ill health, caring responsibilities or delayed wages. Around 11-16% of food bank users at the three food banks where additional administrative data were collected were in households where no one was currently working but which had experienced job loss, for whatever reason, in the last six months.

Income crisis related to job loss seemed to be a particular problem for those with little or no experience of claiming benefits, who were reluctant to claim benefits or found the system difficult to navigate. It could quickly lead to a build-up of arrears and debts, themselves posing a long-term threat to financial stability.

- **Change in family circumstances** Although rarely given as the main reason for turning to the food bank, changes in the family (adults forming or leaving relationships, new babies, or older children moving into or out of the family) can threaten previously established livelihood strategies and trigger a challenging period of change in the process of re-establishing a household (finding new accommodation, securing financial arrangements and registering for changes in benefits).

The frequency of **bereavement** among food bank users was a striking feature of this research. Death of a loved one can have a direct financial impact, through loss of income from the deceased but also job loss (because of time taken to care for the dying person or because the emotional impact on the bereaved leaves them unable to work). Bereavement can also have an indirect effect through its impact on a range of other previously established social networks and survival strategies.

- **Homelessness** This accounts for around 3% of Trussell Trust Foodbank referrals, with additional administrative data collected by the research suggesting that the total proportion may be slightly higher. Suddenly becoming homeless can disrupt income through loss of work or benefits. Equally, other life-shocks, such as losing a job, can lead to homelessness and food bank referral. There were clear examples of participants living in fear of future homelessness as a result of rent arrears which they were building up, or because of suspended Housing Benefit.

Food bank users are not unique in having complex lives. However, it was not uncommon for food bank users interviewed to have experienced several particularly dramatic negative life events, which could be cumulative and compounding. Wider vulnerabilities, often the legacy of previous life-shocks, also played a significant role in determining how well individuals were able to tackle the crisis they were facing.

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**Often attributable to problems with benefits.** Difficulty in navigating the benefit system was a common feature of food bank users' experiences. The benefit system was experienced as complicated, remote and, at times, intimidating, especially for those trying to resolve problems that had occurred with a claim. Lack of clear communication about what help was available or how to access it was particularly a problem for people who had always worked and never claimed benefits before. A number of reasons for 'acute income crisis' were identified which related directly to the administration of main income replacement benefits or tax credits, as follows:

- **Waiting for benefits** Evidence from the additional administrative data shows that around a third of food bank users reported claiming a benefit which had not yet been decided. In County Durham, less than half (47%) of food bank users who reported waiting for benefits said they knew they could apply for a short-term benefit advance (STBA), only 26% of had done so, and only 9% had been awarded the advance. Analysis of welfare advice caseload data from Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that low use of STBAs is attributable to lack of awareness of STBAs, practical barriers to making a request (including lack of access to a telephone; or being advised to use other emergency support, including the food bank, instead), and refusals of STBA claims that were shown to be legally incorrect.

- **Sanctions** Of those food bank users for whom additional data was collected, 20-30% said that their household's benefits had recently been stopped or reduced because of a sanction. This varied between locations: 19% in Tower Hamlets, 23% in Epsom and Ewell, and 28% in County Durham. Themes emerging from the Tower Hamlets Foodbank caseload included lack of clear information about sanctions or hardship payments, sanctions made in error or affecting vulnerable people with health problems, and particular difficulties arising from the impact of sanctions on Housing Benefit.

- **Problems with disability benefits** Analysis of the welfare advice caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed a number of specific problems which can occur with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), including money stopped because of the claimant being found 'fit for work' in an ESA assessment (this affected 9-16% of food bank users included in the additional data analysis). Other problems included difficulties with submitting medical certificates or application forms, and failure to attend medical examinations. The introduction of 'mandatory reconsideration' before submission of an appeal had also contributed to some food bank users experiencing significant periods without benefit payment.

- **Problems with tax credit payments** These had led to dramatic reductions in income for some interview participants, causing real hardship because they had previously been relied upon as a significant proportion of income. These tax credit problems could be difficult to rectify, often resulting in long waits before missing payments are repaid. Analysis of the caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that particular problems can occur for those registering a change in family circumstances, and also for those who are not British or Irish nationals.

**Experienced against a backdrop of ongoing severe shortage or insecurity of income.** Aside from immediate income crisis, many interview participants described the ongoing impact of living on a low income. Long-term low income was sometimes a product of wages being low or unreliable, but was also attributed to low benefit levels. Some families were not receiving benefit they were entitled to, either because they had failed to claim or because they had had claims refused. For others, their income from benefits had been reduced through deductions for repayments or because of recent reforms.

Most participants described how using credit and debt formed part of their immediate coping strategy, but also how repayments of long-term debts had a significant impact on their household's disposable income.

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**Finally, food bank use is made more likely by specific, identifiable vulnerabilities.** In-depth interviews revealed a number of specific factors which appeared to make individuals or families either more likely to be hit by significant life-shocks or less likely to be able to cope with them:

- Experience of living in the particular local area, including lack of access to jobs, shops and services.
- Impact of physical and mental illness on individuals and the wider household, with illness and/or caring responsibilities affecting not only ability to work but also capacity to deal with other crises.
- Difficulty obtaining or proving educational qualifications or skills.
- Problems with housing.
- Isolation or lack of family support.
- Large debt repayments which reduce disposable income at source and potentially lead to spiralling financial problems.

### **RAJA'S STORY JSA SANCTION LEADING TO FOOD BANK USE**

Raja lives in a small flat which he rents from a housing association. He worked as a nurse until 2008 when he was hospitalised with mental health problems; at this time, Raja also lost his home. He made a gradual recovery over the next few years and lived in a series of hostels. He was eventually re-housed to his current home and was able to start work again in 2011.

After losing his job again in 2013, Raja applied for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). His claim took eight weeks to be processed. During this time Raja had to use the food bank for the first time, as he did not have enough money to buy food. His benefits were stopped at the beginning of 2014 because he could not access the system to complete the required job-search activities.

*"Over Christmas for three days I didn't have access to universal job match, as I didn't have access to a computer as everything was still shut, my local library was shut. The day I went to sign on I found I had been sanctioned. It went on for four weeks. It's not at all reasonable. I'm not just talking about myself, but so many people are sanctioned. I didn't even have electricity whilst I was sanctioned as I couldn't afford it, and I ended up at the food bank."*

Raja survived with the help of a crisis payment from Citizens Advice Bureau and food parcels from the food bank. His housing association also supported him in his efforts to find work.

Raja found the Jobcentre to be very unhelpful: he experienced a lack of empathy and support and a lack of information, particularly about whether the JSA sanction would have a knock-on effect on his Housing Benefit. When he tried to question the sanction he was referred to a helpline based in Newcastle, but the advisers were not able to help with his case.

*"I don't think we get enough help from the Jobcentre itself with applying for jobs. My local housing association do help me; they give me a one-to-one and they let me access computers."*

Raja remained positive about the future, and was learning new IT skills at college and applying for low-paid jobs.

*"I think I've now got a part-time job working as a night receptionist so I'm very happy. Working is good for your health; it's good to be doing something. I want to get off benefits. Even though it's minimum wage, I can't wait to get off them. I was on more money when I was a senior nurse but I think anything is better than dole money."*

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## How do food banks fit with wider livelihood strategies?

**Access to emergency payments** – The majority of food bank users were not aware of the availability of Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) crisis payments, and even fewer were receiving them. Experience of our in-depth interview participants was that LWAS were often poorly advertised or difficult to access.

Several in-depth interviews conducted in Scotland, where elements of the social fund were replaced with the Scottish Welfare Fund, also highlighted a lack of awareness of the scheme and practical barriers to take up, including perceived delay in processing applications and lack of affordable local transport to collect awards.

**Wider support services** – for most families, their primary source of emergency assistance was the agency that referred them to the food bank. Referral agencies included welfare rights advice and housing services, homelessness or substance abuse charities, refugee support groups, schools and health services. Referral agencies were usually spoken of very positively, particularly where the food bank referral voucher had formed part of a wider package of help and support.

Users of Trussell Trust Foodbanks also spoke positively about support they received from the food bank itself – particularly the warmth of welcome they received there, the opportunity to talk, and its signposting to other support services.

**Other strategies for managing life on a very low income** – Participants described a range of highly developed financial strategies for managing life on a very low income, including different methods of prioritising expenditure, saving or digging into savings, and selling possessions. Cutting back on food was a common approach.

Borrowing and debt were also an essential part of livelihood strategies. Many participants had borrowed from family and friends, where this was possible, while those whose family were unable or unwilling to help faced particular challenges. Other forms of debt brought higher risks: building up arrears with housing payments and other utilities, or turning to high-cost lenders in desperation.

Phones and internet access played an essential part in families' strategies for survival, allowing them to access the benefit system and stay in touch with vital social support networks.

**Personal strengths** – The people we spoke to showed remarkable fortitude, and often good humour, in the face of very difficult situations. Maintaining a positive mental attitude was mentioned as a strength, with many saying they had to stay strong for other family members. Inter-personal skills, such as communication and friendliness, were often combined with a willingness to help and care for others within and outside their family. Some undertook voluntary work in order to 'give back', others to gain work experience. Similarly, studying was mentioned as both a positive strategy in itself and as a step towards employment.

**Social networks** – For those who had them, social networks played a crucial role in helping individuals and families through crisis. Nuclear and wider family, as well as friends and neighbours, were important for much more than just financial support. Practical assistance, such as help with transport, childcare or filling in forms, was coupled with emotional support. However, social support could have a flipside, with expectations that support would be given in return, or involving relationships which themselves entailed caring responsibilities.

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## Recommendations

For the individuals and families using food banks who contributed to this report, hunger and hard choices between heating, eating, paying bills and servicing debts are real. Crucially, the immediate income crisis which precipitated food bank use was often outside of an individual's control – rather it resulted from a failure of income which they did not instigate, or the effects of which they were unable to reverse.

Participants told stories of complex lives with interlocking challenges. We heard about the ongoing daily grind of living without sufficient income to make ends meet each month, of struggling to find and be able to keep a job, of trying to cope with mental and physical ill health or bereavement. Many of those who are forced to use food banks are living in, or close to, poverty. Offering sustained change for those we came into contact with during the course of this research requires long-term thinking and bold choices. But the promise of a social security safety net that is there to protect people at times of crisis is something that can, and must be, preserved and protected. Food banks, whilst providing a vital and welcoming lifeline to many, should not become a readily accepted part of that formal provision.

The experiences of the food bank users in this study reveal important truths about the impact of problems with our benefit system on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The very real challenges faced by these people are too often being compounded – rather than assisted – by their experience of the benefit system, and by policy choices regarding the support offered to people who are out of work or who cannot work.

Our research has identified a number of specific problems which contribute to food bank use, along with some relatively simple changes which could, potentially, dramatically reduce the numbers of people referred to food banks for these reasons:

### WHAT MIGHT PREVENT PEOPLE FROM USING FOOD BANKS?

1. Improve access to short-term benefit advances: increase awareness, simplify the claim process and improve data collection to identify support needs.
2. Reform sanctions policy and practice: increase access to hardship payments, clarify communications about sanctions, mitigate the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered and address issues for Housing Benefit.
3. Improve the ESA regime: ensure claimants are not left without income whilst challenging a decision made because of missing medical certificates or missed appointments.
4. Sustain and improve access to emergency financial support through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes and the Scottish Welfare Fund.
5. Ensure Jobcentres provide an efficient and supportive service for all clients.
6. Improve Jobcentre Plus Advisers' awareness of, and ability to respond to, mental health problems.
7. Improve access to appropriate advice and support.

The evidence in this report helps shed light on the factors that are driving food bank use in the UK. Causes of shocks in people's lives are many and varied, and the social security system is a vital safety net for all of us at such moments. Yet, as the report shows, action is needed to ensure that this safety net continues to operate as intended. Achieving this will help to prevent a life-shock becoming a crisis, and ensure the system offers vital protection for vulnerable people like those we met during this research. Our report paints a picture of the challenging, complex lives many food bank users have, and underlines the need to address these wide ranging issues. But we are also able to point to practical, measured changes in policy and practice that will help reduce the need for food banks, and ensure vital support for people in times of crisis.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Use of emergency food aid in the UK, particularly in the form of food banks, has dramatically increased over the last decade.<sup>3</sup> Yet the evidence base regarding what leads individuals and families to use emergency food services remains limited.<sup>4</sup> This research, which was jointly commissioned by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust, aims to expand that evidence base, inform the debate on emergency food aid, and offer practical solutions to reduce the need for such assistance.

Our research used a combination of methodological approaches to capture as fully as possible the reality of food bank use in the UK:

- We conducted 40 in-depth interviews with clients at 7 food banks in a diverse range of locations across the UK, charting the course of their journey to the food bank in their own words, using a methodology informed by the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.<sup>5</sup>
- We collected additional administrative data from more than 900 clients at 3 of those food banks regarding the reasons for their referral, enhancing existing data collected by The Trussell Trust.
- We analysed a caseload of 178 clients accessing a welfare advice service at one food bank, available since summer 2013, to explore the specific issues they faced and to identify potential solutions.

Our analysis uncovers the immediate causes that left many of the people we spoke to with little or no money to put food on the table, with many reporting that they had no other option but to turn to a food bank. The immediate income crisis that predominantly led to food bank use was often one incident in a complex life story, in which several other factors had combined to leave people vulnerable and less able to cope with dramatic changes. We also gained insight into the range of steps that people take before (and alongside) going to a food bank as a means of dealing with their crisis.

The research concludes with recommendations on how to reduce the numbers of people who need to use food banks. These particularly focus on remedying some weaknesses in the current administration of the main income-related benefits. Many of the solutions proposed involve making relatively simple, technical changes that could make a substantial difference to the lives of a large number of people. As significant reform of the social security system continues, we propose changes that can help to ensure that this system continues to operate as a supportive safety net for everyone in times of need, protecting vulnerable people like those we met during this research, and preventing a life-shock from becoming a crisis.

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

Provision of informal food aid in the UK has gone on for many years, without being widely publicised, documented or understood. However, the recent growth of the network of food banks and the public attention which surrounds it has made food aid an increasingly visible phenomenon.<sup>6</sup>

Food banks provide food aid to people in acute need, following referral by a health or social care professional, or other agency. In the UK, food banks are run by a range of volunteer-based organisations, redistributing food donated by consumers, retailers and the food industry. The largest network is co-ordinated by The Trussell Trust charity (Box 1.1).

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<sup>3</sup> Downing and Kennedy, 2014

<sup>4</sup>For the most recent review of the literature see Lambie-Mumford, Crossley, Jensen, Verbeke, & Dowler (2014).

<sup>5</sup>The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach adopts a distinctive perspective on poverty by taking as its starting point not deprivation (what people don't have), but instead assets: people's strengths and capabilities, and the strategies they use to survive. (May, Brown, Cooper, & Brill, 2009)

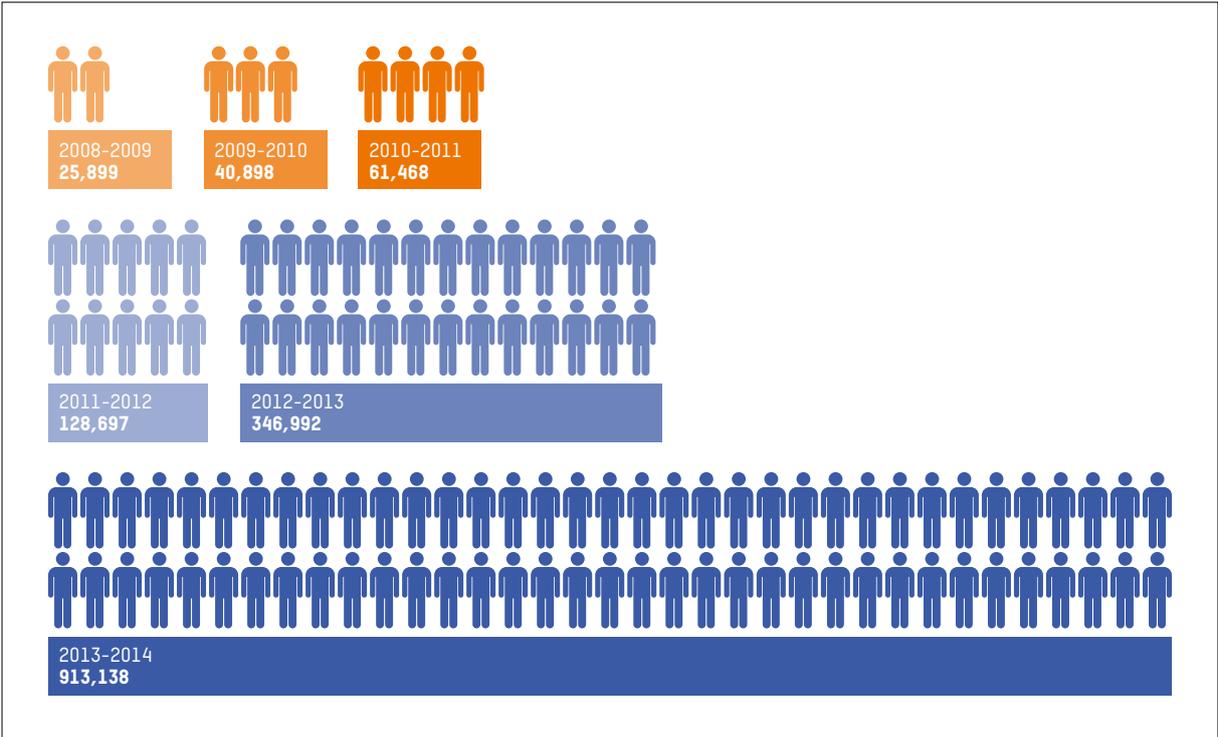
<sup>6</sup>(Lambie-Mumford, Crossley, Jensen, Verbeke, & Dowler, 2014, p. 21).

**BOX 1.1 THE TRUSSELL TRUST FOODBANK NETWORK**

The Trussell Trust works in partnership with churches and other groups to open and run food banks based in the heart of local communities. Food banks which belong to its network operate according to a strict referral system. Referrals are made by a range of support agencies, such as advice centres, doctors, and health or social workers. Frontline staff at those agencies identify people in crisis and issue a food voucher. Clients receive three days’ supply of nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food in exchange for their food voucher. Staff and volunteers at Trussell Trust Foodbanks also make time to listen, and to signpost clients to other services. Typically, clients visit once or twice, but can receive up to three food vouchers in a six-month period, with additional vouchers dependent upon an inquiry from the food bank manager to the referral agency to validate the client’s need and justify continuing support.

The Trussell Trust has more than 400 food banks in the UK operating from over 1,000 locations. In 2013-14, Trussell Trust Foodbanks distributed parcels to feed 913,138 people, an increase from 346,992 in 2012-13 and 128,697 in 2011-12 (Box 1.2).

**BOX 1.2 NUMBERS GIVEN 3 DAYS’ EMERGENCY FOOD BY TRUSSELL TRUST FOODBANKS**



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The government does not collect official statistics on the use of food banks.<sup>7</sup> The main source of data regarding food bank usage across the UK is The Trussell Trust Network. However, The Trussell Trust is only one of a huge number of food aid initiatives in the UK, with the wider food aid landscape being both diverse and difficult to document. It is therefore impossible to accurately estimate the numbers of people fed by food aid providers in the UK, either in total or on a monthly basis.<sup>8</sup>

Existing research on the food aid landscape in the UK largely comes from the high-level statistics and individual stories published by The Trussell Trust and others.<sup>9</sup> A discussion of current data and trends was provided by Oxfam/Church Action on Poverty in their *Walking the Breadline* (2013)<sup>10</sup> and *Below the Breadline* (2014)<sup>11</sup> reports. This analysis made it clear that growth in food aid is not limited to the expansion of The Trussell Trust Network. For example, Oxfam and Church Action on Poverty have calculated that the number of meals provided by three of the main food aid providers (The Trussell Trust, Fareshare and Food Cycle) increased by 54% between 2012/13 and 2013/14.<sup>12</sup>

Discussions of the drivers of food bank use and its increase are set in the context of the current economic climate – characterised by rising costs of food and fuel, stagnating or declining earnings and the ongoing impact of the recent recession – and a number of significant changes to welfare provision and cuts to public spending.<sup>13</sup> This context is complex; it varies regionally and according to different sections of the labour market and wider society. Debates are also highly politicised, with provision of food aid becoming increasingly high profile, but also controversial. There has been much speculation that welfare reforms are having the biggest impact on growth of food banks. However, others maintain that there is ‘no robust evidence’ to the link the two, pointing instead to the growth of The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network itself.<sup>14</sup>

The recent, largely desk-based research published by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)<sup>15</sup> highlighted that current, rigorous empirical information on UK food aid provision, and the reasons for it, is limited. This project attempts to meet the need – as identified in the DEFRA research – for further evidence regarding the background to food bank use and the wider strategies households use to cope in times of crisis (Box 1.3). Most importantly, the substantial qualitative element prioritises speaking directly to food bank users: putting their individual stories, experiences and views centre stage.

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<sup>7</sup> In February 2013, David Heath, then Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, stated that the range and community-led nature of food aid provision was such that ‘the Government does not believe it is possible to keep a record of the number of food banks, nor the potential number of people using them or other types of food aid, without placing unnecessary burdens on volunteers trying to help their communities.’ (Downing & Kennedy, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> (Lambie-Mumford, Crossley, Jensen, Verbeke, & Dowler, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Reports at local levels include Diocese of Ripon, Ellesmere Point food banks and Share food bank in Sheffield (Killeya, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> (Cooper & Dumbleton, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> For full discussion of the social and economic context see (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive, independent, overview of context and debates see (Downing & Kennedy, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> (Lambie-Mumford, Crossley, Jensen, Verbeke, & Dowler, 2014).

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## BOX 1.3 AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This research aims to understand, and thereby help reduce, the need for food banks in the UK, by:

- Identifying the background context and specific trigger points that lead to people being referred to food banks.
- Assessing people's wider coping strategies and how their use of food banks fit with these.
- Exploring what might help people who use food banks not to have to return to them, or not to have resort to using them in the first place.
- Capturing and disseminating the key findings to policy-makers and practitioners.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Why are people using food banks – what are the immediate triggers and wider factors?
2. What is the role of food banks in people's coping strategies?
3. What would help to reduce the need for people to use food banks in the future?

## 1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research was designed to provide a multi-method approach to understanding food bank use, with three complementary strands of data collection:

### A. In-depth interviews and telephone follow-up (40 food bank users from 7 food banks)

Semi-structured, face-to-face interviews allowed extensive exploration of the circumstances leading to referral to a food bank, as well as users' first-hand accounts of their experiences. With their consent, participants were contacted four to six weeks later for a short follow-up telephone interview. This explored what had happened since they had come to the food bank; to what extent the issues which led them to request emergency food had been addressed; and whether they were still at risk of food poverty.

### B. Additional administrative data collection (more than 900 food bank users from 3 food banks)

Simple data were collected which enhanced the administrative data collected by The Trussell Trust, by capturing further detail on the demographic profile of food bank users and their reasons for referral. Where users gave permission, data were collected using a standardised form filled out by food bank volunteers from three food banks between February 2014 and June 2014.

### C. In-depth caseload analysis (at Tower Hamlets Foodbank)

During 2013/14, a CPAG welfare rights adviser based at the Tower Hamlets Foodbank worked with 178 clients, some of whom had multiple problems with benefits. The evidence collected provides detailed background about the benefit problems which had led individuals to be referred to the food bank, and whether these problems could be resolved by benefits advice or required other types of intervention.

Use of mixed methods is widely recognised as essential for building a fuller understanding of complex social phenomena such as food bank use.<sup>16</sup> The qualitative interviews provide real insight into the reasons people are using food banks, how visiting a food bank fits into their lives, and the wider strategies they use to cope.

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<sup>16</sup> [Byrne & Humble, 2007] (Morse, 2003) (Brewer & Hunter, 2006).

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The other strands of the research complement this, giving an indication of the wider prevalence of specific issues (through the additional administrative data) and a much deeper understanding of specific benefits issues experienced by food bank users (through the caseload analysis).

Full details of the methodology used for each strand can be found in Appendix A.

The research was guided by an Advisory Group, made up of academic and social policy experts, as well as representatives from The Trussell Trust and independent food banks. A number of steps were taken to make the research as participatory as possible. In all instances, anonymity of clients/users was maintained, and ethical considerations were built into data collection and analysis. For full details see Appendix A.

### **Scope and limitations of the research**

The research took place at seven locations in The Trussell Trust's network<sup>17</sup>, selected to include a mix of:

- Different types of location: rural, suburban and urban – three food banks in London and the South East, one in the West and two in the North of England, one in Scotland.
- Ethnicity: including a range of mono-ethnic and diverse areas.
- Low-income and more affluent neighbourhoods, including some post-industrial areas.

All research designs are a compromise between methodological rigour and practicality, achieved within resource constraints. The advantages and limitations of each of the elements of our research are outlined in Box 1.4.

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<sup>17</sup> The decision to limit the scope to Trussell Trust Foodbanks means we are not able to say anything specifically about users of independent food banks or other types of food aid provision, although representatives from independent food banks on our Advisory Panel were able to confirm that our findings were widely representative of their own experience. See Appendix A for further discussion.

## BOX 1.4 ADVANTAGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

<b>Our in-depth research can:</b>	<b>Our in-depth research can't:</b>
Engage participants and enable them to take an active part in the research process, giving more authentic results.	Tell us how many people experience a particular phenomenon (because those we spoke to are not statistically representative).
Provide lots of detailed, rich information; tell stories and highlight people's real-life experiences	Prove anything – although one piece of small-scale research may provide persuasive explanations, it can't prove that they are true.
Provide an opportunity for food bank users to tell their stories and explain their perspective.	Check any details against the views of other parties involved.
Help to provide explanations and inform the development of solutions.	Tell anyone what they should do.
<b>Our additional administrative data can:</b>	<b>Our additional administrative data can't:</b>
Provide a more detailed picture of those visiting the three food banks which provided extra information.	Statistically represent all food bank users – either at those three food banks or nationally.
Give an indication of the prevalence of referral reasons or other issues at those three food banks.	Provide definitive data on prevalence of referral reasons.
Allow more detailed exploration of the characteristics of food bank users and some of the problems they face.	Demonstrate change in numbers of food bank users over time, or the reasons for this.
<b>Our caseload analysis can:</b>	<b>Our caseload analysis can't:</b>
Help to build up a detailed picture of the complex welfare rights issues faced by some users of the Tower Hamlets Foodbank.	Statistically represent all food bank users at Tower Hamlets Foodbank or nationally.
Contribute to recommendations about how benefit problems faced by food bank users might be addressed.	Demonstrate how many food bank users faced specific issues, or definitively demonstrate what might solve these issues.
Provide independent verification, establishing the exact cause of the benefit problems being faced (through expertise and investigation of welfare rights worker).	Provide the "official" perspective on events which occurred or particular issues.

### The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The design and conduct of this study draws on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), which has been widely used in the study of poverty internationally and within the UK.<sup>18</sup>

Originating from a community development model, SLA offers a theoretical framework and a practical methodology for understanding the complexities of people's lives in the particular context within which they live. Participatory research tools are used to identify the main constraints and opportunities people face, as expressed in their own words. Building on this description, asset-based projects using the SLA aim to help people identify their own solutions, working from their existing strengths and resources.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Useful introductions to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach can be found on the International Fund for Agricultural Development website: (<http://www.ifad.org/sla/>) and in the Oxfam/Church Action on Poverty *Sustainable Livelihoods Handbook* (May, Brown, Cooper, & Brill, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> In this context 'assets' is used to refer to all resources, strengths and gifts available to the individual or household. These are not purely financial but also include social, human, location and physical assets – see Appendix A for full discussion.

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One benefit of this approach is its emphasis on people as active agents who are doing their best to use the resources at their disposal in order to ‘get by’ or improve their lives. In seeking to understand each participant’s unique perspective, the SLA provides an alternative to reducing the complexities of people’s lives to abstract quantitative analysis, whilst also seeking to avoid extractive use of people’s statements without their involvement and outside of the context of their wider lives. Application of the SLA in UK projects has been shown to be beneficial in helping to illuminate the specific problems associated with poverty in this country, in particular in allowing consideration of both wider structural factors and the impacts of decisions made by individuals themselves.<sup>20</sup>

#### **BOX 1.5 STRENGTHS OF THE SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH<sup>21</sup>**

- **People-centred** – taking real lives as the starting point, with people themselves actively participating throughout the project cycle.
- **Holistic** – acknowledging that people adopt many strategies to secure their livelihoods and that many actors are involved (for example the private sector, national and local government, community-based organisations).
- **Dynamic** – seeking to understand how people’s lives change over time, and what influences them.
- **Builds on strengths** – rather than focusing on people’s problems and needs, and seeks to support existing livelihood strategies.
- **Promotes micro-macro links** – it examines the influence of policies and institutions on livelihood options and highlights the need for policies to be informed by insights from the local level and the priorities of ordinary people.
- **Encourages broad partnerships** – drawing on both the public and private sectors, and always seeking to include participants themselves.
- **Aims for sustainability** – which is important if poverty reduction is to be lasting.

Full details of how key concepts from the SLA shaped this research are given in Appendix A1.

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<sup>20</sup> Studies in the UK using the SLA include understanding the ‘poverty premium’ as experienced by families in Goldthorpe, Barnsley – *Paying Over the Odds* (Perry, 2010); building Sustainable Livelihoods projects in Thornaby and Stockton on Tees – *When Ends Don’t Meet* (Orr & G, 2006); exploring the livelihood strategies of people in poverty in London – *Voices for a Change* (2008); experiences of living on a low income in Splotlands and Riverside, Cardiff – *Making Ends Meet* (2008); exploring small farmers’ livelihood strategies in the Peak District – *Farming Lives* (2009).

<sup>21</sup> Adapted from ‘Seven Principles of Sustainable Livelihoods Approach’, <http://www.ifad.org/sla/>

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## PART A

# WHY DO PEOPLE USE FOOD BANKS?

Part A explores the many interconnected reasons why people turn to food banks, as highlighted by the three strands of the research.

This study focuses on food banks supported by The Trussell Trust, currently the largest formal network of food banks in the UK (Box 1.1). The standard referral procedure used across Trussell Trust Foodbanks means the simple answer to the question ‘Why do people use food banks?’ is that they have been referred by another agency which considered them to be in need of emergency food aid. Following an SLA framework, such a crisis can be seen to represent a failure of other livelihood strategies: people are referred to food banks because they do not have access to sufficient, independent, means for supporting themselves and their families. This assumption was supported by three key messages arising from in-depth interviews:

- People’s feeling that they had had little or no option other than to receive food aid.
- Explicit discomfort at having been ‘reduced to relying on hand-outs’.
- An express wish to rectify their situations as soon as possible, so that they were not relying on the food bank in the longer term.

Qualitative, exploratory research such as this is not able to provide statistically robust estimates of the proportions of food bank users reporting different reasons for using food banks. However, we can say that among the food bank users we spoke to, the overarching reason for food bank use was an immediate income crisis – being left without enough money to pay for food, alongside other essentials.

Part A of this report explores the nature of this income crisis. Following an SLA framework, the underlying reasons for referral to a food bank are broken down into:

- Setting out a clearer understanding of the immediate circumstances or ‘crisis’ which triggered food bank referral (Section 2).
- Further detail on the most common reasons for ‘acute income crisis’, seen in the context of the longer-term personal context or ‘life story’ which led the individual or family to that point. These include financial life-shocks caused by job loss, family change or homelessness (Section 3) and those which arise from interaction with the benefit system (Section 4).
- For many, the wider context of ongoing shortages of income (Section 5).
- Wider vulnerabilities related to the personal, local and national context (Section 6).

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## 2 IMMEDIATE INCOME CRISIS

### SUMMARY

For participants in our in-depth interviews, food bank use was primarily in response to an immediate and severe financial crisis: something had happened which had left them without enough income to buy sufficient food for themselves and their families. Most families viewed food bank use as a short-term or emergency measure.

An 'acute' income crisis – a specific, identifiable event which had left the household without any income at all or with a dramatically reduced income – was the dominant reason people gave for using food banks. Food bank use solely as a result of ongoing, chronic low income, without being attributed to a particular identifiable event, was less common.

Acute income crisis was sometimes caused by wider life-shocks which had fundamentally disrupted household finance, including loss of earnings or a change in family circumstances such as bereavement or homelessness. However, for most food bank users, the immediate income crisis was linked to problems with benefits (including waiting for benefit payments, the effect of sanctions or suspensions, reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments. The additional administrative data analysis and wider research supports this finding.

Accepting a food bank referral was often a difficult decision, described by participants as 'unnatural', 'embarrassing' and 'shameful'. Some participants described what they would have done without the food bank: relying on family, borrowing, going into arrears on rent or essential bills, or simply going without. Others reported that they would have been completely bereft without it, or might even have resorted to stealing to feed themselves and their families.

For participants in our in-depth interviews, food bank use was primarily about an immediate and severe financial crisis: something had happened which had left them without enough income to buy sufficient food for themselves and their families:

*'We didn't really want to come [...] I like to be able to do things on my own and that. But my Mam had brought me a bit of food and I knew I wouldn't be able to last on just £80.50 a week, especially with baby milk and nappies and everything. Because my tokens had just run out, I had to pay a tenner for baby milk and it was just like... I need to do something... so we came.'* Daisy and Eddie – couple with small child, County Durham

Accepting a food bank referral was often a difficult decision (Box 2.1). Many, like Daisy and Eddie, felt they had no other option but to turn to a food bank.

**'I WOULD NEVER HAVE THOUGHT THAT I WOULD HAVE GOT INTO THIS POSITION, TO HAVE COME HERE, BUT ONCE THEY CUT MY MONEY, I WAS STRUGGLING. ONE DAY I HAD NO MILK, I HAD NO TEA, I HAD NOTHING AND I THOUGHT, "I HAVE GOT TO DO SOMETHING."** ' SHONA, KINGSTON

It was apparent during several of our in-depth interviews that many participants had simply reached the end of their ability to cope. This wasn't always because there were absolutely no other options; for example, one participant said he preferred to come to the food bank rather than ask his brother for money, whilst others described how it was a choice between coming to the food bank or not paying other essential bills. However, many alternative options were in themselves high-cost or high-risk strategies (such as going into arrears on housing payments or taking on high-interest loans – see Part B for further discussion). As such, the decision to use a food bank can be seen as symptomatic of a lack of other options and/or fear of exhausting or overloading those other options, which were generally family and friends.

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## BOX 2.1 ISAAC'S STORY – DIFFICULT DECISION TO USE FOOD BANK

In-depth interview participants explained their decision to use the food bank very honestly and graphically. Visiting a food bank was often a difficult choice for many, and not one that people took lightly because of shame, embarrassment or fear of being judged.

Isaac is a father from Epsom, who had to resort to using the food bank after his wages were stopped unexpectedly:

*'I think because I have never been sort of in a situation where I have hardly got no money, you know, it's almost like I was poncing off of people [who had donated food] and I am not one for poncing. I like to deal with my own problems and provide for my own family, you know what I mean?'*

The financial crises which led to food bank use were 'immediate' in the sense that they were ongoing and close at hand. For some the event had only just happened, while for others it had happened some time before but the loss of income had not been rectified and so the effects were still being felt. Whilst there were a few examples where food bank use had gone on over an extended period of time, most families viewed food bank use as a short-term or emergency measure, indicating that they hoped to be 'back on their feet' soon and would therefore not need to return.

Analysis of in-depth interviews revealed that financial crises can be broken down into the following categories:

### Acute income crisis

- **Complete cessation of main income** – Absolutely or next to no income coming into household for a period of weeks or months. Examples of individuals or families experiencing total loss of their main source of income did occur in our in-depth interview sample, relating to failure of income from employment, full sanction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or change of benefit circumstances.
- **Dramatic reduction of income** – Household income dramatically reduced through loss or reduction of one element of household income-related benefits (e.g. element of Employment and Support Allowance [ESA] or Disability Living Allowance) or failure of tax credit system (see Box 2.2).

### Chronic income crisis

- **Ongoing severe inadequacy of income** – Income isn't sufficient to cover outgoings for a sustained period of time.

Evidence from our in-depth interviews, supported by the additional administrative data, indicates that acute financial crisis – a specific, identifiable event which had left the household without any income at all or with a dramatically reduced income – was the dominant reason people gave for using food banks (Section 2.2). Instances of food bank users falling into the third category alone – food bank use solely as a result on ongoing, chronic low income, without being attributed to a particular identifiable event – were less common.

Not having enough money for food is, of course, a product not only of missing/reduced income, but also of not having access to other financial resources (such as savings or the ability to borrow) with which to cover the gap. The impact of ongoing low-income was felt by many food bank users (as explored further in Section 5) but was perceived by participants affected by an 'acute income crisis' to be a less significant reason for food bank use than the sudden stopping or dramatic reduction of income.

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We found no substantial evidence that food bank use was significantly linked to participants not being able to budget or to difficulty accessing to affordable food shops.<sup>22</sup>

### BOX 2.2 KATH'S STORY – DRAMATIC REDUCTION OF INCOME CAUSED BY PROBLEMS WITH CHILD TAX CREDIT

Kath is a single mum, living with her three teenage sons in a private rented home. The two older children are still in full-time education. The youngest has various health conditions which require intensive support and regular hospital visits. He attends school part time and receives tutoring at home, paid for by his Disability Living Allowance. Kath split up with her partner four years ago, partly due to the stress of looking after their youngest son. That is also when she gave up a good job in order to look after her son full time.

Their home of the last seven years is in extremely poor condition; it is damp and cold, which has aggravated her son's medical problems. She has applied to go on the waiting list for social housing, as yet without success. Kath's house is in a very isolated location; this, along with no longer being in work, has contributed to her sense of loneliness. Nevertheless, she was coping until her Child Tax Credit was cut earlier this year without any warning, from £244 a week to £133 a week, even though she had informed HMRC that her children were still in education.

The cut in Child Tax Credit had a catastrophic impact on Kath's finances. Kath relied on her tax credits to pay for food and other daily necessities once all her regular bills were paid (electricity, bus fares for her older children, car insurance, TV licence, telephone, insurance, and debt repayment). The following is an excerpt from her interview.

*'From the direct debit bouncing, I left it a couple of weeks, then I couldn't cope any more. I literally had no money, and was sitting there with nothing.'*

***'So during that two weeks, how were you managing?'***

*'I wasn't, I was just trying to. We had nothing. It's like this week I have got nothing but I am not going back. I feel awful doing it so you just...'*

***'[You're not] going back to CAB [Citizens Advice Bureau] you mean?'***

*'Yes everything [CAB, food bank voucher and Crisis Loan]. It's quite soul destroying, when you have to do it [seek outside help]. They have been fantastic, everybody, it's not them, it's me, it's pride... I can't do it all the time. But then you can't not have money, so...'*

At the time of interview it was six weeks since Kath's Child Tax Credit had been cut and the situation had still not been resolved by HMRC, despite repeated attempts by the local Citizens Advice Bureau. It eventually took eight weeks for the decision to be overturned. In the meantime, Kath was surviving with the help of local welfare assistance payments and visits to the food bank. She said that the help she had received from the food bank had been amazing, but that it somehow felt wrong or "not natural".

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<sup>22</sup> That is the majority of food bank users we spoke to (in interviews and administrative data collection) attributed their food bank use either to one or more specific identifiable events which caused loss or reduction in income, or to ongoing low income. Whilst access to shops or ability to budget may have played a role in some stories, they were not – in the participants' opinion or in the view of our interviewers – the predominant reason they were using the food bank.

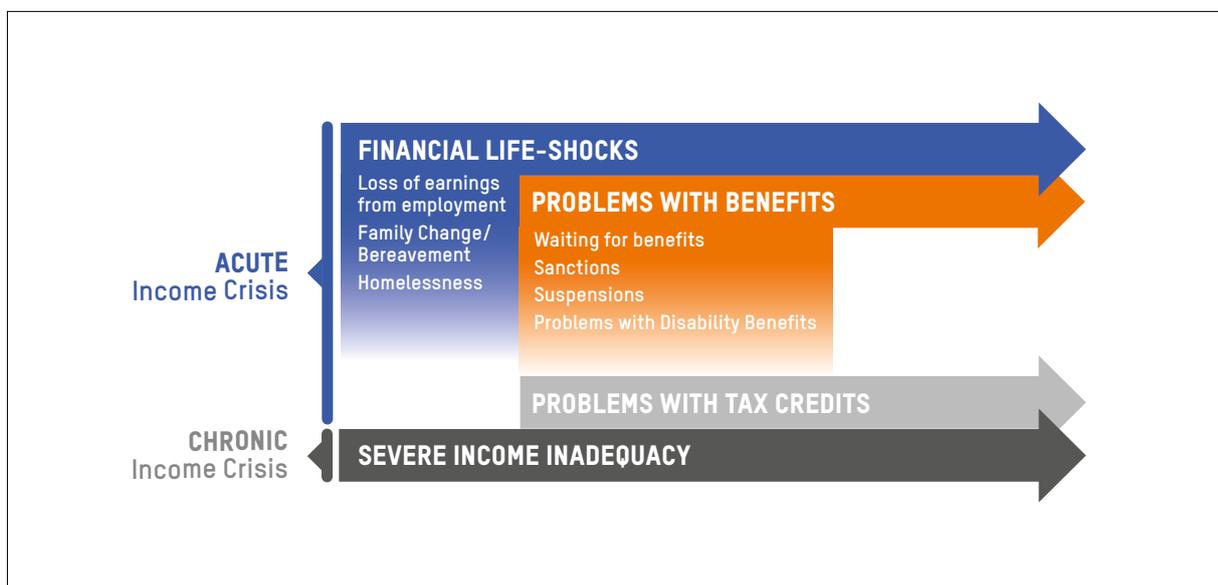
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## 2.1 ACUTE INCOME CRISIS

In the immediate or 'acute' category, food bank use can be seen to have an identifiable trigger related to a specific crisis which had disrupted household income. This crisis is understood in the SLA as a 'life-shock': a sudden event which fundamentally challenges the household's previous livelihood strategy. Food bank referral could occur simultaneously with the crisis (e.g. Jobcentre referring someone because of benefit delays) or come some time after, because the individual had deliberately sought advice (e.g., from Citizens Advice Bureau) or because a third party support service they were already in contact with (e.g. a housing, health or education support worker) provided the voucher as part of a wider package of support.

Evidence given by interview participants was supplemented by findings from our analysis of the welfare rights caseload to develop a second, more detailed typology of the immediate financial crises which can lead to sudden disruption of household income (Box 2.3).

### BOX 2.3 BREAKDOWN OF ACUTE INCOME CRISIS



At the first level, financial life-shocks – sudden life events which occur in the wider life of the individual or household, leading to a major disruption of income – are distinguished from reported reasons for referral which were directly associated with the operation of the benefit system. A third strand recognises that some food bank use is triggered by problems with tax credits.

In the in-depth interview sample there were some examples of financial life-shocks leading directly to food bank use, including:

- Isaac had to turn to the food bank when his income from work was suddenly stopped, even though he was technically still employed (see Section 3.2).
- Erica's family income suddenly reduced when the death of her mother meant the abrupt loss of income from her mother's pension (see Box 3.5 for more details).
- The breakdown of Terri's relationship with her family led to her becoming homeless and without access to her usual pension income.

However, what is notable is that more often one or more financial life-shocks had initially resulted in the household needing to access income-related benefits. Importantly, for these participants it was their interaction with the benefit system and problems with it – such as a long wait for benefits, a sanction, suspension or reductions to ESA payments – that had led to food bank use.

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The final strand in Box 2.3 recognises that income crisis may also be underpinned by what might be termed ‘chronic income crisis’ relating to ongoing severe inadequacy of income.

Before moving on to look at how many food bank users were affected by the different categories of financial crisis outlined above, some important analytical points should be made:

- These categories are not mutually exclusive – individuals or families can be subject to crises which fall into one or more categories either immediately or in quick succession, linked to the same event. For example, Helen experienced a financial crisis after her partner left, which was compounded by subsequent delays in the processing of her new benefit claim (see Section 3.3).
- Many participants’ stories reveal a complex life story involving multiple life-shocks and crises, such as bereavement or job loss. The key events which had led to food bank use are explored in Section 3.
- Specific features of the system for administration of key income-replacement benefits, which had themselves precipitated or increased the need for food bank use, are examined in Section 4.
- Incidents of ‘acute financial crisis’ can occur alongside a story of longer-term severe inadequacy of income. The various factors which may come together to result in chronic and inadequate income are unpacked in Section 5.
- The analysis presented in this section attempts to focus only on recent, specific life-shocks, distinguishing these from wider vulnerabilities which shaped the individual’s or family’s context, as explored in Section 6.

## 2.2 HOW MANY FOOD BANK USERS WERE AFFECTED?

This exploratory study was not designed to produce robust estimates of the prevalence with which food bank users experience different sorts of crisis.<sup>23</sup> However, there are two initial steps which can be taken:

- Whilst The Trussell Trust’s published statistics cover only users of its food bank network (and not those using independent food banks), they do provide an initial indicator of the likely scale of the problems among the wider population of food bank users.<sup>24</sup>
- The additional administrative data collected from three food banks as part of this study permit an assessment of the proportion of food bank users spoken to who experienced each type of issue. These figures are not nationally representative and have their limitations (see Box 1.4). However, they do provide three case studies of food banks in very different areas, giving a good indication of the likely prevalence of issues as well as indicating where commonalities or differences between food banks may occur.

The two sections below set out what can be said from these two strands of evidence, with particular relevance to questions of how many food bank users were experiencing acute crises (as opposed to only ongoing chronic low income); then what can be said about the causes of acute crises.

### Acute versus chronic low income

Data from The Trussell Trust indicate that across the UK, 58% of food bank referrals are attributed to what might be described as an ‘acute’ crisis (benefit problems, unemployment, homelessness, sickness etc.); 23% are attributed to ‘low income’; a further 7% ‘debt’ and 1% to ‘child holiday meals’; with the remaining 12% attributed to ‘other’.

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<sup>23</sup> Estimating prevalence would require a large-scale, quantitative survey approach including a statistically robust sample of food banks and food bank users. This was beyond the scope of this project.

<sup>24</sup> It must be remembered that we are talking here about estimating the proportion of food bank users experiencing a particular crisis. There may be many others who experience a particular crisis but who do not need to, or decide not to, use a food bank.

Analysis of the additional administrative data collected as part of this study suggests that of those who had a Trussell Trust referral reason recorded as 'low-income', 46% also reported one or more 'acute crises' attributable to problems with benefits. An explanation is that some of Trussell Trust's referral agencies may use the 'low income' category as a shorthand for a range of issues, including problems with people's benefits, as opposed to chronic low income. This category has been used by some commentators as a proxy for in-work food bank users; however, our data shows that, in fact, most households referred for this reason do not currently have anyone in paid employment (only 4-19% across the three food banks for whom additional data was collected. Appendix B, Table 10).

This suggests that although ongoing, chronic 'low income' is the main reason for referral for a significant minority, the majority of food bank users had recently experienced one or more acute crises.

### Nature of acute income crisis behind food bank referral

According to Trussell Trust data, 46% of food bank users had a referral reason directly related to benefits (30% 'benefit delays', 16% 'benefit changes' and 1% 'refused crisis loan').

The additional data collected as part of this study provide a good indication that around 50-55% of visits to the three food banks over the data-collection period were attributable to one of the three specified acute income crises attributable to problems with benefits (28-34% 'waiting for benefits', 19-28% 'sanctions' and 9-16% 'ESA stopped because found fit for work').

When food bank users had the opportunity to report multiple problems, analysis reveals the following headline figures (Box 2.4):

- Affected by one or more of sanction, delay, ESA stopped: 50-55%
- Affected by one or more of above and/or 'bedroom tax' or benefit cap: 59-63%
- Affected by one or more of the above and/or referred due to benefit change/delay: 67-78%.

#### BOX 2.4 INCOME CRISES ATTRIBUTABLE TO BENEFIT SYSTEM

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
	%	%	%
<b>Immediate income crisis arising from benefits:</b>			
Benefit delay – claimed a benefit that has not been decided yet	28	32	34
Sanction	28	23	19
ESA stopped because found 'fit for work'	16	9	11
<b>One or more of above</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Reduced benefit income:</b>			
'Bedroom tax'	19	9	6
Benefit cap	9	12	3
<b>One or more of all above</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>One or more of all above PLUS referred to Trussell Trust due to benefit change/delay</b>			
	<b>78</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>No. of respondents (total)</b>	<b>651</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>153</b>

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

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## 3 FINANCIAL LIFE-SHOCKS – WHEN THE WORST HAPPENS

### SUMMARY

Although an immediate, severe financial crisis was the ‘last straw’ that had brought people to the food bank it was rarely, if ever, the entire story. Most participants set their food bank visit in the context of longer-term life events, positive and negative, which had shaped their livelihoods.

Food bank users are not unique in having complex lives. However, it was not uncommon for the food bank users interviewed to have experienced several significant negative life events, which could be cumulative and compounding. Wider vulnerabilities, often the legacy of previous life-shocks, also played a significant role in determining how well individuals were able to tackle the crisis they were facing.

In-depth interviews revealed the following as the most common life-shocks associated with food bank use:

**LOSS OF EARNINGS FROM EMPLOYMENT** – this can occur for a number of reasons, including redundancy, ill health, caring responsibilities or delayed wages. Around 11-16% of food bank users at the three food banks where additional data were collected were in households where no one was currently working but which had experienced job loss, for whatever reason, in the last six months.

Income crisis related to job loss seemed to be a particular problem for those with little or no experience of claiming benefits, many of whom were reluctant to claim or found the system difficult to navigate. It could quickly lead to a build-up of arrears and debts, which themselves posed a long-term threat to financial stability.

**CHANGE IN FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES** – although rarely given as the main reason for turning to the food bank, changes in the family (adults forming or leaving relationships, new babies, or older children moving into or out of the family) can threaten previously established livelihood strategies and trigger a challenging period of change in the process of re-establishing a household (finding new accommodation, securing financial arrangements and registering for changes in benefits).

The frequency of **bereavement** among food bank users was a striking feature of this research. Death of a loved one can have a direct financial impact, through loss of income from the deceased but also job loss (because of time taken to care for the dying person or because the emotional impact on the bereaved partner means they are unable to work). Bereavement can also have an indirect effect through its impact on a range of other previously established networks and survival strategies.

**HOMELESSNESS** – this accounts for around 3% of Trussell Trust Foodbank referrals, with the additional administrative data suggesting that the total proportion of food bank users who are homeless may be slightly higher. Suddenly becoming homeless can disrupt income through loss of work or benefits. Equally other life-shocks, such as losing a job, can lead to homelessness and food bank referral. There were clear examples of participants living in fear of future homelessness as result of rent arrears which they were building up or because of suspended Housing Benefit.

According to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, ‘life-shocks’ are sudden events which can create times of significant financial crisis, potentially destabilising a family’s livelihood. Analysis of our in-depth interviews revealed that life-shocks associated with food bank use include loss of earnings from employment, change in family circumstances (including bereavement) and loss of a home.

### 3.1 ONE INCIDENT IN A COMPLEX LIFE STORY

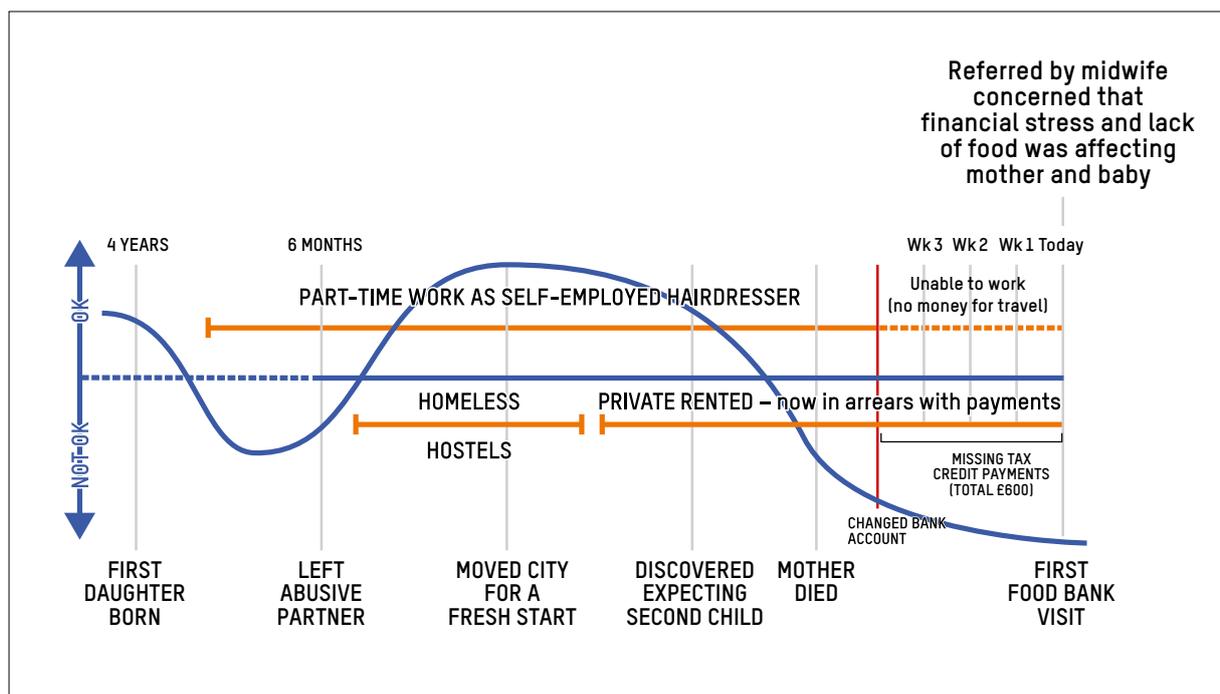
Interview participants were asked to describe in detail the events which had led to them coming to the food bank, using a timeline on they were invited to mark key life events and reflect on the extent to which things were 'OK' or 'not OK' during that time. An example, using the life story provided by Bernie, a self-employed hairdresser with a young daughter, is provided in Box 4.1.

Participant's stories revealed that although the acute income crisis was the 'last-straw' it was rarely, if ever, the entire story. Whilst some participants focused on the events of the last few weeks or months, others chose to start much further back, keen to explain who they were and what had brought them to this point. Some of the events described were positive, such as gaining employment, deciding to train for a new career, meeting a partner or starting a family. However, many were negative: stories of job loss, ill health and bereavement were common, as well as the long-lasting impact of family difficulties.

After the interviews, researchers and food bank volunteers reflected that these life-shocks are not unique to food bank users: we all have life stories and for many of us, those stories are quite complex. The question is why for some people life-shocks lead to food bank use. Part of the answer is that for the food bank users we spoke to, financial life-shocks had rarely occurred in isolation. It was not uncommon for interview participants to have experienced several, particularly dramatic, negative life events, including bereavement, accident, or physical or mental illness. These events could be cumulative and compounding. Families facing the kinds of life-shocks detailed here may also have a number of wider vulnerabilities (see Section 6), themselves often the legacy of previous life-shocks in the individual's or family's life. These vulnerabilities can play a significant role in determining how well-equipped people are, at a given point in time, to tackle the crisis they are facing.

Finally, currently in the UK, encountering the wider financial life-shocks detailed here will usually bring households into contact with the benefit system through making a claim for income-related benefits, where appropriate, or by registering a change in their circumstances for existing benefit or tax credit claims. For some this means claiming benefits for the first time, a situation which can be stressful, with many claimants ill-equipped and struggling to access support to navigate the system.

#### BOX 3.1 BERNIE'S STORY – IMPACT OF MOTHER'S DEATH AND MISSING TAX PAYMENTS IN DESTABILISING RECOVERY FROM DIFFICULT PAST EVENTS



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### 3.2 LOSS OF EARNINGS FROM EMPLOYMENT

Headline figures from The Trussell Trust indicate that the proportion referred to food banks because of unemployment varies regionally across the UK: 4% in England and in Wales, 3% in Scotland, but 12% in Northern Ireland. Nationally, a further 1–2% are referred because of delayed wages (Appendix B, Table 1). The referral figures for food banks participating in this study were similar, although unemployment was less common as a referral reason in North Cotswolds (2%) and more common in Kingston (8%) and Tower Hamlets (7%). (See Appendix B, Table 2).

Additional administrative data, which was collected at three food banks in the study, showed that around 11–16% of surveyed food bank users were in households where no one was currently working but which had experienced job loss, for whatever reason, in the previous six months (16% in Epsom and Ewell, 16% in County Durham and 11% in Tower Hamlets – Appendix B, Table 10).

In-depth interviews revealed a range of reasons for loss of earnings from employment:

- **Delayed or missing wages** – people who are still in work, but who are not, for whatever reason, currently receiving their wages. For example, Isaac unexpectedly lost all income from work when the company he worked for lost its contract for council services. His employment was terminated abruptly and, despite the fact that under TUPE legislation<sup>25</sup> the local authority was required to find him alternative employment, at the time of interview he had been left without income for over six weeks. As he was still technically employed he was unable to claim JSA or other income benefits, and his Housing Benefit and tax credits had not been adjusted to reflect the drop in income. The family had very little savings, describing their regular monthly wage of £900 plus cash benefits as being ‘just enough to get by’ for a family with three children. Unable to survive for long on the last wage package, they had turned to the local Citizens Advice Bureau, which had organised two cash grants under the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (for a total of £200) and food bank vouchers.
- **Redundancy** – unemployment in the UK is typically short-lived but for some can be a frequent occurrence, particularly among those in low-skilled occupations. This so-called ‘low-pay/no pay-cycle’ can be particularly damaging to livelihoods, leaving families risk-averse and vulnerable to other life-shocks.<sup>26</sup>

Income crisis related to job loss seemed to be a particular problem for those with little or no experience of the benefit system. Participants who had not expected to be left without work for an extended period of time described being reluctant to claim benefits (Box 3.2). However, not claiming and/or not being fully aware of any financial help they were entitled to could quickly lead to financial difficulties, particularly if it also involved a subsequent delay in receipt of JSA or difficulty navigating the benefit system.

In-depth interviews revealed that redundancy was also a particular problem if it led to a build-up of severe debts, which could quickly become unmanageable. For example, reluctance to engage with the benefit system was a particular issue for Nick, a young man from Kingston, because he had previously been self-employed. The nature of self-employment meant that it took a relatively long time for Nick to realise and accept that his self-employment was no longer sustainable. During this period he accrued considerable debts and arrears on housing payments, which exacerbated his financial difficulties and ultimately led to him losing his home.

- **Ill health** – the long-term impact of physical and mental ill health in endangering an individual’s or family’s livelihood is explored in Section 6.2. There were also examples where the impact of ill health had directly contributed to job loss and, in turn, food bank use (Box 3.3).

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<sup>25</sup> The TUPE or ‘Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment)’ Regulations 2006 (SI 2006/246) is the UK’s implementation of the European Union Business Transfers Directive, protecting employees whose business is being transferred to another business.

<sup>26</sup> (Orr & G, 2006) (Shildrick, MacDonald, Webster, & Garthwaite, 2010).

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- **Caring responsibilities** – for several in-depth interview participants, care for ill or disabled children or relatives formed a significant part of their life story, again often related to movements away from full-time work. Others felt their responsibilities to care for young children prevented them from working (or working as much as they would like). Crucially, not all these decisions were made by the individual: several participants’ stories involved being instructed or encouraged by family courts or social services not to work in order to be able to provide adequate care for children (Box 3.4).

Caring responsibilities represent a considerable social contribution, albeit one that is not measured in terms of economic productivity. However, for our participants they were also a source of personal vulnerability, sometimes with long-term consequences for the individual’s future work prospects as well as having an impact on their immediate finances. Several participants mentioned either not applying for or not receiving carers’ benefits which could have made a considerable difference to their financial circumstances. For those who did receive Carers Allowance, or who were planning to apply for it, this additional support was seen as an essential element in helping to make their livelihood sustainable.

### **BOX 3.2 MARY AND NEIL’S STORY – STRUGGLING WITH JOB LOSS**

Mary’s financial difficulties started when her partner Neil, who was a manager for a supermarket, lost his job in October 2013. Neil was initially reluctant to claim JSA and they were unaware of their entitlement to tax credits, so for several months they and their baby son were managing to live on £20 per week. It was during this time that they were first referred to the food bank.

In this difficult period the family coped as a result of extremely disciplined budgeting and a small amount of financial support from Mary’s mum. Mary was proud of her ability to budget effectively in difficult circumstances and saw this as a key strength of her coping strategy. Another strength was the fact that her relationship with her partner remained stable even under financial strain and personal discipline (the two adults spent very little on themselves).

At the time of interview the family’s circumstances had improved a little; they were now claiming JSA and Child Tax Credit. It was possible to backdate the tax credit to a previous date to compensate for the period in which they were entitled but not claiming.

At the time of interview Neil was still unemployed, despite applying for 14 jobs per week, and this was seen as the biggest barrier to further improving the family’s circumstances. The job market was seen as offering them little hope. Nevertheless, Mary retained a strong sense of positivity and an ability to cope in the face of difficulties, particularly because she didn’t want any sense of negativity or despair to affect their child. She also had a very positive sense of pride in her personal relationships and budgeting abilities – she knew the exact amounts and date of payment of almost every bill, and took personal responsibility for ensuring everything was paid on time each week/month.

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### BOX 3.3 CHRISTIE'S STORY – LOSS OF INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT DUE TO ILL HEALTH

Christie has arthritis in her hips, shoulder and knees. Until January 2014, she had been employed for six years as a care assistant in a nursing home near her home in the Scottish Central Belt, a job which she enjoyed. However, as her health deteriorated, work became more difficult for Christie. As a result she was transferred to a desk-based role as Care Co-ordinator. After covering the job for some time, Christie had expected to be given the job permanently and was surprised when, after being interviewed, she did not get it. She was told that she was 'not confident enough', though she feels her health condition was relevant to the decision. She describes the whole thing as being a 'horrible experience'.

At the time of interview Christie was receiving the 'assessment phase rate' of ESA, having been waiting two months for an appointment about her claim for contributory-based ESA. She had also applied for Personal Independence Payment and was waiting to hear about that too.

### BOX 3.4 HEIDI AND IAN'S STORY – LOSS OF INCOME FROM EMPLOYMENT DUE TO CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

Heidi and Ian live in Surrey with their young baby. They were attempting to rebuild their lives after Heidi's prolonged mental health difficulties, which had resulted in their three older children being taken into care. Ian was working as a lorry driver until the middle of 2012, when he had time off sick and then left full-time work because of the stress and practical difficulties associated with family court proceedings. He did some agency work after that, but was 'ordered by the judge' to give this up in order to look after the baby.

During this period, Heidi made a successful claim for ESA for her mental health problems, but there was an extended delay during which the family received no benefits and relied on family support, which resulted in them going into arrears with their rent. Ian was keen to do some work and had recently negotiated one shift a week, but they were still largely dependent on Heidi's ESA and Child Tax Credit, which was giving them barely enough to get by.

Ian directly attributed their use of the food bank to lack of money owing to the lost income from work:

*'We just didn't have the money coming in. Our benefits were up in arms because I'd moved in, but they had me down as being working full-time and I said "No, I am not working full time" and they said "Well, yes, but you gave up your job" and I said "Yes, but look at the reasons as to why I gave up my job": it wasn't I said all of a sudden, look I am not going to work, I am going to rely on the State to give me money.*

*'I have worked solidly for the last 20 odd years, I have paid more than my dues in, this [stopping work] was something that wasn't taken on lightly, but it had to be undertaken for the welfare of our family.'*

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### 3.3 FAMILY CHANGE AND BEREAVEMENT

For a great many people the family – nuclear and wider – is an enormous source of strength. Support from wider family was a key asset which food bank users said they rely on to get by (Section 9). However, for some, disruption to their family situation was a significant life-shock which played a key role in triggering food bank referral.

Evidence gathered from the in-depth interviews suggests that, although rarely given as the main reason for turning to the food bank, relationship breakdown can play a key role in the undoing of previously established livelihood strategies, prompting or leading to immediate financial crisis. For example:

- Helen came to the food bank at the suggestion of her mother, after having been left without income when her partner left. Helen had previously worked but had been unemployed, and supported by her partner, for the last year. At the time of the food bank referral she had just made a claim for JSA but payment had been delayed, for reasons she could not explain.
- Becky, a woman in her early fifties, came to the food bank because of a sanction to her ESA claim for failure to attend an appointment. The ESA claim itself was recent, triggered by a split from her husband three months before. Having worked on her partner's farm for most of her life, the break-up left Becky without home or work. The resulting stress led to her health deteriorating and she was put on medication for depression and anxiety. This was the first time Becky had been out of work and on benefits, and difficulty finding her way around the system was key to her story.

It must be remembered that for some, like Bernie, the single mother who had fled an abusive relationship, leaving a relationship need not in itself be a negative step (Box 3.1). However, even if the long-term story is one of improved livelihood, change in relationship status is fundamentally disruptive, affecting housing and other practical arrangements, finances and social support networks. The resulting upheaval can have a negative knock-on effect on physical and mental health and personal resilience. This may particularly be the case where the relationship breakdown has involved domestic violence.<sup>27</sup>

Although relationship breakdown can cast a long shadow, many of the immediate, practical, and stressful challenges lie with household re-formation – finding new accommodation, establishing secure financial arrangements and registering changes of circumstances for benefits. Our participants' stories showed how constructive steps can be assisted, or held up, by the institutional structures, programmes and bureaucracy designed to support people in such circumstances.

#### Bereavement

A surprise in this research, to the researchers at least, was the reported frequency and severe impact of bereavement among food bank users. Like relationship breakdown, death of a loved one can pose huge personal, social and financial challenges. Examples of the direct financial impact of bereavement from stories told by participants included:

- Loss of income directly from the deceased, particularly where their income made a large contribution to family finances (Box 3.5).
- Loss of income through participants giving up their job to care for a dying relative.
- Loss of income due to being unable to work in the aftermath of bereavement.

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<sup>27</sup> Trussell Trust referral data indicate that nationally around 1.4% of referrals are coded as being because of domestic violence (Appendix B, Table 1). This varied by food bank (Appendix B, Table 2) and is likely to be an under-estimate of the total number affected.

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### BOX 3.5 ERICA'S STORY – IMPACT OF BEREAVEMENT ON FAMILY FINANCES

Erica lives with her son in a small ex-mining village outside Durham. She was visibly upset during the interview as she described the enormous impact of having lost her mother the previous November. Her mother used to live with the family, with Erica acting as her unofficial carer.

Both Erica and her son are in poor health; they are currently receiving ESA, Child Benefit and tax credits. Since her mother's death the family had been in spiralling financial difficulties, as they used to rely on Erica's mother's pension which had stopped. They had experienced a number of benefit delays and reported finding the administration of the benefits system very frustrating.

Erica's debts, including housing arrears and a Provident loan, had escalated due to death expenses (her mother's funeral was delayed by several months because Erica could not afford funeral costs) and having to repay some of her mother's pension which she had accessed after her mother's death. Erica visited the food bank for the first time shortly after her mother's funeral, after it had been suggested by a friend that she approach the local council for support.

As well as its effects on income, bereavement could deprive the individual and their household of valued sources of emotional and practical support from the deceased. Some participants also described losing touch with their wider circle of family and friends, either because the deceased had acted as a point of contact or because of the wider impact of the bereavement on the family or social circle. The death of a loved one (and in some cases the deaths of two or more people close to the participant) was also cited as a contributory factor to seriously deteriorating mental health. This could itself become cyclical, with depression damaging ability to work and to engage with social networks.

### 3.4 HOMELESSNESS

Referral rates to Trussell Trust Foodbanks because of homelessness are around 3% (Appendix B, Table 1). However, food bank users may be homeless even though this was not recorded as the primary reason for referral; our additional administrative data indicates that around 3-7% of food bank users surveyed were homeless. Evidence from interviews indicated that some homeless people, particularly those housed by a service provider in temporary accommodation, may have been referred to the food bank by that service provider as part of their support package.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst it is difficult to tease out cause and effect, there were examples where having become homeless had been the life-shock which had disrupted income, leading directly to food bank referral. For example, Archie had been living with a friend after the break-up of his relationship. He ended up living on the streets when his friend's tenancy ended unexpectedly and difficulties with his family left him with nowhere else to live. Being homeless affected Archie's mental health and ability to work, and left him unable to claim benefits.

In other examples, as in the case of Nick from Kingston, job loss followed by a JSA sanction led to mounting housing arrears, and subsequent homelessness and food bank referral (see Section 3.2).

Other participants were living in fear that the life-shock they had experienced would result in them losing their home. Housing costs posed a significant challenge to the livelihoods of many, particularly in Kingston, Epsom and Ewell, and Tower Hamlets. Across locations, difficulty making ends meet and/or a specific financial life-shock led many food bank users to experience particular problems with housing arrears. For some this was because their Housing Benefit had stopped due to a change of circumstances (see Di's

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<sup>28</sup> Many others who are living on the streets and also hungry will be served by other forms of food aid.

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story Box 4.1) or sanction (see Appendix C2 for more information). Others described how their strategies to survive financially included not paying some or all of their rent. At worst, financial difficulties had led to homelessness.

It was striking that the life stories of many interview participants included past experiences of homelessness. The importance of housing and homes to feelings of security means there is a particular link between homelessness and mental ill health.<sup>29</sup> When things are going well, secure income and housing form an essential bedrock on which people can construct and maintain sustainable livelihoods. Conversely, financial instability, insecure housing and poor mental health can be very closely linked in a spiral of decline, with deficits in one area quickly leading to loss of assets in other areas.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/homelessness-and-health-research>

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## 4 PROBLEMS WITH BENEFITS – WHEN THE SAFETY NET FAILS

### SUMMARY

Difficulty in navigating the benefit system was a common feature of food bank users' experiences. The benefit system was often experienced as complicated, remote and, at times, intimidating, especially when trying to resolve problems that occurred with a claim. Lack of clear communication about what help was available or how to access it was particularly a problem for people who had always worked and never claimed benefits before.

A number of reasons for 'acute income crisis' were identified which relate directly to the operation of the benefit system, as follows:

**WAITING FOR BENEFITS** – evidence from the additional administrative data shows that around a third of food bank users reported claiming a benefit which had not yet been decided. In County Durham, less than half (47%) of food bank users who reported waiting for benefits said they knew they could apply for a short-term benefit advance (STBA), but only 26% of had done so and only 9% had been awarded the advance. Analysis of caseload data from Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that low use of STBAs is attributable to lack of awareness of STBAs, practical barriers to making a request (including lack of access to a telephone or being advised to use other emergency support, including the food bank, instead), and refusals of STBA claims that were shown to be legally incorrect.

**SANCTIONS** – of those food bank users for whom additional data were collected, 20-30% said that their household's benefits had recently been stopped or reduced because of a sanction. This varied between locations: 19% in Tower Hamlets, 23% in Epsom and Ewell, and 28% in County Durham. Themes emerging from the Tower Hamlets Foodbank caseload included lack of clear information about sanctions or hardship payments, sanctions made in error or affecting vulnerable people with health problems, and particular difficulties arising from the impact of sanctions on Housing Benefit.

**PROBLEMS WITH DISABILITY BENEFITS** – analysis of the Tower Hamlets Foodbank caseload revealed a number of specific problems which can occur with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), including money being stopped because of claimant being found 'fit for work' in an ESA assessment (which affected 9-16% of food bank users included in the additional data analysis). Other problems included difficulties with submitting medical certificates or application forms, and failure to attend medical examinations. The introduction of 'mandatory reconsideration' before submission of an appeal had also contributed to some food bank users experiencing significant periods without benefit payment.

**PROBLEMS WITH TAX CREDIT PAYMENTS** – these had led to dramatic reductions in income for some interview participants, causing real hardship because they had previously been relied upon as a significant source of income. These tax credit problems could be difficult to rectify, often resulting in long waits before missing payments were repaid. The welfare rights caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed that particular problems can occur with tax credits for those registering a change in family circumstances, and also for those who are not British or Irish nationals.

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This section explores acute income crises directly related to interaction with the benefits system. In-depth interview participants reported a range of financial crises which were directly attributable to problems with benefits. By cross-referencing these issues with the evidence and in-depth understanding provided by caseload analysis of the welfare rights work at Tower Hamlets Foodbank, the following typology emerged:

- Severe shortage of income whilst waiting for benefits to be paid.
- Income stopped or dramatically reduced by sanctions.
- Income stopped or dramatically reduced due to problems with disability benefits
- Dramatic reduction in income through problems with tax credit payments.

This section begins with an introduction covering general problems which participants experienced in navigating the benefit system. It then takes each area in turn, providing detailed analysis of why each particular problem arises. This information is enhanced by the experience of food bank users, who describe powerfully the impact on them.

Throughout this section the analysis attempts to distinguish between:

- Policy goals – what the policy was designed to achieve.
- Programme design – how the policy was designed to be implemented.
- Programme implementation – how the policy was actually implemented.

As stated before it is not possible, from this research design, to provide robust, nationally representative estimates of the prevalence of each issue. However, where possible, additional administrative data collected at three food banks are used to indicate the scale of the problem, supported by wider desk research.

#### **4.1 DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING THE BENEFIT SYSTEM**

Difficulty navigating the benefit system was a common theme of the stories told by food bank users. The system was perceived as complicated, with ‘a minefield’ of rules and regulations which were confusing to the uninitiated:

*‘... people who use the benefit system, they have an advantage: they’ve used it for so long that they know how the system works. But for someone coming straight out, you are like a deer in the headlights – you really haven’t got a clue as to what you should do, the dos and don’ts, don’t do this, don’t do that, don’t say this, don’t say that, you know, all those sort of things. I suppose it’s like a learning curve, where suddenly you wise up and you think well I have got to do this, I must apply for jobs... if I don’t do that, I am going to lose this.’ Nick, single male from Kingston, claiming benefits for the first time, after his self-employment failed.*

Some participants felt there was a lack of communication about what help was available or what they needed to do to access it. This had led some to miss out on benefits they were entitled to, such as help with transport costs or even more substantial income benefits. There were instances where lack of knowledge or understanding of how the system worked had led to a reluctance to claim, or to participants being sanctioned because they had not understood the conditions attached to their benefits.

**SOME OF THE LETTERS YOU GET, I CAN’T MAKE HEAD NOR TAIL OF THEM... YOU JUST LOOK AT IT AND THINK “WHAT DO I DO WITH THAT?” THEY JUST NEED TO BREAK IT DOWN A BIT... THERE ARE A LOT OF EDUCATED PEOPLE WHO CAN’T UNDERSTAND WHERE THEY ARE COMING FROM. JUST SIMPLE THINGS, MAKE THINGS SIMPLER, HELP US A BIT MORE.’**  
**NICK, KINGSTON**

Others experienced particular problems with the organisation of the benefit system: for some, this involved difficulty in communicating with benefits processing offices elsewhere in the country, requiring access to a telephone as well as the persistence and confidence to pursue issues over the phone. Several recipients of welfare rights advice at Tower Hamlets Foodbank described having insufficient credit to make phone calls,

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and talked of difficulties caused by the removal of dedicated phone points to call benefit delivery centres from their local Jobcentre Plus office.<sup>30</sup> Others experienced practical issues in getting to and from different offices, resulting in them incurring additional transport costs or having to walk considerable distances.

Many interview participants expressed disappointment at their experience of Jobcentre Plus. This dissatisfaction appeared to centre on how they were treated by Jobcentre staff, who gave wrong or misleading information, or failed to give the help or support the participant had expected to receive. Jobcentre staff were referred to as 'judgmental' and 'unsympathetic'. One participant, Helen, explicitly contrasted her experience of the food bank with the treatment she had received at the Jobcentre:

*'I had such a bad experience at the Jobcentre that coming here and meeting the volunteers and having that coffee really picked me up afterwards, so they were really helpful... the food bank lifted my spirits after being at the Jobcentre, which was terrible that morning, so it was a positive experience.'* Helen, young woman from London, claiming benefits for the first time, after her partner left (Section 3.3)

As well as offering a friendly welcome and a listening ear at a difficult time, food banks played a key role in helping people to navigate the benefits system, either by having specific advisers in place (as at Tower Hamlets Foodbank), and offering informal advice based on volunteers' own local knowledge, or through signposting to more formal welfare rights support.

## 4.2 WAITING FOR BENEFIT PAYMENTS

Evidence gathered from in-depth interviews demonstrated the hardship caused to people during the time taken to decide and process a benefit claim (see for example, Di's story – Box 4.1). Gaps or long waits for benefit payments occurred not just with completely new claims but also when changes in circumstances led to changes in the benefit claim. Stories told by our participants revealed that the stresses involved with waiting for benefits, often for an unknown length of time, were worst when the household had no other means of financial support.

The experience of our in-depth interview participants is that the period of up to 16 days specified by government targets may still be far too long to wait, especially for someone who has no other access to money.<sup>31</sup> For those whose claim was not settled within the target time, the wait could be dangerously long, endangering physical and mental health and relationships with friends and family, and leaving the participant particularly vulnerable to building up arrears with bills or taking out high-cost loans.

Difficulty in obtaining timely benefit payment also featured strongly in the caseload of the CPAG welfare rights worker in Tower Hamlets Foodbank. Caseload analysis revealed that extensive waiting periods can occur:

- Between benefit claim and decision.
- Between award and payment.
- Where an award had ended but that decision was being challenged.

Additional administrative data indicated that around 30% of food bank users<sup>32</sup> were waiting for a benefit claim to be processed or paid (28% for County Durham, 32% for Epsom and Ewell, 34% for Tower Hamlets. Appendix B, Table 3). As discussed below (and, with reference to local welfare assistance, in Section 7.1), awareness of various crisis payments available in different circumstances was patchy and often low, with very few food bank users receiving them.

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<sup>30</sup> See HC Deb, 10 February 2014, c513W.

<sup>31</sup> Current government targets relate to payment of a percentage of claims within a set time period – 90% within 16 days for JSA, 90% within 13 days for Income Support and 85% within 16 days for ESA – See Appendix C Box C1.1 and C1.2.

<sup>32</sup> Indicative approximation based on additional administrative data collected for over 900 food bank users at 3 locations between February and May 2014. See Appendix A for full methodology.

#### BOX 4.1 DI'S STORY – LONG WAITS FOR BENEFITS THROUGH CHANGE IN CIRCUMSTANCES

Di is a young mother, who was referred to the food bank because of a delay in her benefit payments. She was living with her partner and their baby in private accommodation (partly paid for by Housing Benefit).

Di, a trained nursery nurse, had previously been working as a carer for elderly people. Her last job finished when her employer discovered Di was pregnant, dismissing her with no notice and without paying her last month's wages (causing her to fall behind on pay-day loan repayments). Since then Di had claimed JSA, then Income Support (during pregnancy). She had recently discovered that the Income Support had been stopped and that her partner, a professional musician who is currently without work, needed to remake a claim for JSA. This had left the family with Child Benefit as their only income (their Child Tax Credit also having been stopped along with the Income Support claim).

The immediate trigger for the food bank referral was that they had been told it could take up to six weeks to arrange the new JSA claim. This was the third time in the last year that Di had missed benefit payments because of delays – the first was when she made her original JSA claim, then when she was transferred from JSA to Income Support. On the third (most recent) occasion there was no notice of the end of the family's Income Support – they only found out that it had stopped because of a letter from the council notifying them that their Housing Benefit had been stopped.

Di said she hoped to return to nursery nursing when her daughter is old enough. It was not clear whether her partner would be likely to get a job and the relationship seemed under considerable strain. The family were being supported by both Di and her partner's parents, but that support is limited.

#### Access to short-term benefit advances

Among both in-depth interview participants and food bank users in the welfare rights caseload, awareness that they may be eligible for a 'short-term benefit advance' (STBA)<sup>33</sup> was patchy and often low, with very few food bank users receiving STBAs at the point at which they were referred to the food bank.

Experience from the welfare rights caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank suggests that unless a person seeks advice or highlights their difficulties to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), they have little chance of even finding out they can obtain an STBA. People are not automatically told, when making telephone claims, that if they are experiencing hardship they can request an STBA and there is no information, other than the regulations published on the '.gov' website about their availability.<sup>34</sup> Lack of knowledge about STBAs as a problem for those waiting for benefit claims to be decided is also indicated in the additional administrative data: In County Durham, where additional data collection was highest (with 28% of food bank users waiting for benefits and therefore potentially eligible for an STBA), less than half (47%) of those waiting knew they could apply for an STBA, with only 26% having applied (Appendix B, Table 5).

Publicly available information shows there has been a significant decrease in the volume of STBAs compared to the equivalent payments under Crisis Loans ('Alignment Awards'). Based on analysis of data released by the DWP in a Freedom of Information request from the authors, the number of positive responses to STBA requests in 2013/14 fell by 80% compared with the number of Crisis Loans awarded in 2012/13. Part of the explanation is that far fewer people are applying for STBAs. This fits with the finding (from our in-depth interviews and caseload analysis) that large number of potential applicants are either unaware of the existence of STBAs or are being deterred from applying. More information is provided in Appendix C1.

<sup>33</sup> From April 2013, if a person is experiencing 'financial need' because they have made a claim for benefit which has not yet been decided, those experiencing hardship because they were waiting for a benefit claim are entitled to a 'short-term benefit advance' (STBA). This replaced the previous Social Fund Crisis Loan known as an 'alignment payment'. For more detail about STBAs see Appendix C1.

<sup>34</sup> Search conducted 09/10/2014.

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Analysis of the welfare rights caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank reveals a number of other reasons why food bank users who are waiting for benefit claims (and facing hardship) may not have made a claim for STBA:

- **Lack of ability to claim** - STBA claims must be made by telephone or in person at the Jobcentre. Many clients do not have a home phone and, when seen at the food bank, may not have credit on their mobile phone. They therefore cannot afford the phone call to make an STBA application. When attending the Jobcentre, several had been offered appointments days later.
- **Being told they were not eligible to make an STBA claim**
  - Client 06 was released on bail in August 2013. He claimed JSA and asked for an STBA, but was told it was not possible to request one. He was seen at the food bank 11 days after this. CPAG was able to call the DWP and secure a same-day payment. There is no legal reason why an STBA could not have been provided when it was requested by the food bank user.
  - Client 07 was 16, estranged from her parents and living in a refuge. She had claimed Income Support a week previously, but did not know about the availability of STBAs. When the welfare rights adviser called the DWP on her behalf they were initially told that an STBA could not be made in this situation. It was only because CPAG was able to explain that the DWP should, in any case, take an application and pass it to a decision-maker that her application was taken and approved. Had the client not sought advice, it is unlikely she would have heard about STBAs or insisted, against advice from the DWP, on her right to make an application.
- **Being advised by Jobcentre Plus to approach Local Welfare Assistance Schemes or use a food bank instead.** The Tower Hamlets Foodbank welfare rights caseload included examples of food bank users, who were destitute because a claim for benefit had not been processed, being given a food bank voucher by the Jobcentre without an application for an STBA being considered or submitted.

The welfare rights adviser at Tower Hamlets Foodbank also dealt with several cases where STBA applications were refused by the DWP decision maker, but where the benefit claim was valid and, after intervention on the client's behalf, claims were either paid or an STBA put into place. Two examples include:

- Client 08 was seen in the food bank in late August 2013, having made a claim for JSA one month before. The claim was held up because the decision maker needed to consider whether the client was 'habitually resident' in the UK (the client had lived and worked in the UK for many years, but had spent much of the previous two years abroad). The client had been referred to the food bank by Jobcentre Plus, having had two applications for an STBA refused. The welfare rights adviser wrote a letter setting out why an STBA was appropriate and explaining why it was more likely than not that the client was habitually resident (under the rules relating to previous residents). Four days later JSA was paid.
- Client 09 was given refugee status at the end of May 2013 and claimed JSA in mid-June 2013. She was seen in mid-August 2013, having had no income for three months, during which time she had been entirely reliant on her local church. An initial STBA application was refused because the decision maker did not have access to the case details (when a National Insurance number has not yet been allocated the claim must be dealt with clerically, and the papers had not been forwarded). CPAG sent a letter before action for judicial review to the DWP solicitors regarding the unlawful delay. Eleven days later the benefit was awarded.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Evidence from a number of organisations responding to the Home Affairs Committee's call for evidence concerning asylum seekers commented on the problems arising from the delay in processing benefit and tax credit claims. The evidence points to the problem whereby asylum support ceases 28 days after status is granted, but it often takes longer than this for benefit and tax credit claims to be processed. A recurring theme is problems around the allocation of National Insurance numbers to these claimants. <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-committees/home-affairs/130416%20Asylum%20written%20evidence.pdf>

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### 4.3 SANCTIONS

'Sanctions' featured strongly in the in-depth interview participants' reasons for food bank use.<sup>36</sup> Supporting this finding, the additional administrative data collected in three food banks indicated that around 20-30% of food bank users had had their benefit reduced due to a sanction. This varied from 19% in Tower Hamlets, 23% in Epsom and Ewell, and 28% in County Durham (Appendix B, Table 4). Sanctions could have a considerable long-term impact, especially when missing money was never restored even on appeal (see Box 4.3).

Most food bank users (according to in-depth interview participants, welfare rights caseload and additional data analysis) were not receiving hardship payments.<sup>37</sup> In County Durham, 68% of those who had been sanctioned were aware that they could apply; 47% had applied (about 70% of those who knew about their availability); and only 18% of sanctioned food bank users (30 people in total) had been awarded a hardship payment (Appendix B, Table 4).

Key issues emerging from Tower Hamlets welfare rights caseload analysis regarding sanctions included lack of information, incorrectly applied sanctions and sanctions of vulnerable people. These are discussed in turn below.

#### BOX 4.2 ALEX'S STORY – ONGOING IMPACT OF BENEFIT SANCTIONS LATER OVERTURNED ON APPEAL

Alex, a single male from Durham had been left living alone in a three-bedroomed house after his partner left with their two children. He originally visited the food bank after his income was reduced as a result of the 'bedroom tax', but his most recent visit had been prompted by two benefit sanctions within the previous 20 weeks. He appeared during the interview to be unclear about the sanction process, repeatedly referring to it as a 'suspension' and strongly expressing the view that the decision making appeared very arbitrary:

*'If they are not happy, if they've had a bad day [...] then they say "Oh, you have not done enough. I am going to have to suspend you."*

*... my benefits all stopped because I didn't put down the right job history, job search on the little diary they give you. They suspended it so I have had to fight to get that back. And it has been a fight to get that back – this is where [this support service] has come in quite good.*

*That's what's put me behind on everything, so that's why [coming to the food bank] has been a godsend: basically to be able to know at least I can get something to eat [...] the things I have [been through] before in my life... it can't get no worse than this, it physically can't.'*

Alex was aware that his benefits had been stopped for not fulfilling the set criteria for numbers of jobs applied for, which he said was 22 new jobs a fortnight (with no repeats). He reflected: *'Now if you think about it, if I did that for a year I would have to contact everybody in Durham, and [it would be like] stalking them because [the Jobcentre] keep saying to me I have got to keep going back and asking.'*

Both sanctions had been overturned on appeal, Alex's job search criteria reduced and his benefits reinstated, but not without disruption to his already tight finances: *'That's money that you don't have, you don't get that back, it's kind of that's your punishment.'*

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<sup>36</sup> 'Sanctions' are reductions in benefit income for a period of time because the DWP has decided that the benefit claimant has failed in the performance of some activity related to seeking or preparing for work. The sanction regime was redesigned for JSA and ESA in 2012, increasing the range of 'failures' for which a sanction could be imposed and standardising the sanction period. The background to these changes and the reasons why a claimant may be sanctioned are set out in Appendix C, Boxes C2-1 and C2-2.

<sup>37</sup> 'Hardship payments' at 60% (or for some 80%) of normal JSA rates are available to sanctioned claimants who can demonstrate that the sanction may cause them harm. Unless part of a 'vulnerable group', hardship payments cannot be claimed in the first two weeks of a sanction. See Appendix C2 for further details.

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## Lack of information about sanctions

The themes emerging from the Tower Hamlets Foodbank welfare rights caseload regarding sanctions included:

- **Letters that were unclear** – letters that were difficult to understand or lacked clear information about the specific reason for the sanction.<sup>38</sup>
- **Difficulty obtaining information from the DWP** – particularly regarding reasons for a sanction, as a result of multiple decision makers (see Box 4.3 for one client’s story) and different computer systems.<sup>39</sup>
- **Lack of information about hardship payments** – letters sent to those who are sanctioned do not indicate that the recipient can ask for hardship payments or explain the process for obtaining these. This helps to explain why large number of sanctioned people do not know they can obtain hardship payments.
- **Problems arising from the impact of sanctions on payment of Housing Benefit** – failure to provide clear information about sanctions to the local authority can have a particularly severe effect on the payment of Housing Benefit, leading in some cases to the threat of eviction (see Appendix C Box 2.6). They can also lead to, or exacerbate, problems with debt.<sup>40</sup>

### BOX 4.3 CLIENT 10’S STORY – DIFFICULTIES OBTAINING INFORMATION ABOUT SANCTIONS

Upon investigation by the welfare rights adviser, it emerged that Client 10 had been sanctioned for ‘failure to attend work programme’ three separate times by different decision makers in three different offices:

- Feb 2014 – decision made by Wellingborough Labour Market decision makers but reversed as client had been attending a job interview when not at the work programme.
- March 2014 – decision made by the Watford Labour Market decision makers, reversed as the claimant had been ill on that date and had phoned to explain this to the work programme provider.
- April 2014 – decision made by Cosham Labour Market decision makers, reversed because the claimant had had a meeting about rent arrears with her landlord at the time she was supposed to be attending, and had told the Jobcentre in advance.

There appeared to be confusion within the DWP regarding this case. In particular, sanction periods should not have overlapped as they did. However, from the claimant’s perspective, the multiple decision makers meant any phone calls and correspondence had to be with three different offices. It was also incredibly hard, even for a welfare rights adviser, to obtain accurate information regarding the case. It took in excess of ten hours of welfare rights adviser time to resolve these sanctions and ensure the client was paid, given the difficulties of obtaining information and the need to correspond with so many different parties. The client meanwhile, despite the fact she had obtained hardship payments and still retained her Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit during this period, had had to take her child’s Christmas presents to Cash Converters in order to pay for fuel. On redeeming these when she was finally paid she had to pay more than she had received.

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<sup>38</sup> A typical example of such a letter is given at Appendix C, Box C2.4 and analysed at Box C2.5.

<sup>39</sup> There is a separate DWP computer system for labour market decisions. DWP staff have to move between two systems to try to establish basic information, such as the date a decision was taken, date the claimant was notified of the decision, period of sanction and date(s) of alleged failures to participate.

<sup>40</sup> (Joint Public Issues, 2014).

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## Incorrectly applied sanctions

The welfare rights caseload also included sanction decisions that should never have been made, because the Jobcentre or work programme had been notified that the client was not able to attend (as in the case of Client 10); where the client had tried to notify that they could not attend but had not been able to make contact (Client 11); where the letters had been sent to the wrong address (Client 12); or where the decision maker simply did not have access to the correct information (Client 13).

- Client 10 (see also Box 1.2 above) was sanctioned on three occasions for failure to participate in the work programme (due to three missed appointments). Because of the cumulative nature of sanctions this would have led to her receiving no JSA (absent hardship payments) for a 30-week period in total (had the DWP applied the sanction periods correctly). The first failure to attend was because the client was at a job interview, the second when the client was very unwell and had phoned her work programme provider to confirm this, and the third when the client had told the Jobcentre in advance that she could not attend as she had a meeting about rent arrears with her landlord.
- Client 11 – in April 2013, Client 11 was sent on the work programme. As part of her work programme duties, in June 2013 she worked for a large cleaning company for a three-day trial cleaning the showrooms of a luxury car retailer on Park Lane. On the last day, Client 11 agreed to do another day in the hope it might lead to paid employment. She then attended on one more occasion to help out but realised that she would not be able to get back from doing this in time to make it to the work programme offices where she had an appointment that day. She telephoned the work programme provider at 7:00am. No one answered the phone at that time. She telephoned again at 8:30am and was told her Work Programme Adviser was not in yet. She tried to explain she was running late – she was told to call back later in the day. She called back later in the day and again asked to speak to her adviser but she was not available. She received a four-week sanction.
- Client 12 received a sanction for failure to attend the work programme because he was attending his grandfather's funeral. That was resolved. Six months later he was sanctioned again for failing to attend the work programme. Hardship payments were refused. A challenge to that decision was not resolved for three months. When the issue was finally resolved, the DWP decision maker accepted in conversation with the welfare rights adviser that the sanction should never have been made: Client 12 had maintained from the start that he had not received letters about the work programme, and it turned out that the work programme provider had sent them to the wrong address.
- Client 13, a young man living independently for the first time, was sanctioned because his adviser refused to check both of his online job search accounts on Universal Jobmatch. When challenged, the decision maker reversed the decision and explained he could not access one of the accounts, but was prepared to accept the job search had been done as claimed.

## Sanctions of vulnerable people

The rules provide that JSA claimants should be allowed to adjust their job search activities to make allowances for their mental and physical health problems. There were examples in the Tower Hamlets caseload which indicated that this was not happening. A related problem occurs when those whose ESA ends due to them being found 'fit for work' attempt to claim JSA – often they are quickly sanctioned for failing to actively seek work because proper allowance has not been made.

- Client 14 had been without his ESA for a three-month period: His ESA had stopped when he was found not to have 'limited capability for work'. He had attempted to claim JSA and was quickly sanctioned. He attempted to commit suicide in part due to this decision, and his GP certified that he had a serious deterioration in his mental health.

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- Client 15 has severe mental health problems. He was claiming ESA. He was sanctioned for failure to participate in work-related activity. His sanction continued even after he had agreed to attend another interview with the DWP. The client explained that what he had said to the Jobcentre worker when asked about work-related activity was that he was unable to work (as a matter of law it is unreasonable for him to be asked to do so). He had not understood he was being asked to participate not in work, but in work-related activity.

## Suspensions

The welfare rights adviser in Tower Hamlets Foodbank and in-depth interviewers both encountered a smaller number of cases where food bank users had had their existing benefit award suspended. Suspension usually occurs where there is doubt about the person's entitlement. Often the claimant was not told why their benefit has been suspended or given a timeframe for how long the suspension was likely to continue. Dealing with suspensions is difficult because the decision to suspend benefit is not appealable (it is an administrative measure to withhold payment for the time being, rather than a decision that the person is not entitled). Those whose benefits have been suspended are not entitled to hardship payments (although the suspension can be lifted in part or full if the claimant is considered to be in hardship).

- Sami, a young man from central Africa, arrived in the UK barely able to read or write, and was attending a college course to learn English. He was left with no income, from any source, after his JSA payment was suspended pending a sanction for 'failure to complete adequate job search', caused, he said, by his inability to fill in the paper or computer records required. The suspension was identified during the in-depth interview because Sami presented the letters from the Jobcentre, which he was unable to read or understand. Sami explained, apologetically, that he needed the food bank because he didn't have anyone to borrow money from, being so far from family and friends. Before visiting the food bank he had survived by making his remaining food last longer, asking for hand-outs from local shops and restaurants, and relying on the generosity of others from his hostel or course. He was now receiving assistance with challenging his benefit suspension, but feared the wait would be too long, especially given that his landlord was anxious about the developing rent arrears.

## 4.4 PROBLEMS WITH DISABILITY BENEFITS

Food bank referral because of problems with disability benefits were highlighted both in in-depth interviews and among clients seen by the welfare rights adviser based in Tower Hamlets Foodbank. The most common were problems related to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA<sup>41</sup>).

Around 9-16% of food bank users included in the additional administrative data collection reported that they had had their ESA stopped because they were found 'fit for work' (9% for Epsom and Ewell, 11% for Tower Hamlets and 16% for County Durham – see Appendix B, Table 5). For County Durham, the only food bank where sufficient cases were collected to enable further analysis, 53 out of 74 food bank users who had had ESA stopped had asked for the decision to be looked at again.

The additional data collection only captured those whose payments ended because they were found 'fit for work'; however, analysis of the welfare rights caseload shows many other reasons why ESA payments might end. It is therefore likely that the proportion of those whose primary reason for using the food bank was cessation of ESA payment is actually higher than this headline finding.

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<sup>41</sup> ESA is a benefit paid to people who suffer from a health problem such that it would be unreasonable to expect them to work (see Appendix C3 for full details). Food bank users also reported problems with delays to Personal Independence Payments and reductions in rates of Disability Living Allowance. These were less common and so are not covered in detail in this report.

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## Why do difficulties with ESA occur?

Analysis of the caseload in Tower Hamlets Foodbank reveals a number of points during the process of establishing and maintaining an ESA award where particular difficulties can occur, all related in some way to decisions or evidence regarding whether a person has or can be treated as having 'limited capability for work' (Appendix C Box 3.1 explains what this means). ESA payments could cease for the following reasons:

- Medical certificates not being logged by the DWP during the 'assessment phase'<sup>42</sup> or when an appeal is pending (a common problem).
- Claimants failing to return a form or attend a medical, because such claimants' entitlement cannot be established by providing medical certificates.
- Claimants seeking to challenge a decision through 'mandatory reconsideration', a process which can take months,<sup>43</sup> during which ESA is not paid; and for those refused mandatory reconsideration delayed payment where an appeal is submitted because of the time taken for the DWP to receive notice of an appeal, and then to act by reinstating payment.

## Missing medical certificates

Analysis of the welfare rights caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed a number of problems regarding missing medical certificates, including:

- Claimant not being able to obtain an appointment with their GP in time (see Client 18 below), or their GP not being in a position to provide a medical certificate for the full claim period (either for the start of their claim or when the period covered by an existing medical certificate had expired).
- Medical certificates submitted to the DWP by post, only for the claimant to find several weeks later that their medical certificate had not been married up to their claim.<sup>44</sup> In some cases, several original copies of medical certificates were submitted but none were linked to the file.

In an effort to ensure their medical certificates reached the relevant section of the DWP quickly, several clients took them to their local Jobcentre Plus and requested that the office scanned and emailed them to the section dealing with the issue. Their experience was variable: in some circumstances this worked, but in others clients were told they had to post their medical certificates. This was despite it being known that certificates would take at least ten days to reach the relevant section, and that payments would not be made until they arrived.

Two experiences from the Tower Hamlets Foodbank caseload are illustrative:

- Client 16 had been without benefits for a prolonged period because the severity of his mental health problems and his lack of support network meant he had been unable to maintain his claims. He was assisted at the food bank to make a claim for ESA. On visiting his GP to get his medical certificate, he reported that she deliberately gave him two signed copies and explained that this was because she had seen so many cases where the DWP mislaid certificates, leaving her patients without income for long periods.
- Client 18, a lone parent of one child, who had made a claim for ESA when her child turned five (bringing her entitlement to Income Support to an end) had been without this income for four weeks (having only Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit to live on – i.e. £83.86 instead of £156.27 each week for her and her child) as

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<sup>42</sup> First 13 weeks and for a longer period in cases where the assessment has not been conducted by the DWP.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/voices-frontline-mandatory-reconsideration>

<sup>44</sup> All mail is sent to a central mail-processing site from which the DWP then disperse it to the teams dealing with a particular claim (which for Tower Hamlets residents could be in Glasgow or in Hackney). Even in the best case, it appears (from cases seen at Tower Hamlets Foodbank) that it takes about ten working days for the medical certificate to arrive at the correct section and be actioned.

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she could not obtain a medical certificate. The reason she could not obtain the medical certificate was that she had recently moved to a women's refuge due to domestic violence. This had also necessitated changing GP. Her new GP had not provided a medical certificate as they were waiting for receipt of the medical records from the previous GP.

### **Failure to return forms and attend medicals**

Many of the people seen in this situation at Tower Hamlets Foodbank had very severe health problems (typically mental health issues) which were themselves the reason they had failed to manage to attend the medical etc. The rules on this area are complex (see Appendix C Box C3.1 (4)). In some cases, people had been seen only when they had already had zero income for several months. For example:

- Client 24 suffered from depression. When he was seen in March 2014, he had managed to abstain from alcohol for the last three months, following a long period of homelessness and alcoholism. His ESA had ceased payment in late December 2013 as he was alleged to have failed to attend a medical without a good reason. He had attempted to reclaim ESA but that was refused as there was no evidence his health had worsened. A request to reconsider the decision had been refused, but the client had not received a copy of that letter and thus could not easily make an appeal. Client 24's Probation Officer gave a witness statement to the effect that, in her view, her client was scrupulous in attending appointments and that she was aware of postal problems for other of her clients who lived at the same large hostel. CPAG emailed this witness statement with a request that the decision be revised. Twenty-one days after sending this request (during which CPAG made repeated phone calls to encourage the DWP to look at the matter promptly, in view of the fact that Client 24's health appeared to be further deteriorating and there was some risk that he would relapse), the DWP reversed the decision and ESA was paid. The client had by then been without any income four months. Had the DWP been able to speak to his Probation Officer at an early stage, it is likely that no refusal of benefit would have occurred.

### **Being found not to have limited capability for work; and mandatory reconsideration**

For some food bank users seen by the welfare rights adviser at Tower Hamlets Foodbank, the new 'mandatory reconsideration' procedure,<sup>45</sup> introduced during the course of the fieldwork, had caused significant periods of no payment of either ESA or JSA. The reasons for this were various:

- Some people simply could not manage to transfer their claim to JSA or attend appointments because of the severity of their health problems (Client 20).
- Others had attempted to claim JSA, only to find themselves subject to a sanction because they were judged to have failed to actively seek work, with no allowance made for their significant health problems (Client 19).
- A smaller group were simply unwilling to claim JSA because they felt it would negatively impact upon their chances of winning a subsequent challenge to the ending of their ESA.
- Even when benefit should commence following an appeal being made, delays in the DWP actioning this are normal (Client 20).

For example:

- Client 19 attended the food bank in early May 2014. He had been receiving Income Support on the grounds of ill health (the predecessor to ESA) up until February 2014; he suffers from diabetes and intermittent

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<sup>45</sup> Since October 2013, such claimants must first seek a 'mandatory reconsideration' of their case within DWP. During the period whilst the mandatory reconsideration is carried out, ESA is not paid. Claimants can instead claim JSA, but to be eligible must show that they are actively seeking and are available for work. Only if ESA payment is still refused by the mandatory reconsideration procedure can they then submit an appeal and re-establish entitlement to ESA pending appeal.

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severe back pain. In February he had been reassessed to see whether he could qualify for ESA but failed to achieve sufficient points to be regarded as having limited capacity for work. He had claimed JSA and been paid for about one month. However, he had then suffered a significant flare-up of his back pain and had been unable to attend an appointment to sign on in early April. He contacted the Jobcentre to explain and was told to reclaim ESA. That was refused, as the Jobcentre had not advised him that he would also need to provide evidence of a significant deterioration in his health. Client 19 then obtained evidence from his GP explaining his condition. The GP added that he was concerned Client 19 was at increased risk of diabetic coma (he wrote, 'I understand his benefits have been stopped and he has not got money to buy appropriate food and consequently his diabetes is becoming dangerously out of control. His benefits need to be reinstated immediately otherwise he is in danger of diabetic collapse, even diabetic coma.'). That evidence was provided to the DWP in early May. The DWP reversed its decision and made payment of ESA in mid-May. Client 19 had been without any income for over a month.

- Client 20 had also been receiving Income Support on the grounds of ill health and failed to qualify for ESA. Payment of her benefits had stopped towards the end of December 2013, leaving her with no income whatsoever. She suffers with diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and arthritis. When seen at the food bank in early February 2014, having lived without income for over a month, she was visibly struggling to stand, even supported by a walking stick. The client had phoned the DWP in January and said she wanted a mandatory reconsideration of the decision. In late February, the client received a notice that her request had been refused. The next day CPAG assisted her to complete an appeal form which was submitted to Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Service (HMCTS). HMCTS confirmed to CPAG that it had sent acknowledgement of receipt of the appeal to the DWP eight days after it had been posted. The welfare rights adviser called the DWP the same day (12 days after the appeal had been posted) and explained that HMCTS had received the appeal, and asked for ESA to be reinstated pending its resolution. As the section of the DWP dealing with the issue had not received the acknowledgement at that time it refused to reinstate ESA. Three days later HMCTS finally agreed to send an email to the DWP confirming that the appeal had been received. CPAG also faxed the DWP the copy of the client's letter from HMCTS confirming an appeal had been lodged. The DWP refused to act on this evidence. In late March, some 26 days after the appeal had been posted, CPAG received the papers for the appeal from the DWP (meaning that they must have received confirmation of the appeal from HMCTS). The client was finally paid ESA in early April (35 days after the appeal was posted to HMCTS).
- Client 21 suffers from uncontrolled diabetes and significant depression following the recent death of a childhood friend. He was seen at the food bank in late February 2014. He had been found not to have limited capability for work following assessment, and his last ESA payment had been made ten days previously. He had asked the DWP for a mandatory reconsideration on the same day as his last payment, but received the 'refusal to reconsider' some 36 days later. On this occasion, CPAG sent the appeal letter by recorded delivery. The next day it obtained proof from Royal Mail that the letter had been received at HMCTS. CPAG then immediately emailed scanned copies of the appeal form and other relevant documents, together with proof of receipt of the appeal by HMCTS, to the relevant section of the DWP (benefit claimants do not have access to these email addresses; they would have been required instead to post this proof of having made an appeal to the mail-handling site, from where it would take about ten days to reach the relevant section). CPAG also made a lengthy phone call to the DWP team leader dealing with the matter (again, a claimant would have had no access to this number) where the view was put forward, with reference to the relevant law, that there was now sufficient evidence for the DWP to accept that an appeal had been made. The claimant was paid three days later.

The difference in experience between Client 20 and Client 21 shows that significant input from a representative can reduce a lengthy delay between the submission of an appeal by the claimant and acknowledgement of this/payment by the DWP. However, claimants would simply not be in a position to do this for themselves.

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## 4.5 PROBLEMS WITH TAX CREDIT PAYMENTS

Several interview participants reported problems with their tax credits having stopped or been reduced:

- Kath gave up her job in research in order to care full time for her youngest son, who faces severe health difficulties (for full story see Box 2.2). Despite the challenges the family of four had faced since the parents had separated, Kath said she had been ‘coping OK’ until her Child Tax Credit was cut from £244 to £133 a week without warning. Payment had been reduced because of the age of the oldest children, despite Kath having informed HMRC that her children were still in full-time education. At the time of interview, the payment had been reduced for six weeks and was still unresolved despite repeated attempts by Kath and the local Citizens Advice Bureau. Kath described the effect of the tax credit cut on the family’s livelihood as ‘catastrophic’. She was surviving with the help of local welfare assistance payments and visits to the food bank.
- Bernie had been referred to the food bank by a midwife, who was concerned that she had missed appointments and was not eating properly. Reluctantly, Bernie had admitted that she had missed appointments because of the stress of a financial crisis caused by a problem with her tax credits, which had not been paid for three weeks (totalling about £600). The tax credits had stopped because she had changed her bank account but had not managed to notify HMRC before a returned payment from her old account had led to payments being temporarily suspended. Bernie said she had now sorted the problem and at the time of interview (in late February) she was expecting payments to resume in the next week. However, HMRC had told her they were unable to backdate the missing payments until the end of year review in June/July. This posed a significant financial setback for someone who was already struggling to rebuild her life after a sequence of difficult life events (illustrated in Box 3.1).

Analysis of the welfare advice worker’s caseload at Tower Hamlets Foodbank revealed two specific problems which can lead to particularly long waiting times for tax credit claims to be decided:<sup>46</sup>

- **Change in family circumstances** – when couples form or separate, or children move from living with one parent to living with another, a new claim must be made.<sup>47</sup> Client 22 had just taken responsibility for his two children, placed with him by social services because their mother’s mental health problems meant she was unable to look after them. The mother had been in receipt of the Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit.<sup>48</sup> It took over three months for the father’s claims to be determined and paid. During that time, the client attempted to support himself and his children from a single person’s ESA. He was offered food bank vouchers and a single cash payment by social services.
- **Where the claimant is not British or Irish** – HMRC’s policy is to process such claims within 92 days (this is over four times longer than it takes to process a claim by a British/Irish person). This can cause particular hardship, but at Tower Hamlets Foodbank cases of much longer delays have been seen, for example, that of Client 23 (a couple). One of the couple was British, while his partner was from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). They had a child (a British citizen) in November 2013 and claimed tax credits in December 2013. The client from DRC was a ‘person subject to immigration control’ and did not have a National Insurance number. However, the rules provide that in this situation she did not need one in order for the couple to obtain tax credits.<sup>49</sup> The couple were seen at the food bank in late May 2014 and their tax credit claim had not been decided. CPAG wrote a letter to HMRC solicitors threatening judicial review, setting out why the claim could in fact be determined without the need for a National Insurance number to be issued. The claim was decided and payment was made within 14 days, together with £50 compensation.

Short-term benefit awards are not available when tax credit or Child Benefit claims have been made but not decided, further increasing the risk of severe income shortage or hardship for people in this situation.

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<sup>46</sup> Both of these problems have been highlighted before ([http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/child\\_benefit\\_briefing\\_-\\_final.pdf](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/child_benefit_briefing_-_final.pdf)) but do not appear, from the cases seen at Tower Hamlets Foodbank, to have been resolved.

<sup>47</sup> Section 3 Tax Credits Act 2002.

<sup>48</sup> For Child Benefit, if a different person is to be the claimant then the existing award of Child Benefit in respect of that child must be terminated before the new award can begin.

<sup>49</sup> Reg 5(8) Tax Credits (Claims and Notifications) Regulations 2002 (SI No. 2014).

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## 5 ONGOING SEVERE INCOME INADEQUACY – WHEN ENDS DON'T MEET

### SUMMARY

Aside from immediate income crisis, interview participants described the ongoing impact of living without enough income. Long-term low income was sometimes a product of wages being low or unreliable, but was also attributed to low benefit levels. Some families were not receiving benefit they were entitled to, either because they had failed to claim or because they had had claims refused. For others, their income from benefits had been reduced through deductions for repayments or because of recent reforms.

Most participants described how using credit and debt formed part of their immediate coping strategy, but also how repayments of long-term debts had a significant impact on household disposable income.

As discussed in Section 2, whilst immediate income crisis was the dominant reason for food bank use, long-term low income was the background for many interview participants. For a few, this was the main reason given for their food bank referral, as in the case of Heidi and Ian, a couple living in outer London with their small baby, struggling to make ends meet after Heidi's illness meant Ian reduced his work hours to take on more childcare:

*'So if you balance [income and expenditure] up where does that leave you each month?'*

*'Pretty much up the creek without a paddle.'*

*'So that's really why...you use the Food Bank when you have to?'*

*'Yes, occasionally... we can normally... budget our money and think: "Right, we have paid this bill, we have paid that bill, blah, blah, blah, filled the fridge and freezer up". And then it seems to be, maybe towards the end of the month, on odd occasions something has gone wrong that we have had to spend some money [on], we haven't got enough in there and you think "Oh great, we haven't got enough to go and buy our food this month", and that's when we end up where we are.'*

Insufficient income causes real hardship and forces people to make difficult choices (see Section 8.1). Participants talked about struggling to cover the cost of gas and electricity, sometimes leading to decisions to dramatically cut use by turning off heating or sitting in the dark. Further problems were presented when ongoing low income meant that families or individuals found it very difficult to deal with unexpected expenditure, often because their finances were already so stretched that there had been no scope for saving for emergencies. Other families spoke about having to make difficult decisions to cancel family outings, even when they involved visiting their own children who lived away from them.

Ongoing financial pressure also leaves families vulnerable to the temptation to use credit to pay for household essentials. The additional data showed that around 20% of food bank users were using credit cards or other loans to pay for essentials such as food and housing. This sort of desperate financial strategy is double-edged: not only does the household not currently have sufficient income to cover resources, but the credit they are using will have to be paid back, sometimes at high interest, potentially storing up problem debts for the future (see Section 8.2).

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This section focuses on some of the wider causes of income inadequacy which, whilst severe, were more chronic, or ongoing, in nature:

- Low income caused by:
  - Low or insecure wages.
  - Benefit levels too low.
- Under-payment of benefits caused by:
  - Under-claiming.
  - Under-entitlement.
- Reduced benefit income due to:
  - The introduction of size criteria in the social rented sector, also known as 'Removal of Spare Room Subsidy' and 'bedroom tax'.<sup>50</sup>
  - Benefit cap.
  - Council tax.

## 5.1 LOW INCOME

### Low or insecure wages

In-depth interviews revealed that, in common with many low-income households, food bank users have a dynamic and sometimes unclear work status, including unstable or temporary work, part-time work (in the formal or informal economy) or insecure self-employment, so obtaining reliable data on their work status is difficult.<sup>51</sup> Additional data collected for this research shows differences according to food bank, with 19% of food bank users in Epsom and Ewell having someone in the household currently in employment, compared to 6% for County Durham and 4% for Tower Hamlets (see Appendix B, Table 10).<sup>52</sup>

For those who were in work, food bank use was directly related to their employment income being insufficient to cover individual or family living expenses. This was due to a combination of low wages and working hours being reduced through limited availability of work or as a result of caring responsibilities (as illustrated by Heidi and Ian's story; Ian was required by the family court to reduce his working hours to care for his children – Box 3.4). Others, like Aleksander and Elena (Box 5.1), struggled with income from work being both low and unpredictable; in some cases this had led to people stopping work altogether. Only one interview participant mentioned being on a zero-hours contract.

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<sup>50</sup> The introduction of size criteria in the social rented sector is variously known as the 'removal of the spare room subsidy' and the 'under-occupation penalty' (see Section 5.3 for further discussion). As the change was ubiquitously referred to as the 'bedroom tax' by research participants, we will use that term throughout the remainder of this report.

<sup>51</sup> Until 2014, The Trussell Trust did not routinely collect data on employment status. Many of those with referral reasons coded as 'low income' were thought to be in work but there was no way of independently verifying this, particularly as referral forms only capture a single reason for referral, coded by a referring agency, and so did not provide a reliable employment indicator.

<sup>52</sup> These figures are likely to reflect socio-economic differences between areas, particularly in employment rates and housing type/cost. Differences may also, potentially, be attributable to differences in referral agencies (i.e. a food bank with a substantial number of referrals from the Jobcentre or other employment support agencies is likely to have a higher proportion of users who are out of work).

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### BOX 5.1 ALEKSANDER AND ELENA'S STORY – LOW INCOME FROM WORK

Aleksander and Elena are a young couple living in Scotland who had just had their first baby. Aleksander was working between 20 and 25 hours a week as a packer in a clothes factory. He wanted to work more but there were only limited hours available. Both he and Elena had previously worked together in a bakery for four months for around 12 hours a day, but the agency they had used to find the employment suddenly stopped phoning them so neither had any work. Elena was seven months pregnant at this stage so did not look for another job, but Aleksander found work in the factory after a few weeks.

Aleksander was earning the minimum wage and said his income from this fluctuated between £100 and £150 a week. The family's only other income was from Child Benefit – approximately £80 every four weeks – so their income fluctuated between £480 and £680 a month. They had no other income although their rent was reduced by £20 a week because of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

The couple had been referred to the food bank by their family nurse, because their income just wasn't sufficient. They were finding having a new baby and a new house to furnish expensive, although were trying to save a little at a time to buy things for the house and the baby. Their estimated outgoings came to around £145 per week, including:

Council Tax and rent – £45 a week

Electricity – £10 a week

Gas – £10 a week

Food – £30 a week

Nappies – £10 a week

Bus to work for Aleksander – £20 a week

Top up for phone – £5 a week between them

Broadband connection – £20 a month

The family was eligible for other benefits and tax credits (Child Tax Credit and possibly Working Tax Credit, and a maternity grant, and Elena should possibly have been getting Maternity Allowance). They were either not aware of this or were waiting for claims to be processed. They described the lack of information on benefits, childcare etc. as a barrier to them becoming more financially stable.

Several working participants felt that their income from work was so low that they would always be reliant on the benefit and tax credit system, even if they were in work. This predicament was described eloquently by Gary, an unemployed manual labourer from London:

*'I'd like to train up, you know, so I can get off the unemployment list permanently, rather than just taking these minimum wage jobs that come and go. One minute I am there for a little while struggling, just getting my on my feet, and suddenly the work is gone, especially now I have signed up for an agency with zero hours. I mean, how's that going to work? I could be working five days one week and three weeks nothing, you know?... So I am still relying on the system, even if you are on minimum wage, you still end up relying on the system.'*

One family at North Cotswolds Foodbank actually felt that they were worse off since the mother returned to work (Box 5.2).

## BOX 5.2 VICKY'S STORY – RETURN TO WORK LED TO REDUCED HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Vicky, Wayne and their two children moved to the countryside from London in search of a better quality of life for their children. However, an accident at work resulted in Wayne having chronic back pain and being unable to return to the job that he loved. This left him battling with depression, and his drinking escalated. Coping with these challenges placed a considerable strain on the family, both emotionally and financially.

In an attempt to restore their family's livelihood and her own personal wellbeing, Vicky managed to get a manager's position at a local charity shop, a job she was able to apply for after volunteering in the shop for the previous two years. She had been employed since July 2013 but her employment led to a reduction in Wayne's ESA benefits. She says the net result was that there was actually less money coming into the house.

In addition, since April 2013, the couple have had to pay the 'bedroom tax', which has had a significant impact on their finances. The age of their children meant that they only had a matter of months before they would be entitled to the additional bedroom, so they were reluctant (in fact had been advised not) to move.

The family had been using the food bank for the last two years and without it the mother felt that she would have been forced to steal food.

Hope came in the form of ongoing treatment for the father. However, they both felt that there had been a lack of support from Jobcentre Plus in terms of helping him back into work and identifying alternative jobs.

### Benefit levels too low

The value of means-tested benefits has fallen for all groups in real terms in the last three years.<sup>53</sup> Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has found that out-of-work benefit income consistently remains well below the Minimum Income Standard for different groups (MIS).<sup>54</sup> Since 2008, out-of-work benefits for single people have amounted to just 40% of the MIS, and have undergone a slight decline in the five years to 2013. Single parents' income from out-of-work benefits has fallen from almost 70% of the MIS in 2008 to under 60% in 2013.

The stories told by in-depth interview participants provided several examples of individuals and families struggling to survive on benefits, even when benefits were fully paid and not sanctioned.<sup>55</sup> For example, Becky, who was struggling to adapt after the breakdown of her relationship (see Section 3.3), was clear that the £71 a week she received in JSA as a single person was 'not enough to live on'. She reported that she was left with only £23 for food and toiletries after other bills had been paid, and said she was therefore likely to remain reliant on the food bank in the near future. Others, such as Daisy and Eddie (couple from County Durham with a small child – Section 3), said they could financially survive on the benefits they receive, once a sanction was lifted, but described it as 'surviving, not living'.

*'It was so difficult [living on JSA, prior to sanction], honestly, it was difficult, I had to go without things. You get your, say £128 or £130... and you think about ahead what's going to come, what bill is going to come, what is there to be paid out, and you try and save something from that... it's just difficult, it's really, really hard, really really hard. It's not alright, I would rather do any type of job than be on this, it's dehumanising, I swear to God, it's just depressing.'* Raja, single male from Epsom, claiming JSA after recent job loss.

<sup>53</sup> [MacInnes, Aldridge, Bushe, Kenway, & Tinson, 2013].

<sup>54</sup> The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) project, run by Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, aims to define an 'adequate' income based on what members of the public think is enough money to live on to maintain a socially-acceptable quality of life (<http://www.jrf.org.uk/topic/mis>). (Hirsch, 2013) (Davis, Hirsch, & Padley, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> As seen above, this was not confined to people out of work, as working families still received income top-ups in the form of tax credits, and yet still struggled to pay for essentials.

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## 5.2 UNDER-PAYMENT OF BENEFITS

Some food bank users were not receiving all the benefits they were entitled to, either because they had simply not claimed (under-claiming, also known as 'claimant error') or because they had claimed but had wrongly been refused or underpaid (under-entitlement, also known as 'official error').

Government figures for 2013/14 show that £0.9bn was underpaid due to claimant error and £0.5bn underpaid because of official error. This included £40m of Income Support, £20m of JSA, £160m of ESA and £370m of Housing Benefit.<sup>56</sup>

Under-payment was difficult to identify in the in-depth interviews, but clearly identified in the welfare rights caseload, as follows:

### Under-claiming (claimant error)

Analysis of the welfare rights caseload showed that, typically, failure to claim benefits was related to one of the following reasons:

- The complexity of the system is such that the food bank user was simply not aware of their entitlement.
- The food bank user had severe mental health problems or a learning disability such that they were unaware of entitlement or unable to take the steps needed to claim.
- The food bank user had been wrongly advised (by the Jobcentre or social services etc.) that they did not have an entitlement.

In many cases, the food bank user who was under-claiming had never previously accessed welfare benefit advice, often because they were unaware they had an advice need. Provision of the advice service in the food bank allowed them to access advice in situations where they would not otherwise have done so.

### Under-entitlement (official error)

This category differs from under-claiming in that the food bank user had properly claimed all the benefits to which they were entitled but had, at the point they were seen, either been wrongly refused the benefit or had been paid less than they were entitled to due to a mistake in an aspect of their award.

## 5.3 REDUCTIONS TO BENEFIT INCOME

In-depth interview participants reported having a range of other repayments deducted from their benefits. These included repayment of old Social Fund loans, rent arrears and repayments of benefit overpayments. For example: Aileen was a vulnerable 20-year-old with a difficult family background and serious mental health problems, who had recently returned to Scotland after spending some time with family living elsewhere. She reported that her sole income was ESA ('assessment rate') of £133 per fortnight, from which £26 per fortnight was deducted for a budgeting loan which she received to cover moving costs. Others, like Helen, were affected by the recent reduction in the rate of Housing Benefit for those aged under 35.

In the financial year 2013/14, an estimated 1.75 million families in the UK saw their benefit entitlement cut as a result of four changes to welfare: Local Housing Allowance (LHA), the introduction of size criteria in the social rented sector (the so-called 'bedroom tax'), the overall benefit cap and the change from Council Tax Benefit to Council Tax Support.<sup>57</sup>

This section considers the 'bedroom tax', benefit cap and changes to Council Tax. Due to the qualitative nature of this study and difficulties in identifying when someone was subject to changes to LHA, it was not possible to include LHA in the coverage of this report.

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<sup>56</sup> (DWP, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> (Aldridge & MacInnes, 2014).

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## ‘Size criteria in the social rented sector’ or ‘bedroom tax’<sup>58</sup>

The introduction of size criteria in the social rented sector, introduced in April 2013, is variously known as the ‘removal of the spare room subsidy’, the ‘under-occupation penalty’ and the ‘bedroom tax’. It should be noted that all of these terms are politicised. Within the legislation there is a neutral description of the change, ‘size criteria in the social rented sector’ – this term is not in widespread use either by the policy’s supporters or its opponents. As the change was ubiquitously referred to as the ‘bedroom tax’ by research participants, we will use that term throughout this report.

**‘IT’S ACTUALLY DESTROYING PEOPLE’S LIVES BECAUSE THEY DON’T REALISE THAT £26 IS A LOT OF MONEY IN THIS SITUATION.’ ALEX, DURHAM**

For the food banks participating in the additional administrative data collection, the proportion of food bank users who reported they were affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ varied, from 19% in County Durham, 9% in Epsom and Ewell, to 6% in Tower Hamlets (Appendix B, Table 6). The lower rate in Tower Hamlets Foodbank was thought to be because Tower Hamlets Council had been particularly proactive in using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to mitigate the impact of the removal of the spare room subsidy for its tenants.

In County Durham, around two-thirds of those affected knew about the DHPs,<sup>59</sup> indicating that around one-third may have been missing out on help due to lack of information. Just under half of food bank users affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ had applied for DHP, but only 8% were receiving it. Nationally, around half of those who had applied for DHP because of the ‘bedroom tax’ said their application was successful.<sup>60</sup> This indicates that those with unsuccessful applications may be over-represented among food bank users.

Six in-depth interview participants directly reported that having been affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ was a significant part of the story which led to them coming to the food bank. Apart from food bank use, wider implications of the ‘bedroom tax’ included building up rent arrears and debts, and having to seek financial support from other organisations.

For example, Alex, a single male in his late forties, had been left living alone in a three-bedroomed house after his partner left with their two children (see Box 4.2). Although his most recent financial crisis was attributed to sanctions, he identified the introduction of the ‘bedroom tax’, which reduced his benefits by £26 per week, as his first reason for attending the food bank:

*‘I am wanting to move [...], so I am in the process of doing that with the Housing. I live in a three-bedroomed house on my own and it’s just, it’s pointless. It’s more expensive and it’s better on tax [to move]... I mean that’s what’s really made me struggle... that ‘bedroom tax’... it’s £26 a week added to my rent money, which is half of my benefit.’ Alex Durham*

He went on to list being ‘short of money and literally having nothing in’ as the main reason he was using the food bank, having been referred through a support agency linked to his housing provider. When asked how he was hoping to improve his situation, Alex was clear that he wanted to return to work. However, he said he felt hampered in his job search by the impending move, not wanting to commit to a job when he did not know where he was going to be living.

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<sup>58</sup> From 1 April 2013, working-age social tenants whose properties have more rooms than the DWP’s size criteria state that they need, had their rent eligible for Housing Benefit reduced by 14% for one spare bedroom, and by 25% for two or more spare bedrooms. DWP’s Housing Benefit data show that in August 2013, 522,905 households (11.1% of all social tenancies) were affected. (DWP, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) are made by local authorities on a discretionary basis. Originally intended to help private sector tenants deal with short-term financial problems, the government has made substantial increases to funding for DHPs to help some of those affected by the ‘bedroom tax’ or benefit cap and other welfare reforms.

<sup>60</sup> DWP, 2014, p. 39.

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By the time of the follow-up interview, Alex said his situation had improved because he had been awarded DHP to cover the next 26 weeks and was receiving support from a charity to pay off his rent arrears.

Whilst Alex was happy to move, some of those affected by the 'bedroom tax' were resistant to moving. Some families with children felt that the house or area was the right one for their family to be living in or were concerned about the disruption of moving. Another family had been advised not to move because their son was about to turn ten, making him eligible for his own room. However, in the meantime the additional rent payment had made a 'big, massive, dent in our financial situation'. Although the family were appealing against the payment, not being able to meet the additional payment had pushed them into rent arrears, raising the fear that if they did not prioritise paying their rent they could lose their home:

*'They could happily possess our house back off of us and where would me, Wayne and the kids be? We'd be out on the street. So we have got [to have] the money now to pay for that little bit of rent that we are supposed to pay... it kind of suffocates you to be honest, because it's all of them [the decision makers] that sort of rule your life, you don't really get to have a say.'* Vicky, mother, North Cotswolds (see Box 5.2)

### **Benefit cap<sup>61</sup>**

Analysis of additional data shows that 3-12% of food bank users were affected by the benefit cap (3% in Tower Hamlets, 9% in Durham, 12% in Epsom and Ewell – Appendix B, Table 7). The much smaller percentage for participants affected by the cap in Tower Hamlets may well be to do with the fact that DHPs are proactively used to alleviate the effects of the cap in that local authority.

There were no in-depth interview participants who had experienced the benefit cap.

### **Council Tax**

Even in our relatively small qualitative sample, there was evidence that the recent demands to pay Council Tax, especially when combined with other various other deductions from benefits, had played a role in people needing to use food banks. For example, Liam (a single male with poor mental health) said he received £143.40 JSA per fortnight, from which he had to pay £16 per fortnight for an old Crisis Loan and now £19 per month for Council Tax.

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<sup>61</sup> From April 2013, the total overall weekly benefit payment that a household can receive was limited to £350 a week for single people or £500 a week for single parents and couples. (If a claimant or their partner is entitled to Working Tax Credit they are exempt from the cap. This exemption also applies if someone in the household is on certain disability-related benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or War Pensions).

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## 6 WIDER VULNERABILITIES: PERSONAL, LOCAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

### SUMMARY

In-depth interviews identified a number of specific factors which appeared to make individuals or families either more likely to be hit by significant life-shocks or less likely to be able to cope when they do occur:

- Experience of living in the local area, including access to jobs, shops and other services, the housing market and transport costs.
- Impact of physical and mental illness on individuals and the wider household, with illness and/or caring responsibilities affecting not only ability to work but also capacity to deal with other crises.
- Difficulty obtaining or proving educational qualifications or skills.
- Problems with housing.
- Isolation or lack of family support.
- Large debt repayments which reduce disposable income at source and potentially lead to spiralling financial problems

Many of us have complex lives and we are all likely to experience a number of life-shocks. However, low-income families may be more likely to be hit hard by financial shocks and less able to cope with/respond to them. The 'asset-based approach' used for the in-depth interviews identified a number of specific factors underlying this.

This section covers aspects of life in the local area, the impact of physical and mental illness, lack of qualifications, problems with housing and isolation. A further key vulnerability, the role of large debt repayments in diminishing disposable household income (especially where debt repayments are deducted at source is covered in full in Section 8.2.

### 6.1 LOCAL AREA

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) looks at the role of the local context in shaping individual's and family's livelihoods. Although we were not able to conduct an in-depth mapping exercise for each local area, the in-depth interviews did indicate both that the socio-economic context of the local area did affect people's lives and that this varied between different areas. Main concerns focused on access to services and jobs, together with the cost of transport. A final local challenge concerned the housing market, covered in Section 6.4.

**'THERE ARE PROBLEMS WITH THE LACK OF JOBS TO APPLY FOR IN THE NORTH EAST, WHICH MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO [SHOW] EVIDENCE THAT YOU ARE CONSTANTLY APPLYING FOR JOBS ON YOUR JOBSEEKER'S FORM.' ALEX, DURHAM**

#### Access to services

Several participants mentioned problems with accessing shops (leading to increased food costs) and other services, such as medical and educational provision or the Jobcentre. The cost and logistical issues in arranging transport was cited as a reason for not accessing services, including advice centres or offices distributing local welfare assistance grants or Scottish Welfare Fund, particularly if these were situated some way from where participants lived.

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## Access to jobs

With work playing such a key role in participants' stories, it is unsurprising that participants, particularly those who were actively seeking work, reflected on the availability of jobs in the local area. Generally those who commented felt that there were not enough jobs locally. There were indications that access to jobs did present slightly different challenges in different areas: participants in County Durham, North Cotswolds and West Lothian said it was hard to access any jobs at all, because there were none in the immediate vicinity and it was difficult to get transport to access work in larger urban centres. For participants in the south east of England (Epsom and Ewell, Kingston and Tower Hamlets), the problems revolved around there not being enough jobs to go round, particularly unskilled jobs, jobs deemed 'suitable' or those that paid well enough. For example, Ron from Kingston reflected that lack of jobs was the biggest barrier to improving his livelihood. Despite applying for 14 jobs per week, the job market was seen as offering little hope:

*'There are not very many jobs out there, like, there are so many on the internet but you apply for them and you won't get nothing back.'* Similarly, Ron felt that in his line of work, as an HGV driver, the current economic conditions made it very hard to get work: *'There is that many HGV 2 drivers out there with loads of experience, if you see a bloke in a rigid lorry it will be an old boy, you never see young faces, it's dead men's shoes, you have got to know somebody to get in.'*

## Transport

Costs and difficulties with transport also presented a big challenge to creating and sustaining livelihoods, in particular by affecting people's ability to find and keep work. Participants described having jobs in the past which they had lost or had had to leave because of problems with transport. This was particularly an issue for work outside regular hours – for example, Robbie described having been sacked from his catering job in a country hotel in West Lothian because of having to run for the last night bus home rather than working late to complete tasks. Erica described not being able to keep work in factory jobs in Newcastle because of the difficulty of being able to make early starts before the buses ran. Zane reflected that it was difficult to get jobs which paid well enough, with a particular view to meeting the extra transport costs for those living in his relatively rural area in the north Cotswolds.

Transport was also seen as essential to maintaining other crucial elements of livelihood, such as access to children living elsewhere and to wider social networks of family and friends. It appears this may have been a particular problem for those living in Greater London, who tended to have friends and family living a bus or train journey away but who struggled to find money to pay the fare. It is possible that those in more rural areas, without transport links, just settled for seeing friends and relatives much less frequently (if at all) or had a car, in itself a considerable financial burden.

Access to work and services, along with strong family networks, are all key strategies which individuals use to prevent or ameliorate the impact of poverty and low income. Difficulty meeting transport costs meant either missing out or going without in other areas, creating vulnerability to income crisis and food bank use.

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## 6.2 HEALTH

### Physical illness or disability

Around two-thirds of participants in the in-depth interviews mentioned serious debilitating physical illness or disability in the household. Whilst this qualitative sample cannot be taken as statistically representative, it illustrates the very high prevalence of physical ill health among food bank users. The most common health problems were back or leg pain and mobility-related issues, or diabetes and asthma. In some cases the participant themselves was affected; sometimes others in the household suffered ill health. Life could be particularly difficult when illness affected more than one member of the family, including children, creating considerable multiple caring responsibilities for others in the household.

For most in-depth interview participants, illness was not the immediate cause of food bank referral; however, it was clearly a significant background vulnerability, affecting work but also their ability to be self-sufficient in range of other ways, including accessing services and benefits.

### Mental health

Similarly, depression and anxiety were extremely prevalent among in-depth interview participants. Nearly all participants openly mentioned some sort of mental health issues, with others describing circumstances where mental health clearly was a factor even though it was not explicitly mentioned. Many mentioned that more than one person in their household struggled with their mental health.

As well as being a specific financial life-shock that forms the immediate trigger for food bank referral, for a significant number of participants past bereavements cast a long shadow over their current situation. In particular the death of loved one, and sometimes the deaths of two or more people close to them, was cited as a contributory factor to seriously deteriorating mental health (see Section 3.3 for full discussion).

Analysis of the stories told in the in-depth interviews revealed potentially four distinct chains of influence between mental health and food bank use:

- **Mental illness as a direct vulnerability, with a close connection to the immediate financial crisis** – for example, Barbara, a former teacher living in Scotland whose mental health had deteriorated rapidly after the death of her partner, had to access the food bank after her benefits were stopped for three months. This was because, due to her severe mental health problems, she had repeatedly failed to attend her work capability assessment. She described the situation as being ‘entirely my own fault’.
- **Mental illness as an indirect vulnerability, adding to the burden of the immediate financial crisis** – for example, Alex had stopped work to care for his children, but became depressed after his partner left taking the children with her (Box 4.2). His depression had contributed to escalating personal problems and mounting debts, and stresses which had made it more difficult for him to secure a job. Although he directly attributed his food bank referral to difficulties with the ‘bedroom tax’ and reported previous referrals due to sanctions, mental ill health clearly played a part in the wider vulnerabilities which had prevented him from rebuilding his life.
- **Mental illness exacerbated by the immediate financial crisis.** There were several examples of participants pre-existing mental health issues being considerably worsened by the effect of the financial crisis. For example:
  - Becky, who had been sanctioned because she did not realise she was due at the Jobcentre on a particular day, identified that the stress of being without money and the uncertainty of waiting for benefits had considerably worsened her depression (see Section 3.3 for more details).

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- Liam, a single man from Epsom, had struggled to hold down jobs in the past owing to long-term mental health problems. His recent difficulties had started when his father, the only person he was really close to, died about 18 months ago. At about the same time, he was moved onto JSA, having previously been signed off work for depression. He was subsequently sanctioned (in March 2013) for missing an appointment with his adviser. The financial and personal implications of the sanction left him in a very bad state for several months, barely leaving the house, drinking and not eating properly. Fortunately, he was rescued by one of his neighbours (see Section 9.4), who helped to sort out his benefits with the Job Centre, so narrowly avoiding eviction for missed rent payments.

- **Mental illness preventing wider recovery** – the wider effects of depression left participants demotivated and lacking energy or confidence. In some cases, such as that of Pete from Kingston who had lost both his accommodation and place on a course following a JSA sanction (see Box 9.1), these mental problems were both compounded by their immediate financial crisis and themselves prevented recovery.

**‘RIGHT, WHAT’S STOPPING YOU [TAKING STEPS TO SORT OUT PROBLEMS] AT THE MOMENT?’ ‘WELL, HOMELESSNESS, STARVATION, LACK OF ANY INCOME WHATSOEVER, WORRY, STRESS, ANXIETY, SLEEP DEPRIVATION, THESE SORTS OF THINGS.’**  
**PETE, KINGSTON**

Most damagingly, more than one of these chains of influence could be true for the same person, quickly creating a situation where deepening struggles with mental health inhibited other coping mechanisms or exacerbated wider crises.

Our findings are supported by research on the prevalence of mental health problems among people who are sanctioned. A recent Freedom of Information request found that six out of ten adverse sanctions of ESA were made for people with mental or behavioural disorders.<sup>62</sup> Other research found that 15% of JSA claimants had neurotic symptoms that warranted treatment, twice the rate for the general population.<sup>63</sup> A study by the mental health charity Mind found low levels of specialist employment support for people with mental health problems, and high levels of severe anxiety over the threat of losing income as a consequence of being unable to access mandatory work-related activities.<sup>64</sup> Such evidence resonates with our understanding of how mental health can be a directly or indirectly contributing factor to an immediate financial crisis.

## 6.3 EDUCATION AND SKILLS

### Formal qualifications

The in-depth interview process did not set out to obtain a systematic cross-section of different levels of formal qualifications. Nevertheless, participants included those with degree-level qualifications, highest qualification at tertiary/post-16 level, GCSE (or equivalent) and those with no formal qualifications. There were also those with work-related qualifications, such as having being a qualified electrician, hairdresser, chef or tree-surgeon. Although the achieved sample had greater numbers of those with low or no qualifications, the fact that even such a small sample picked up those with higher qualifications indicates that food bank users are not confined to those with poor qualification levels.

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<sup>62</sup> Freedom of Information request 2014-79, 18 March 2014, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/295384/foi-79-2014.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/295384/foi-79-2014.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> [DWP, 2012].

<sup>64</sup> [Hale, 2014].

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Many of those without formal qualifications (particularly work-related qualifications) did point to this being a barrier:

*'Well I left school, I went to college and did music, I did that for two and a half years and I have been on Jobseeker's since then... so we are talking a good about seven years-ish. Yes I mean unfortunately when you come out of a music college, with music qualifications, it's not really the best thing to get a job with, I mean a normal job. And the music industry is not exactly the best industry in the world at the moment to get a job in so I was a bit stuck. I thought I was going to be cool and being a hit music guy, yes if I go back in time... I should probably go and do something else at college, like I probably would have got a job. But I've got past the point where I can afford to get the course to get the job. So I am just stuck in a rut where I have got a CV with nothing on so, who is going to employ someone with a CV with nothing on it? It's ridiculous.'* Eddie, father from County Durham

The requirement for formal certification of qualifications and experience was a barrier for many, and seen by some as a particular feature of modern life. Gary, a single man in his forties had a good work history since leaving school, labouring in the construction industry and most recently working for supermarkets:

*'[In the past] you'd turn up, get interviewed, you'd talk to them and they'd say "Okay it's good what you have done"... You tell them, that's it, you didn't really need to produce nothing... But now they want you to produce everything, all your paperwork. They asked me about my schooling, I left school without any education because I went straight into work. So times have changed and people who have been in work regularly for years are now finding they are unemployed, and it's a completely alien world to them. Even when I tried to get back on the building site, I have to have a CSCS card<sup>65</sup> and they always say [you have to have] this Health and Safety stuff, whereas we used to learn it on the job, you know.'* Gary, manual labourer from London

A further problem was faced by those who had lost their qualification certificates and could not afford to replace them. This seemed to be a particular issue for those who had experienced spells of homelessness.

### Language and literacy

The worst problems were faced by those who had problems with language and literacy, either because English wasn't their first language or because they had specific learning disabilities, particularly dyslexia, which affected their ability to read and write.

Several in-depth interview participants reported that the specific problems which had brought them to the food bank were directly related to their difficulties with English. For example, Sami had his benefit suspended because he had been unable to adequately record his job search activities, with no allowance made for the fact that he was unable to read or write (see Section 4.3). Participants with language problems were particularly angry when they felt that they were being penalised for their difficulties, when they actually needed additional support:

*'I really need the help and I don't have any person who can help me with English... I don't know what to do until now. I know how to write formal letter but my English is too low to write this letter, I tried so many times; I started to and I didn't finish.'* Francesca, moved to UK from Lithuania with her teenage daughter

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<sup>65</sup> CSCS is a certification card scheme for construction workers.

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## 6.4 HOUSING

Housing, particularly the extent to which housing could be considered an adequate, safe and secure home, featured prominently in participants' accounts of their current circumstances.<sup>66</sup>

Additional administrative data collected by three participating food banks demonstrates that the type of housing lived in by food bank users differed considerably according to location (Appendix B, Table 9). Very few food bank users were owner-occupiers (1-3%). The proportion in private rented accommodation was much higher in Durham (36%) than London (18% for Epsom and Ewell, 12% for Tower Hamlets); this is likely to be due to differences in the local housing market. The majority of food bank users were in social housing, with a split between local authority housing (30% for Durham, 19% for Tower Hamlets, 8% for Epsom and Ewell) and housing association properties (21% for Durham, 54% for Tower Hamlets, 63% for Epsom and Ewell). There are a number of potential explanations for this finding, including that social housing tenants are more likely to access (or be able to access) the kind of support from housing services, the housing association or other tenant support services, which leads to a food bank referral.

### Housing – suitability and security

At its best, a good home provided physical and emotional security, particularly for those who had a history of homelessness or of living in temporary accommodation. At the other end of the spectrum insecure, unsuitable, unsafe housing could significantly affect participants, damaging physical and mental health as well as financial security. The significance of housing for a financially and emotionally sustainable livelihood meant it was a real vulnerability for some households, leading directly or indirectly to food bank use.

Problems with housing included the suitability of the accommodation. For some, particularly those living in urban areas with large housing estates, suitability concerned the local area. However, a more pressing concern was the size of the house. Some families found themselves in homes which were too small for themselves and their children. For others the house was too large, often as a result of changes to family circumstances which left them either living alone or with fewer children than previously. Housing which was too large was a burden financially in terms of heating bills and rent and, for some, made them liable for the 'bedroom tax'. Other participants had serious concerns about the condition of their housing, especially about damp or other unsafe conditions. This seemed to be a particular problem in the private rented sector.

Suitability of housing was an area of concern for those with disabilities. For example, one participant from Durham who had lost his tenancy on a flat in sheltered accommodation due to rent arrears, was forced to live in the ground floor of his current house as he was unable to use the stairs. Others, like Kath from Epsom (Box 2.2) and Di from Sheffield (Box 4.1) were concerned about the impact of poor housing on existing health conditions such as asthma and allergies.

Because of the importance of housing to their wider livelihood, decisions about moving house were a prominent feature of several participants' life stories. Moving voluntarily, either in the past or as a future plan, was generally seen as a positive development, particularly where it involved moving to a better area or to more suitable accommodation. Most participants who reported that they were in unsuitable accommodation felt themselves to be trapped by rent arrears, difficulty finding suitable accommodation or shortage of affordable housing, particularly in the social sector. Finally, some participants were reluctant to move, even where housing costs (or conditions) endangered their financial stability or wellbeing. For some, reasons for reluctance to move, related to personal security (for example, Ava, from Sheffield, who felt unable to leave the home she had lived in with her husband before his death), for others, because relocating would mean having to leave family and friends.

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<sup>66</sup> The in-depth interview began by asking participants to describe their household and the house they were living in. This focused attention on housing, but the detail of their accounts reveals the crucial role that housing plays in people's lives.

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## 6.5 ISOLATION

Section 9 explores in some detail the crucial role of social networks in food bank users' wider strategies to survive their crisis. Social networks of family and friends provided not only financial but valuable practical and emotional support. It also follows, therefore, that the most vulnerable people were those who were most isolated. Although examples of participants experiencing isolation were not as numerous as those who had good social support, they were compelling. Social isolation both contributed to the likelihood of experiencing an immediate financial crisis and exacerbated the effects of one, potentially causing a relatively minor crisis to become much more serious. Those who seemed most isolated were also more likely to say that they had 'nowhere else to turn' other than to the food bank.

Importantly, the income crisis experienced by the individual or family also played a role in exacerbating social isolation, as described by Alex who was referred to the food bank because he was unable to afford food, he said, as a result of the 'bedroom tax' and the legacy of previous sanctions. He described his situation as:

*'Just me... I am just on my own. [It is] very difficult but you have to grin and bear it, you have to. There is nothing I can do, so just there is no point in sitting and wallowing in it. It does get me sometimes but... [I try to] think positive...'*

He described the biggest impact of his immediate income crisis as being unable to afford things he needed to maintain everyday life, particularly socialising:

*'... just having things that you want, you know, getting about and mixing with people. You don't realise until you have got no money how limited you are in doing anything, people say you don't need money but you do, you do. You need money to be able to buy clothes, to be able to go out and just function.'* Alex, Durham (see Box 4.2).

For others, it appeared that being alone was almost a strategy in itself, a coping mechanism to avoid the harmful effects of potentially stressful relationships or bad influences, particularly for those concerned about spending money they didn't have:

*'There is quite a few people I know in the area and you know, will stop and talk to if I see them in the street or something, but they want to go to the pub and I don't really want to go to the pub and pay £2 for a coke, so yes, I would have to say I am more isolated now than I was.'* Ron, unemployed, Kingston.

Although several of the most isolated people attributed their isolation to their immediate situation, some hope was provided by examples of small amounts of help or social contact making a big difference. One participant from Epsom described feeling very isolated when his job suddenly stopped, but also how in that situation a little contact with an advice worker had made a big difference:

*'People haven't rung me up and said "How are you?" or, you know. Obviously the way I feel at the moment, because you are sort of there by yourself, you know? The only person I manage to talk to at the moment is obviously the woman that's dealing with my case, and just talking to her sometimes makes me feel better, knowing that someone is actually listening to me, they know I am right...'* Isaac, father from Epsom, whose income from work stopped without warning (see Box 2.1).

The big impact of a relatively small amount of good quality social contact was seen as one of the main strengths of the Trussell Trust Foodbank model (see Section 7.2).

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## **PART B**

# **HOW DO FOOD BANKS FIT WITH WIDER LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES?**

Part B focuses on the question of what other coping mechanisms food bank users are using to survive the time of crisis. The concept of livelihood strategies – the ways in which people combine their assets to support themselves and their families, and the decisions and choices that they make within the context in which they live – is used to provide an insight into how food bank users are seeking to survive and to improve their lives.<sup>67</sup> Some of these strategies will have been used over a number of weeks or years, particularly for those who had been living with chronic low income for some time. Other strategies will have been prompted by attempts to deal with the immediate crisis and so were much more recent.

Research questions explored in this section focus on how food bank use fits within these wider livelihood strategies. What is food bank users' experience of accessing other emergency assistance or support? What alternative financial strategies for managing on a low income have they also employed? What other assets or strengths – particularly human and social – do families draw on in times of need?

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<sup>67</sup> The concept of a livelihood strategy is a central part of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach – see Appendix A for further details.

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## 7 ACCESS TO EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

### SUMMARY

The majority of food bank users were not aware of the availability of Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) crisis payments, and even fewer were receiving them. Experience of our in-depth interview participants was that LWAS were often poorly advertised or difficult to access.

Several in-depth interviews conducted in Scotland, where elements of the Social Fund were replaced with the Scottish Welfare Fund, also highlighted a lack of awareness of the scheme and practical barriers to take up, including perceived delay in processing applications and lack of affordable local transport to collect awards.

For most families, their primary source of emergency support was the agency that referred them to the food bank. Referral agencies included welfare rights advice and housing services, homelessness or substance abuse charities, refugee support groups, schools and health services. Referral agencies were usually spoken of very positively, particularly in cases where the food bank referral had formed part of a wider package of help and support.

Users of Trussell Trust Foodbanks also spoke positively about support received from the food bank, particularly the warmth of welcome, the opportunity to talk and signposting to other support services.

This section explores the various options for emergency assistance which were potentially available to food bank users. When faced with a crisis what were their options in terms of financial and non-financial support? How aware were they of the various options open to them? What were their experiences of accessing such services?

### 7.1 ACCESS TO CRISIS PAYMENTS

This section explores the extent to which food bank users were aware of, or were using the main form of state-sponsored crisis payments, currently administered through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes (LWAS) and Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF).

LWAS and their Scottish equivalent were created as part of the reform of the Social Fund in April 2013. They are designed to act as a crisis support for families and individuals who cannot build up reserves on their low incomes, and find themselves in incredibly difficult circumstances. See Appendix C4 for full details.

Awareness of LWAS among food bank users in England who were included in this study was at best patchy. Between one-third and half of food bank users in the three food banks included in the additional administrative data collection knew they could seek support from LWAS (51% in Tower Hamlets, 48% in Epsom and Ewell, 36% in County Durham, Appendix B, Table 8).

Applications for, and successful receipt of, LWAS varied between food banks. Tower Hamlets Foodbank, where awareness was highest, also had the highest rates of applications (42%) and receipt (35%). Application and receipt rates were lower for Epsom and Ewell (32% applied for, 18% receiving) and lowest in Durham (21% applied for, 11% receiving). These differences are likely to be accounted for by differences in the food bank set-up: (County Durham Foodbank has a wide network of distribution sites, each of which may have varying levels of contact with different referral agencies and wider support services. Tower Hamlets Foodbank has fewer distribution points, and also an emphasis on co-locating a range of other advice services).

That there were examples of people coming to the food bank who had also received LWAS indicates that the LWAS itself was not always enough to prevent people needing to use the food bank. Indeed, Epsom and Ewell participants' stories suggested that the food bank referral, used in conjunction with rather than

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instead of an application to LWAS, were seen by referral agencies as complementary parts of a support package (this view was corroborated by the local knowledge of the food bank manager).

In-depth interview participants were asked about various types of crisis payment which may have been available to them, including access to LWAS (or SWF in Scotland). However, despite interviewers' best efforts and detailed prompts in the interview script, the evidence gathered is patchy, inconsistent and incomplete. This confusion reflects the complexity of new arrangements, in terms of a real lack of clarity about what is available, who is making the payment, where it can be accessed and even what it is called:

- As indicated above, some participants knew they were definitely receiving crisis support because it had been provided by the same agency that had provided the food bank voucher. However, even in these cases there was confusion about exactly what the money was or what the support was called. For example, in several areas payment now appeared to be made by voucher (for white goods etc.) rather than in cash. This led participants to consider the support as 'vouchers' rather than crisis payments or loans.
- Similarly in Scotland, while several of the participants were aware of and had accessed the Scottish welfare fund, several others had never heard of it or had experienced barriers to accessing it.
- Other participants were simply not clear whether the help they had received was part of the LWAS/SWF or not. This confusion seemed to be caused by the different names by which the schemes were now known and the different organisations providing them. In one area, there appeared to be confusion between LWAS support (which itself was provided by three different local organisations) and a council scheme, with a very similar name, designed to help low-income homeowners with property improvements.
- Some knew about the existence of crisis support, but had been put off by the additional application procedure, particularly the need to travel to another office some distance away.
- A final, smaller group, simply reported that crisis payments no longer existed.

## 7.2 SUPPORT SERVICES

### Referral agencies

When asked about their main sources of help and support at the present time, participants tended to first mention the agency which had referred them to the food bank.

Referral agencies included welfare rights advice and housing services, homelessness or substance abuse charities, refugee support groups, and educational and health services. In some areas, it appeared common for the food bank referral to have come from the organisation distributing the local crisis support or welfare assistance scheme, often alongside other financial and non-financial support.

Relationships to referral agencies can be characterised in a number of different ways:

- **Existing relationship** – the participant's relationship with the agency began before immediate crisis or contact, not because of it (e.g. schools, midwives, housing services); referral for food bank was made because the agency became aware of the need for support because of pre-existing relationship. For example, Bernie was referred to the food bank by her midwife who became aware of Bernie's financial difficulties because she had missed a couple of appointments at the hospital (see Box 3.1 and Section 4.5).
- **Contact because of crisis** – the participant came into contact with the agency because of a particular moment of crisis (e.g. homelessness or substance abuse charities, refugee support groups); the referral agency gave the food bank voucher as part of a wider package of support:

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‘Well I have no money. My money ran out quite quickly, being on the road where you have to pay for every drink and every cup of tea and every meal, and I was without food finally. Then I was recommended to go [to the food bank] by the Cotswold Volunteers, they were wonderful... I went to the [Advice Drop In] in Moreton-in-Marsh for help and legal advice, and they gave me one of these brilliant orange forms to go and get food.’  
Terri, late middle-aged lady living in her car because she did not have enough access to money to cover the upkeep and heating of her house, North Cotswolds

- **Specifically contacted to request food bank voucher** – the participant approached the agency specifically to ask for a food bank voucher, usually on the recommendation of, and with active encouragement from, friends or relatives keen to help. These examples were much rarer, and were usually associated with advice services with a public profile (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau) which meant people knew they could turn to them in a time of crisis.<sup>68</sup>

Referral agencies were usually spoken of very positively for the help and assistance they provided, especially when they had been able to offer a wider range of assistance alongside the food bank voucher.

### **Trussell Trust Foodbanks**

Participants generally spoke highly of the food bank, focusing particularly on the warmth of the welcome they received. The opportunity to sit and talk was particularly appreciated, with participants explaining how they had valued the feeling of being listened to and understood, rather than feeling judged.

Food banks supported by The Trussell Trust actively signpost clients to other services (sometimes making phone calls on clients’ behalf or accompanying them to meetings). Some food banks, such as Tower Hamlets, have partner services (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau or money advice services) present on the premises during food bank sessions.

Although having to resort to emergency food aid was described by many participants as their ultimate low point, interviewers reflected that going to the food bank could, in itself, be a turning point. For some, the food bank referral was symbolic of having accessed a wider package of support (from the referral agency) which could be the start of improvements. Other participants described how their visit to the food bank had given them hope, helping to restore a positive attitude because they were treated with respect and dignity.

### **Other support services**

A range of support services other than the referral agency were accessed, sometimes following signposting by the food bank. These covered the categories outlined above but with particular emphasis on public sector support – social workers, support workers, health visitors, and schools or children’s services. The exact nature of support described was often difficult to make out from interviews. It also varied according to the organisation and type of relationship; for example, assistance offered by probation services or social workers was different in nature and substance from that provided by charities or community groups.

In some circumstances, the assistance involved actual financial support, in cash or in-kind; in others it came in the form of advice and support with accessing services. Support varied according to whether the professional themselves intervened in the situation, making phone calls or writing letters on the participants’ behalf, or enabled the participant to attempt to solve the problems themselves. The former was felt by some to be particularly effective, either because the participant viewed the professionals as having communication skills (verbal or written) that they were lacking, or because institutions were felt to take phone calls from organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) much more seriously than they would if the claimant themselves called:

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<sup>68</sup> In these cases, The Trussell Trust expects such agencies to carry out a full evaluation of the client’s situation and support needs, which may or may not lead to a food bank referral.

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*'... they have got a bit more clout... when you get rung up by a big organisation [and they say] "This is the CAB", they tend to stand to attention... but if I ring them up, you know, they think... [you imagine] they are on the keyboard and smoking a fag and not giving a toss because I mean I am just a voice crying in the wilderness.'*

However others, like Ava who had come to Sheffield after meeting her British husband while he was working in Eastern Europe, were particularly grateful that the help and advice they had received enabled them to stand on their own feet. Ava described how she felt when her husband, who had previously handled all the bills and paperwork, died suddenly: *'Since my husband died, I need to deal with all the bills, everything else, and I now I need to think straight, but it's [the advice centre] helped me a lot... because I used to feel really low, the bills coming through I didn't know how to pay, I didn't know how to do it.'* She went on to describe how the support worker made time to help her through things, sometimes every day if necessary: *'She used to come in and fill in all the papers and call all the people for me on the phone, but now I am much stronger... I am now much more [sure] of myself, I pay the bills, I check for the food, everything, it's done.'*

### **Other emergency food aid**

For most participants, the Trussell Trust Foodbank was the only source of food aid they had used. In our in-depth interview sample, there was only one clear example of a participant using other food banks alongside the Trussell Trust Foodbank on an ongoing basis.

Where other providers of food aid were mentioned, this tended to be in the past and in the most extreme cases, where the participant had been left destitute or homeless (see for example Archie's story, Box 7.1). Other providers mentioned included independent food banks run by local charities or through a school, but were predominantly organisations working directly to provide meals for homeless people, such as the YMCA or Salvation Army.

#### **BOX 7.1 ARCHIE'S STORY – USE OF ALTERNATIVE EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION**

Archie, a late-middle-aged man from South Yorkshire, had just been re-housed after a spell of living on the streets, but was still waiting for his claim for ESA to be processed:

*'Have they managed to find you any other emergency cash or short-term payments?'*

*'No.'*

*'Nothing at all?'*

*'I don't know what's going on, well hopefully I am going to be able to see about something tomorrow, I will ask them down at [support service] if they can just point me in the right direction, but I suppose the longer I can last out the better really, because I suppose what I borrow I will have to give them back.'*

*'So what have you been doing for food in the meantime?'*

*'Bits and bobs, [mentions a specific church-based homelessness project], as long as you get one meal a day so...'*

*'So you have become a bit of an expert in where to find that meal?'*

*'I amaze myself, absolutely amaze myself... I wouldn't have been able to do that a few months ago I tell you.'*

*'It's not a life skill you think you are going to need, is it? Sadly.'*

*'Not that I ever wanted to... I am tired of it all. Do you know what I mean?'*

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## 8 STRATEGIES FOR FINANCIAL SURVIVAL

### SUMMARY

Participants described a range of highly developed financial strategies for managing life on a very low income, including different methods of prioritising expenditure, saving or digging into savings, and selling possessions. Cutting back on food was a common approach.

Borrowing and debt were an essential part of livelihood strategies. Many borrowed from family and friends where this was possible, while those whose family were unable or unwilling to help faced particular challenges. Other forms of debt brought higher risks: building up arrears with housing payments and other utilities, or turning to high-cost lenders in desperation.

Phones and internet access played an essential part in families' strategies for survival, allowing them to access the benefit system and stay in touch with vital social support networks.

### 8.1 MANAGING ON A LOW INCOME OR WITHOUT MONEY

Testimony from interview participants revealed a wide range of developed and well-practised strategies for managing life on a low income. As well as borrowing from, or relying upon, family and friends (see Section 9.3) these included:

- Prioritising children.
- Developing saving or budgeting habits (separate 'jam jars' for different budget areas, supermarket saving stamp schemes, or specific plans to spread cost of Christmas).
- Digging into/using up longer-term savings.
- Selling possessions.
- Scavenging or begging.
- Cutting back:
  - Cutting back on gas and electric.
  - Buying second hand.
  - Not smoking or drinking, or cutting down.
- Reducing transport costs – avoiding public transport, not going places or walking everywhere.

No participants actually admitted to stealing but several said that they had been tempted to, or reflected that without the food bank they might have been forced to steal.

Interviewers observed that participants showed remarkable resilience in very difficult circumstances. However, the coping strategies they used are not without costs including mental health problems, poor diet and pressure on relationships etc.

#### Reducing food budget

Participants were asked to detail their weekly income and expenditure. For some this gave an opportunity for reflection on changes caused by the immediate income crisis. Perhaps surprisingly, food expenditure was commonly seen as the 'easiest' item for people to cut. Even though food is a basic necessity, it was seen as variable and even optional compared to many other items which were regular, fixed commitments (e.g. housing, gas, electricity, TV licence, insurance, mobile phone and debt repayments). These bills were usually paid if at all possible, and often by direct debit, leaving very little for food.

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Strategies for reducing food budget included:

- Accessing Healthy Start vouchers to help with paying for milk and vegetables.<sup>69</sup>
- Going without meals.
- Eating cheap food – using reduced counter, ‘saver’ ranges or only buying cheap products.
- Cooking from scratch rather than buying ready meals.
- Stocking up on bulk buys or reduced food.
- Eating or cooking with friends/family.
- Using freezer – buying cheaper frozen food; bulk buying and freezing reduced items or cooking in big batches and freezing individual portions.
- Drinking water, tea/coffee or alcohol to avoid hunger (Box 8.1).

### BOX 8.1 GARY’S STORY – DRINKING TO AVOID HUNGER

Gary, a father in his forties, had worked since leaving school, labouring in the construction industry and most recently working at a local supermarket. He became ill three years ago, lost his job, and his marriage broke up soon after. He became homeless and was living in temporary accommodation, but had recently taken over the former family home, a two-bedroom housing association flat. He was living alone, but his two teenage daughters stayed with him occasionally at the weekends or during holidays.

Gary’s ex-wife left him with £2,000 of rent arrears, and repayments for that plus the ‘bedroom tax’ account for a substantial proportion of his outgoings. He visited the food bank after being sanctioned for inadequate job search, and had previously been sanctioned for missing an appointment that he does not believe he was informed of.

He was surviving on a very low income by stocking up on reduced-to-clear food, going without meals, and selling his possessions and scavenging for items to sell. He prioritised his daughters’ food over his own food and heating:

*‘When I first moved into Whitechapel I wasn’t aware of food banks at the time [...] I was on my own and during the weekend I resorted to buying a case of lager. That was it – it would last me a week and I know when I got a hangover I don’t eat, so I just didn’t eat, I just got drunk in the afternoon, fell asleep, woke up the next day, crack open another and go back to sleep, I have done that for pretty much a good few months until I got into a manageable [financial] situation.*

*‘... a couple of cases of lager... works out a lot cheaper than buying all the food. The food I have got left in the freezer was for the girls, so it’s like “Okay, for a week’s food money, I can get two cases of lager”. So that’s £7.50 a packet so that’s 24 cases, now you don’t eat, you drink, you don’t need that much alcohol before you just pass out and wake up and so therefore you have to have more, and you crash out again so you are sleeping most of the time, not burning energy... over the week it works out a lot cheaper than buying food, that way I could afford it.’*

### Deciding not to own a car

Most participants didn’t have a car, particularly in urban areas. For many, car ownership was seen as something which was not accessible to them because of running costs, tax and insurance. However, this could have implications for family life and reliance on public transport, which was viewed as inflexible and creating additional problems in terms of cost. Access to a car was seen as more important in rural areas, where it was more likely to be crucial for accessing jobs and services (see Section 6.1).

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<sup>69</sup> Healthy Start vouchers are a means-tested scheme providing vouchers to pregnant women and children under four, which can be spent on milk or fresh/frozen fruit and vegetables (<http://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/>).

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## 8.2 CREDIT AND DEBT

For many households, different forms of credit and debt are an everyday part of their livelihood strategy. Whilst this is true of families across the income spectrum, precarious juggling of multiple debts is particularly relevant to low-income families. Where repayments are proportionate and manageable, existing debts may pose little or no problem. However, repayment does drain household resources, reducing disposable income, often at source. This can especially be the case if low-income families have resorted to using the high-cost loan sector, where high interest rates or punitive charges escalate repayments.<sup>70</sup> In addition, the existence of debts requiring regular repayment can become a particular liability if the household is struck by an immediate income crisis. Failure to keep up with debts can lead to spiralling arrears, penalties or the risk of repossession.

Participants in our in-depth interviews described a range of strategies which they used to attempt to avoid damaging debt:

- ‘Robbing Peter to pay Paul’.
- Paying bills weekly.
- Paying essential household bills by direct debit.
- Accessing debt support.
- Negotiating reduced housing payments.

However, for many food bank users, debt had simply been unavoidable. Additional administrative data showed that around 20% of food bank users were currently using credit cards or loans to pay for essentials, and over 50% were currently in arrears with essential bills such as housing or heating (50% in Durham, 59% in Epsom and Ewell, 73% in Tower Hamlets). The proportion who were currently receiving any money or debt advice varied between food banks (30% for Durham, 42% for Epsom and Ewell, 9% for Tower Hamlets, Appendix B, Table 10).

**‘IT GETS ME DOWN SOMETIMES... THE DEBT [...] I START GETTING REALLY STRESSED OUT ABOUT ALL THAT, YOU KNOW? OBVIOUSLY THE LETTERS COMING THROUGH THE DOOR SAYING THAT THEY ARE GOING TO SEND THE BAILIFFS ROUND AND STUFF LIKE THAT. WE HAVEN’T GOT LOADS OF STUFF ANYWAY YOU KNOW, BUT THEY STILL TAKE THE COOKER AND I HAVE HEARD LOTS OF HORROR STORIES AND THINGS LIKE THAT.’**  
**WENDY, NORTH COTSWOLDS**

In some cases, it was suggested that the value of the food bank was that it enabled users to save some money, which would otherwise have been spent on food, to get to grips with debt repayment.

## 8.3 MAINTAINING ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION

Ability to communicate via the internet or by phone formed an important part of participants’ survival strategies:

- For participants without access to their own landline, mobile phones were essential for keeping in touch with family and friends, maintaining social networks, preventing isolation and allowing a sense of continued participation in ‘everyday life’.
- Phone access was also important for accessing the benefit system and attempting to solve administrative problems. Participants reported being grateful to advice centres or friends/neighbours for letting them use their landline phones to do this, allowing them to avoid excessive mobile phone call charges.

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<sup>70</sup> (Perry, 2010)

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- Access to internet was essential for job search activities and accessing the benefit system. For those who didn't have internet at home, lack of access could be real challenge: Raja, a single male from Epsom, was sanctioned after failing to complete required job search activities in the first week of January, when the local library was shut leaving him with no access to the internet.

The importance of phones and internet was signified by the lengths to which some participants went to maintain access to them, even where this posed a significant financial cost. Phones in particular could be a challenge to pay for, with some participants reporting that they had cut back use or shared credit with others. Other participants admitted that excessive payments for phone or internet sometimes played a role in poor management of their finances, describing the considerable upset caused by having had the phone cut off for failure to pay. Fewer participants had access to the internet at home, but those who did were anxious to maintain it even though they also mentioned struggling to pay for it.

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## 9 PERSONAL AND SOCIAL STRENGTHS

### SUMMARY

The people we spoke to showed remarkable fortitude, and often good humour, in the face of very difficult situations. Maintaining a positive mental attitude was mentioned as a strength, with participants saying they had to stay strong for other family members. Interpersonal skills such as communication and friendliness were often combined with a willingness to help others. Some undertook voluntary work in order to 'give back', others in to gain work experience. Similarly, studying was mentioned as both a positive strategy in itself and as a step towards employment.

For those who had them, social networks played a crucial role in helping individuals and families through crisis. Nuclear and wider family, as well as friends, were important for much more than just financial support. Practical assistance, such as help with transport, childcare or filling in forms, was coupled with emotional support. However, social support could have a flipside, with expectations that support would be given in return, or involving relationships which themselves entailed caring responsibilities.

### 9.1 POSITIVE ATTITUDE

The considerable personal strength and dignity displayed by participants was striking, with many managing to stay cheerful and resilient in spite of their circumstances. Perhaps surprisingly, this remained the case even for many who also reported problems with anxiety and depression.

#### **'EVENTUALLY IT WILL GET BETTER... AND THAT'S ALL I'VE GOT TO SAY.'** MARY, KINGSTON

Several participants mentioned a positive mental attitude as a strength, with this often being attributed to having to stay strong for children or wider family and friends, as well as being linked with a sense of personal responsibility:

*'Mindset, it's definitely got to be your mindset. You have got to be, I wouldn't say happy with yourself, but you have got to think positive because if not, then... I mean at the minute it can't get no worse except health-wise, but for me it just cannot get any worse, being evicted and being on the streets. But it's just having a positive attitude, you know, taking responsibility for your own actions [...] You are responsible for your own actions, nobody else is and that's it, that's just the way life is.'* Alex, single male, Durham

Staying positive was also seen by some as key to survival and hope for the future:

*'There has got to be an upside to it soon, there has got to be... If I didn't think there was going to be somewhere like [a better future] in the end... I'd pack in today, I'd have to because there is no way I want to live the rest of my life like this. Things have got to get better, you know, and I suppose there is only me can make them better, but it's... I need some help doing that.'* Alex, single male, Durham

Optimism and a positive attitude were linked to:

- A clear sense of planning for future goals.
- Wider faith in God, to resolve situations but also to support and give strength in the midst of difficulties.
- Participants' belief in their own strength to fight and that their trials could only make them stronger, which gave them hope.
- Recognition of their own interpersonal skills; where good communication skills, friendliness and compassion were listed as strengths and assets, this was often linked to a sense of personal strength.

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Finally, personal resilience was often attributed to determination and pride. However, several participants mentioned that pride, particularly a reluctance to seek help, could also have contributed to their difficulties.

This evidence of the value of a positive attitude needs to be set against the evidence of the shame some participants reported at having to use the food bank, referring to a loss of dignity or feelings of failure at not being able to provide for their family. Some participants strongly expressed the hope that they would not need to come back to the food bank, fearing that further reliance on it would mean they had failed to overcome their problems and support themselves.

### **Voluntary work**

One way in which personal strength was manifested was in people's willingness to undertake voluntary work. For some, volunteering was seen as a clear stepping-stone to future goals, particularly gaining employment. However others were clear about a motivation to help other people, often because they had been helped themselves.

### **Studying**

Studying was mentioned by many participants as part of their long-term strategy for improving their livelihood. Some, like Kath, had already successfully completed courses (see Box 2.2). Kath discovered a passion for helping older people whilst visiting her father in a nursing home. She had recently completed a diploma in dementia care as a home-based course whilst caring for her sick child. She described the qualification with obvious pride and hoped that it would give her employment opportunities in the future.

For some participants the studying was clearly work-related, including hairdressing or computing courses. These courses were taken on with the aim of better providing for themselves and their families, even though in the short-term they put the participant under a lot of pressure financially. Other participants were open about the fact that they looked to study for something to occupy their time and help with rehabilitation, particularly from depression, by giving them structured activity, purpose and hope for the future:

*'I went back to college [as] I wanted to re-train... one of the things, the major things, when you have got clinical depression, it is like being [constantly in a state of] boredom and I am not that kind of person. I am not one to stay indoors and what have you, so I enrolled at college to do a couple of different courses as well. One is learning more about computers and how to use them... another one because I want to go into customer services like as the basis of employment.'* Raja, single male from Epsom, claiming JSA after recent job loss

Whilst some stories involved successfully using studying as a way out of their situation, others felt they had been actively held back from studying by their situation. Janey, a mother from Epsom, described how she had left school with no qualifications, a situation which had not been improved by a long spell of homelessness. Since finding a secure home and starting a family she had decided that she wanted to go to university, but had faced difficulty getting a place on a course because of her inability to support herself financially. In another example, Pete had been taking steps to improve his life by enrolling on a college course with a view to training as a lawyer. However he lost the place on course as a result of the deterioration of this financial and personal situation following a JSA sanction (see Box 9.1).

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## BOX 9.1 PETE'S STORY – IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON ABILITY TO STUDY

*'During my time at the YMCA both my grandmothers died and also my mother. It was a low, but there are positives though because I managed to somehow get onto a course. It was difficult to juggle and balance because there is only a certain amount you can do whilst you are claiming benefits, but I managed to get a place on what's called an Access to Higher Education course, which involved law, and I want to become a lawyer. It's a part-time course of one year and so I was able to claim JSA and still do the course and live at the YMCA... up until the sanction.*

*'I started the course which was going well... and I had work and to do plenty of reading with that. So I was enjoying the course but I had to leave because of the end of the benefits, I was going to be homeless, so I was forced to leave....'*

*'Is there anyone you could speak to at the college at that time about that course?'*

*'I possibly I didn't follow that up enough, I just, I was so disappointed, if you will, to be back homeless again, that I just sent the college an email saying regretfully I am unable to continue the course.'*

*'Right, did they respond in any way to that?'*

*'Yes, "We are very sorry to hear that you won't be able to continue the course."'*

Few, if any, participants felt they had been positively assisted in studying by Jobcentre Plus. In the worst cases, several cited examples of having been put forward for work programme courses which never materialised.

## 9.2 NUCLEAR FAMILY

For those who were living with partners and children, the family unit was clearly an important source of strength. Those living alone but who had previously lived in families had been severely affected by family breakdown. Splitting up with a partner had immediate financial, emotional and practical consequences (as documented in Section 3.3), but also long-term ramifications in terms of wellbeing, mental health and the practical implications of having to manage shared care for children.

Given the impact of family breakdown on livelihoods and wellbeing, it is significant that several participants described the impact of their circumstances on family life. Several participants described how the shortage of money put a considerable strain on their relationship, through the impact of ongoing stress and anxiety as well as arguments about spending or who should do what to alleviate the situation.

*'I would say the strengths are having a good relationship with one another. I mean I know we take the mick out of one another...'*

*'You drive me up the wall at times.'*

*'Yes but it's like your mum and dad said, we are like one of those cartoon couples [...]'*

*'Battering each without getting hurt, yes!'*

*'Yes, but they said that we do feed off one another in that sense you know.'*

*Heidi and Ian, (lost income after Ian gave up work to care for Heidi and their baby, see Box 3.4)*

### Children

Children featured in coping strategies mentioned in our in-depth interviews in two main ways:

- **Staying strong for children, or children enabling them to stay strong** – for older participants, children and grandchildren themselves became a source of support, emotionally but also financially, particularly if still living with parents. Conversely, many family units included adult children who were supported partially

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or in full by parents, despite no longer being considered part of the ‘benefit unit’ for income calculation purposes. Having to provide for adult children could place a strain on already tightened circumstances.

- **Concerns about the impact of financial crisis on children** – many participants mentioned going to great lengths to make sure that children did not lose out, including parents going without meals so children could eat well. Several parents expressed concerns over the quality of food they were able to offer their children. Some commented that the food bank helped with this; others used strategies such as cooking their own food from scratch or prioritising buying healthier food.

### 9.3 WIDER FAMILY SUPPORT

For those who had good relationships with family, particularly where they lived nearby, family could be a huge source of social, emotional, practical and financial support.

Social and emotional support was mostly in the form of feeling there was someone who would ‘be there for me’, to understand, support or advise. However, sometimes this support could be double-edged. For example, Di from Sheffield counted very supportive relationships with her own and her partner’s family as a source of strength. However, she also described how the family challenged their lifestyle, particularly her partner’s apparent unwillingness to get a job outside of the music business. This meant that, although she said family had helped with money or food, she felt unable or reluctant to rely on them in case they decided to withhold support. There was an implication that this sense of challenge might itself be a positive shaping force on their livelihood.

Practical support from family included help with childcare and transport, as well as washing, gardening and other practical tasks. Family were often cited as helping by providing meals, which represented practical, financial and social support. At the extreme, family had provided the ultimate practical help by allowing participants to stay with them. For some, occasional visits provided financial and emotional respite; for others, being able to stay for extended periods had prevented them from being on the streets.

#### Family unable or unwilling to help; or participants feeling unable to ask

A significant proportion of participants either did not live close to any wider family members or were estranged from them. This was a major contributory factor to feelings of isolation (see Section 6.5), as well as meaning that a significant source of financial support was not available to them.

Some participants mentioned that their families had been unwilling to help. This either involved an ongoing decision not to help, or help in the past which had petered out. There was an implication that, in some cases at least, the long-term demands of mental illness and/or ongoing financial difficulties had created demands which families felt they could no longer meet. Other participants admitted that their own actions or behaviour had played a part in the breakdown in relationships, such that help and support was no longer available. Some participants specifically mentioned that their families would like to help but were unable to do so because of their own financial situation. For some this was because of immediate, large financial commitments (such as buying a house) but others reported that family members were also struggling on a low income, either as pensioners or benefit claimants themselves:

*‘In the past my parents have paid, but they are pensioners and it’s not fair, to say ‘I need money’... they are not poor but they are not exactly well off, and it’s not fair to ask my parents for help.’ Barbara, a former teacher living in Scotland whose mental health had deteriorated rapidly after the death of her partner.*

Whilst most participants appeared happy, or resigned to, accepting help from family, some described how they had used every other strategy they could think off before asking family for help. This was usually attributed to pride or embarrassment. Some described how their families understood this and would find ways to help which were less intrusive than lending money, for example by paying for shopping or coming round with food.

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The flipside of family support was the demands placed on participants by caring for family members, especially where providing substantial amounts of informal care had led to loss of earnings from employment (see Section 3.2). Alongside practical caring responsibilities, many participants also had financial responsibilities for non-resident children, dependent relatives and friends. These responsibilities, assumed out of duty, love or friendship, formed an important part of the social network. However they not only placed an additional financial burden on the individual concerned, but also potentially left others vulnerable if the continuing income crisis meant that this financial support was no longer available.

## 9.4 SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS

### Financial support

For those who had a good social support network, financial and practical support from friends and neighbours was a common and important strategy for managing an income crisis. Financial support from friends varied in type and scale:

- Small-scale, the occasional bit of bread or cup of sugar, part of a reciprocal relationship but without immediate expectation of return or repayment.
- Loans of more substantial amounts of money: in these cases the participant often reported having had to ask for the money, something which could be difficult or degrading. Many loans came with firm expectations that they would be paid back, either in weekly re-instalments (which themselves could put a strain on finances and relationships) or once the financial situation was restored.
- Some of the most moving stories were of unsolicited gifts because friends knew they were in a 'tight spot' even if they found it too difficult to ask for help directly:

*'People would leave money in my pockets and things when I wasn't there... I would go and meet my friend for a coffee and I'd turn round and there'd be a tenner in my pocket when I left. How did that get in there? People are like that because I won't take money, and I won't take things. So people bring me things and I won't take them, so they have to sneak things into my pockets and leave things on the side or I'd come home and there'd be a bag of something on the doorstep or yes, money in my bank account and things like that.'* *Janey, mother from Epsom.*

- In another example, Liam from Epsom, who lived alone, was given a TV by a neighbour who was replacing their own set. The neighbour then paid for an annual TV licence as a birthday present. Others, such as Wendy, a single mother visiting North Cotswolds Foodbank because of difficulty covering training expenses, experienced longer-term support from a generous friend, in her case £100 per month towards childcare costs to help her complete the college course.
- Friends also provided valuable practical support, such as help with childcare or transport, which itself had a financial benefit. Again practical support was often reciprocal, with participants able to offer help with gardening or other practical tasks as part of the relationship.

However, relying on friends for help was not an easy strategy. Participants spoke of it with reluctance or mentioned being too proud or ashamed to ask. Some participants regarded their friends as being unable to help, particularly if they were in a similar situation or if it was around Christmas.

*'I don't like to have to keep asking him, you know, and it's just horrible... once in a blue moon really... only to tide me when my benefits have been cut. I try not to. It's a terrible thing.'* *Alex, single male, Durham*

Others received help from friends but were acutely aware of being a burden on them:

*'I have eaten with the family, but as I say they are on low incomes so I have said to them, "Well look, feed your kids, do whatever you have got to do". What they started doing was cutting down on their food to feed me.'* *Nick, homeless after dwindling income from self-employment left him with severe debts*

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In this example, where the participant was homeless and staying with a family who themselves had problems with benefit payments, the food bank played a crucial role in easing his mind about not being a danger to their financial survival.

### **Social support**

The social support provided by friends could be a lifeline. Sometimes this was low-level, ongoing support such as popping in for a chat or giving the participant an excuse to get out of the house. In other examples the support was much more acute and influential. One participant described how a neighbour rescued him at a particularly low point:

*'... I had given up, I just didn't care. I sort of locked myself away and just sat in me bedroom reading, and that was it. I got to one point... [I had] no gas and electric or anything and my neighbours thought I had done a runner because obviously no lights on at all, for two weeks, at night. And one of my neighbours came round, he actually broke my front door in, to see whether I was out or not and if I was... to make sure I was alright. And [he] sort of dragged me out and bought my shopping, gas and electric but it was only when that happened and sort of clicked with me and I was thinking, yes, I have got to do something, I have got to pull myself out of this, everyone has problems with losing family members, and so then I started trying to sort myself out.'* Liam, single male from Epsom, living alone and struggling with depression since the death of this father, tipped into financial crisis because of a JSA sanction for missed appointments.

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## PART C

# WHAT WOULD HELP TO REDUCE THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS IN THE FUTURE?

This final section draws together the key findings and considers how they relate to the third main research question: 'What would help to reduce the need for food banks in the future?'

Logically, the need for food bank use could be reduced in two ways: first, steps could be taken to prevent new individuals or families either from experiencing the sort of acute income shock or ongoing chronic low income which we have shown to lie behind food bank use, or – if such a financial life-shock is inevitable – to prevent it from leading to such a dramatic loss of income that emergency food aid is required. Second, existing food bank users could be supported not to return through strengthening their existing livelihood strategies (as discussed in Part B) or helping them to develop new ones.

The following discussion section reviews the research findings and identifies key recommendations which arise from them. These fall into three categories:

- Making specific changes to the administration of benefits to help ensure continuity of income.
- Increasing the effectiveness of social security by increasing the support offered.
- Strengthening wider coping mechanisms and strategies.

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## 10 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Use of emergency food aid in the UK, particularly in the form of food banks, has dramatically increased over the last decade.<sup>71</sup> This research was a collaborative project between Oxfam, Church of England, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) and The Trussell Trust, designed to provide a better understanding of why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use.

This research represents an unprecedented attempt to analyse the complex factors which lie behind food bank use in the UK. The breadth of work involved, setting evidence from 40 in-depth interviews against additional administrative data from over 900 clients of three food banks and a detailed analysis of the issues faced by 178 clients at Tower Hamlets Foodbank, provides a detailed picture of what is happening on the ground. Crucially, it seeks to do so from the perspective of food bank users themselves, respecting that they are ultimately the only true experts when it comes to talking about their lives and experiences.

All research designs have strengths and limitations. The qualitative nature of our research provides insightful, in-depth analysis, but it cannot provide definite numbers regarding how many food bank users experienced particular issues. (For an overview of what can, and cannot, be said from this research, see Box 1.4). There remains very little large-scale quantitative research on the scale of food bank use or wider experiences of food insecurity across the UK. We therefore strongly support wider calls for government to monitor food insecurity/poverty, drawing on established food insecurity methodologies from the US, Canada and Australia which were used as part of the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey in 2007.<sup>72</sup> We also recommend much stronger, ongoing engagement with food banks to identify trends in their data and explore the long-term outcomes for food bank users.

### Summary of key findings

- People interviewed for this research turned to food banks as a last resort, when other coping strategies had failed or were overstretched. Deciding to accept help from a food bank was often difficult, described by participants as ‘unnatural’, ‘embarrassing’ and ‘shameful’ (Section 2)
- Most food bank users we interviewed were facing an immediate, acute financial crisis – either a complete loss of income or a very significant reduction in their income. This left them at crisis point, with little or no money to put food on the table (Section 2).
- The acute crises people faced could be prompted by sudden loss of earnings, or a change in family circumstances such as bereavement or homelessness (Section 3). However, for between half and two-thirds of the people included in this research, the immediate income crisis was linked to problems with benefits (including waiting for benefit payments, sanctions, reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments (Section 2.2 and Section 4).
- The events leading to food bank use were set against a backdrop of complex, difficult lives. Many food bank users had experienced ill health, bereavement, relationship breakdown, substantial caring responsibilities, or job loss. Many lived on constantly low incomes. People with mental health problems appeared to be particularly at risk (Sections 5 and 6).
- The emergency support available to people at a time of crisis is not sufficient to prevent them having to turn to a food bank. Many were not aware of the various crisis payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them. Only half (or less) of the users we spoke to knew they could seek

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<sup>71</sup> [Downing & Kennedy, 2014].

<sup>72</sup> [Lambie-Mumford & Dowler, 2014].

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support from the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme; very few of those potentially eligible knew about short-term benefit advances or hardship payments (Section 7).

Offering sustained change for those we came into contact with during the course of this research requires long-term thinking and bold choices. But the promise of a social security safety net that is there to protect people at times of crisis is something that can, and must be, preserved and protected. Food banks, whilst providing a vital and welcoming lifeline to many, should not become a readily accepted part of that formal provision.

Our research has identified a number of specific problems which contribute to food bank use, along with some relatively simple changes which could, potentially, dramatically reduce the numbers of people referred to food banks for these reasons:

### **10.1 SPECIFIC CHANGES TO ADMINISTRATION OF BENEFITS: ENSURING CONTINUITY OF INCOME**

From our analysis of the experiences of food bank users, it is clear that tackling the need for food bank use requires a long-term approach. Some benefit crises set out in this report represent failures of implementation – the system simply not doing what it is designed to do. Others, particularly sanctions, represent decisions to withdraw financial support, following perceived failure to fulfil conditionality. Evidence suggests that in both scenarios, the ultimate result is that problems with benefits leave people without income to buy food.

The first three recommendations focus on improving the role of the administration of the main income replacement benefits in ensuring continuity of income:

#### **Improve use of short-term benefit advances**

Our research has shown that food bank users had faced sudden loss of income for a variety of reasons between benefit claim and decision, between award and payment and when an award had ended but that decision was being challenged (Section 4.2). Others had been referred to the food bank after a dramatic drop in their income caused by problems with tax credit payments (Section 4.5).

Short-term benefit advances (STBAs) are designed to provide support for those who appear likely to be entitled to benefit payment but who are experiencing financial need because the benefit is not yet in payment. However, our research shows that few eligible food bank users were aware of STBAs and even fewer were receiving them. Local Jobcentres should be empowered to enable continuity of payment by increasing and easing access to STBAs rather than referral to Local Welfare Assistance Schemes or food banks.

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## **Recommendation 1 – Improve access to short-term benefit advances: increase awareness, simplify the claim process and improve data collection to identify support needs.**

DWP and Jobcentre Plus should ensure no one who is eligible for a social security payment is left without money by:

**a. Increasing awareness of STBAs** – steps should be taken to ensure claimants are aware of the availability of STBAs:

- Add a reference to STBAs being available in the standard script read out over the telephone when benefit is claimed.
- Prominently display details of STBAs in Jobcentres.
- Ensure that DWP guidance to decision makers on STBAs is in the public domain, for example, on the government website.

**b. Simplifying the process to claim an STBA** – including:

- Make STBAs available to be applied for online.
- Ensure that everyone requesting an STBA in the Jobcentre has access to a telephone.
- Given that it is often the most vulnerable claimants whose claims are delayed and these claimants may not, even were information to be publicised, know about STBAs or be able to make a request, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers could be obliged to proactively consider making an STBA application if a claim for a means-tested benefit has not been decided after ten days.

**c. Improving data collection to better identify and monitor the need STBAs** – including publishing data on the number of claims for means-tested benefit made, the average time taken to determine a claim, the number of STBA applications and the outcome of those applications.

**d. Consider making STBAs (or similar) available to claimants who are missing tax credit payments** – avoid claimants facing hardship because of missing tax credit payments or while problems are being addressed.

## **Sanctions**

Experience of participants interviewed for this research indicates that the operation of the current sanction policy is causing hardship and hunger (Section 4.3). People who have faced sanctions have not been able to replace income from benefits with income from work, and instead have turned to food banks. Furthermore, the sudden removal (or reduction) in benefit income, for whatever reason, is likely to have longer-term consequences, exacerbating rather than ameliorating the difficulties faced by households.

Many participants were either not aware they could apply for a hardship payment if they were sanctioned, or had not done so. Of those who had applied, many had not been awarded a hardship payment (Section 4.3).

The Oakley Review of sanctions, published in July 2014, focused on improving claimant understanding and provision of better information on reconsideration, appeals and hardship. We commend the government's full acceptance of the Oakley Review's recommendations. The following recommendations identify areas where we particularly agree with or go beyond the recommendations identified by the Oakley Review.

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## **Recommendation 2 – Reform sanctions policy and practice: increase access to hardship payments, clarify communications about sanctions, mitigate the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered and address issues for Housing Benefit.**

### **a. Increase access to hardship payments**

- A decision on hardship payment should be made at the same time as a decision to sanction.
- Hardship payments should be made available to all claimants in the first 14 days of a sanction.

### **b. Clarify communications about sanctions**

The Oakley Review makes clear recommendations on the need for better communication of decisions about sanctions. These could be strengthened by ensuring that a sanction decision is only lawful if the letters sent, and proven to have been received, clearly communicate:

- The reason that a sanction is being imposed (including dates, what the failure was, and why there is not good cause).
- The period for which the sanction will apply.
- Whether a hardship payment has been granted, and if not, set out the process for obtaining one.

### **c. Mitigating the impact whilst a sanction is being reconsidered**

In order to address the problem of people not being able to adequately challenge a decision to sanction, or being left in limbo whilst a sanction is being reconsidered, we recommend:

- Benefits are not suspended whilst a sanction is being reconsidered.
- A sanction does not start until 14 days after the claimant has been notified, and if the claimant challenges the decision within that period will not commence until it has been reconsidered.

### **d. Addressing implications for Housing Benefit**

The DWP is working to fix the issue of local authorities being informed a claimant is no longer claiming JSA when sanctioned, and so also incorrectly having Housing Benefit stopped. A possible solution could be that a claimant is left with at least £0.10 per week of income-based JSA payment to ensure Housing Benefit is not affected (as is already the case for ESA sanctions).

## **Employment Support Allowance**

The third specific area of the current benefit administration identified as causing particular problems for a significant number of food bank users was problems with disability benefits, particularly ESA. Food bank use following problems with ESA appeared to particularly relate to sudden stops in ESA payments because of failure to fulfil conditionality (leading to ESA payments being stopped during 'mandatory reconsideration'), because of missing medical certificates and due to missed appointments where the claimant may not be entirely at fault or may have additional support needs (Section 4.4).

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### **Recommendation 3 – Improve the ESA regime: ensure claimants are not left without income whilst challenging a decision, or because of missing medical certificates or missed appointments.**

#### **a. Mandatory reconsideration**

The problem of claimants being left without income whilst awaiting mandatory reconsideration could be addressed by ensuring that those claimants are treated in the same way as claimants appealing an ESA decision, providing they have supplied medical certificates. This could be achieved through an amendment to regulation 30(3) of the Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI No. 794).

#### **b. Medical certificates**

The DWP could ensure that for those whose award is dependent on provision of medical certificates, there is a system for receiving them and linking them to the award by, for example:

- Providing an email address to which certificates can be sent, and accepting scanned email copies.
- Issuing guidance to Jobcentres advising them to scan and email medical certificates to the DWP when a claimant's existing certificate is about to expire or has expired.
- Allowing ESA payments to continue for a grace period of 14 days where a claimant informs them that a medical certificate has been or will be provided in that time.

#### **c. Missed appointments**

Steps should be taken to mitigate the impact of missed appointments, particularly where there is the possibility that the claimant may not be entirely at fault or may need additional support:

- The DWP could consider a reduction of, for example, 25% of ESA for a one-month period when a claimant fails to attend a medical assessment or submit an ESA50, instead of a loss of all income.
- Additionally, allow a claimant who contacts the DWP within that one month to rearrange their appointment or submit the ESA50, so as to remain on ESA, rather than starting the application process over again.

### **Universal Credit**

The phased roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) was not advanced enough for any areas included in the early phases to be included within our research locations. We were therefore not able to directly assess the impact of UC on food bank use. We note that UC will have some benefits, particularly in addressing some of the points raised above regarding continuity of income. However, themes raised by this research also have implications for challenges that could arise from the design of UC, which we believe, without further redress, may affect the need for food bank use:

- In Section 4.2, we highlight the financial difficulties many individuals and families face while waiting for benefits to be paid. This raises concerns regarding the five-week wait before the first payment after loss of employment.
- The impact of sanctions was a particular feature of our research (Section 4.3). This raises additional concerns over the extension of conditionality in UC, which will put many more people at risk of being sanctioned. It is vital to address the sanctions policy, as per recommendation 2, ahead of extending its remit.
- Finally, our research highlights families that are struggling to survive on benefits such as Child Tax Credit and Child Benefit because their other benefits have been delayed, withdrawn or sanctioned. If Child Benefit were rolled into UC, an unintended consequence would be that families could be left with nothing.

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## 10.2 INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL SECURITY: STRENGTHENING THE SUPPORT OFFERED

The UK's social security system is designed to offer protection against the financial life-shocks described in Section 3: loss of earnings through employment, times of family change and when housing security is threatened.

Our findings indicate some key places where this support could be strengthened and improved, including access to emergency payments in times of crisis, tailoring the system to meet individual needs, and improving support for people with mental health problems. We believe that all three areas could make a significant contribution to reducing the need for food banks.

### Crisis payments

The current system of emergency payments is designed to cushion households from the worst effects of income shocks, enable vulnerable people to return to, or remain in the community, ease exceptional pressures on families and pay rent in advance and meet short-term needs in an emergency. Our findings provide a clear indication that the Local Welfare Assistance Schemes (LWAS) do not appear to be working in many cases. Only half of the users we spoke to knew they could seek support from LWAS (Section 7.1). Similarly, in-depth interviews conducted in Scotland suggested low levels of awareness and understanding of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

At the time of writing, future funding for LWAS is currently under review (see Appendix C4 for full details). We feel the findings of this report indicate how important crisis payments are. We support the Work and Pensions Select Committee's recommendations,<sup>73</sup> and argue strongly that access to emergency financial support through LWAS and the Scottish Welfare Fund should be sustained and improved. Whilst recognising that there are arguments for and against restricting local authorities' spending autonomy, consideration should be given to ring-fencing to ensure that resources to meet people's emergency support needs are not further eroded.

### Recommendation 4 – Sustain and improve access to emergency financial support through Local Welfare Assistance Schemes and the Scottish Welfare Fund.

- A statutory duty should be placed on local authorities to meet the needs covered by Local Welfare Assistance Schemes, including meeting short-term needs in an emergency.
- Funding for LWAS should be maintained and, if possible, ring-fenced.
- Ensure Scottish welfare fund is adequately funded and that those who might benefit from it are aware of its existence and how to access it.
- Improve communication between Jobcentre Plus, local authorities, food banks and other statutory and charitable service providers to ensure that those in need are aware of the support available.

### Tailoring the system to individual needs

Our findings revealed that many people faced difficulties when they tried to engage with the benefits system (Section 4.1). Those affected expressed a general loss of faith that the system was 'there for them'. Participants noted a general lack of communication, at its worst when the system did not deliver expected support. There was also frustration at complex applications and administrative hurdles that were difficult to navigate. Many also noted the judgmental culture that discouraged people from claiming support. Crucially,

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmworpen/1153/115307.htm>

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these perceptions undermined participants' willingness to claim benefits due, to engage constructively with benefit conditionality or to challenge decisions. Ultimately, this led to people being without enough income and having to turn to a food bank.

### **Recommendation 5 – Ensure Jobcentres provide an efficient and supportive service for all clients.**

Reform is needed to create a social security system that is more efficient, and that has minimum standards ensuring all claimants are treated with dignity. Immediate steps in this direction should include:

- Reinstating access to telephone lines in Jobcentres, for claimants to contact benefit call centres.
- Making available email addresses for claimants and/or their advisers to correspond with the relevant office within Jobcentre Plus (JCP).
- Revise JCP guidance and circulars to reduce the complexity of the application process and provide clearer support and guidance.
- Clear procedures for complaint and resolution in the event of service failure.
- Improve management and training of personal advisers, to ensure they act as support workers for claimants as well as gate-keepers.

### **Improving response to mental health problems**

Another key area of our findings involve the links, both direct and indirect, which were revealed between mental illness and the immediate financial crises that led to people turning to food banks (Section 6.2). In addition, such crises exacerbated mental illness or prevented recovery. Despite the over-representation of people with mental health issues among benefit claimants, there remains a lack of understanding of mental illness by Jobcentre Plus decision makers, which in turn leads to decisions that create financial crises.

The known prevalence of mental health issues among people in receipt of benefits requires a proportionate response in terms of how well-equipped Jobcentre staff are to identify and deal with mental health difficulties among clients. Improved understanding of mental health issues by personal advisers and decision makers would lead to better decisions, and the ability to direct people with mental illness to local support such that recovery can be achieved.

### **Recommendation 6 – Improve Jobcentre Plus advisers' awareness of, and ability to respond to, mental health problems.**

- Improve quality and availability of training of Jobcentre Plus Advisers and decision makers to better understand the role of mental health in circumstances that led to any breach of expectations.
- Create better links between Jobcentre Plus and local health and financial support services, to enable better signposting.
- Ensure sufficient mental health services are available to meet the need.

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### 10.3 STRENGTHENING COPING MECHANISMS

Through interviewing food bank users and including Trussell Trust Foodbank staff and volunteers in our feedback events, we were able to build up a comprehensive picture of what help and support they felt food bank users needed in order not to return. Often these related to specific issues identified above – getting benefits paid or lifting sanctions – but discussions also raised a wider range of ways in which food bank users could be helped, including better access to advice and support and other programmes to strengthen their assets.

#### Improving access to advice and support

Our research included the use of a welfare rights adviser at Tower Hamlets Foodbank, who helped clients to identify and overcome problems with benefits. This work revealed the need for more advice and support to help people to access the support to which they are entitled.

Providers, including The Trussell Trust, in whose food banks this research was located, place a high emphasis on the non-food support they are able to offer through their food banks. The recent DEFRA review of emergency food aid highlighted the importance of other, non-food, support on offer through food banks, as well as identifying the need for co-ordination between providers and other agencies.<sup>74</sup> In late 2014, The Trussell Trust will be piloting finance and debt advice capability in their food banks for clients who have been referred to the food bank as a result of benefit delays, as well as providing support with the application process.

The need for these services is, of course, not limited to food bank users. Improving access to services for the whole local community could bring a range of positive outcomes, including reduction in food bank use.

#### Recommendation 7 – Improve access to appropriate advice and support

We therefore recommend that:

- Independent advice services and legal aid should be better resourced and have funding restored to increase their availability.
- Links between advice services and food banks should be increased and, if appropriate, some services could be co-located with emergency food aid provision.
- The Trussell Trust and other agencies should be supported in their efforts to better signpost and provide support for food bank users and others in the community.

#### Strengthening other survival strategies

Our findings, particularly those set out in Part B, strongly complement wider research evidence that turning to food aid is a strategy of last resort, only used when households have exhausted all other strategies.<sup>75</sup> However, our analysis also highlighted that many of those alternative strategies were insufficient, whilst others, such as building up housing arrears, were very high-risk.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) was used as a framework for exploring the food bank users' access to assets in five areas: locational, financial, physical, human and social. The analysis presented in Part B of this report provides a holistic view of the strengths and weaknesses of different assets, which in

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<sup>74, 75</sup> [Lambie-Mumford, Crossley, Jensen, Verbeke, & Dowler, 2014]

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turn support or hinder people's ability to weather shocks. This can help to identify areas where enhancement of various assets would help to build resilience to life-shocks, and could help reduce the need for food bank use.

We encourage an open, on-going discussion between government, community groups, voluntary organisations, local authorities and others working with food bank users, to explore how food bank users' own coping strategies could be enhanced. It is also important that there is further research on food bank use and wider food insecurity. This further work could start from the issues raised in this report (as outlined in Box 10.1), but will inevitably stretch much wider as the situation continues to develop and new evidence comes to light.

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## BOX 10.1 SUPPORTING EXISTING COPING STRATEGIES – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

### Locational

A limited number of jobs in the local area combined with the prohibitive cost of transport was frequently raised as a barrier to taking on employment opportunities (or increased hours). Transport costs also reduced the ability to see family and friends. Locally relevant strategies need to be developed by local government in collaboration with businesses to ensure people either have access to jobs or affordable transport to reach jobs.

### Financial

Our evidence demonstrates the longer-term impact of chronic low income on people's ability to survive crises. Tackling the low level of financial assets requires action on several fronts:

- Benefits should enable people to meet basic costs.
- Strategies should be devised to help people move on from low-paid jobs – including training.
- A range of support should be offered to help people explore budgeting options, tackle high-cost or insurmountable debts, and gain access to low-cost credit.

### Physical

An insecure housing situation further undermined people's ability to overcome crises. Some participants felt unable to move on from what they perceived as unsuitable accommodation. Others who had suitable accommodation lacked access to phone or internet services that are vital to address their situation. Action required includes:

- Greater support in the event of rent arrears.
- Increased access to affordable housing in the social sector.
- Better access to communications – internet and phone – especially to engage with social security helplines and online support.

### Human

Illness featured prominently among the food bank users we interviewed, and clearly contributed to a reduced ability to weather shocks. Ill health affected ability to work and reduced access to support services. A lack of job-ready interview skills also acted as a long-term hindrance. We recommend the following:

- Public health services need to be better linked with the delivery of social support – such as partnerships between local GPs or social workers and food banks.
- Food banks could develop links with job-clubs and support with CV writing.
- Improved awareness of opportunities for further self-development, training and education, to influence aspirations for a better life.
- Core digital skills training should be provided to improve confidence.

### Social

The importance of family and friends in providing financial and emotional support cannot be underestimated. By contrast, isolation was found to contribute to the likelihood of an acute financial crisis and to exacerbate its effects. Addressing isolation could therefore be a significant response to reducing the need for food banks. This could be achieved by:

- Strengthening local social engagement and enabling people to more easily expand social networks.
- Encouraging awareness of isolation as part of service delivery and providing targeted support.

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## 10.4 CONCLUSION

For the individuals and families using food banks who contributed to this report, hunger and hard choices between heating, eating, paying bills and servicing debts are real. Crucially, the immediate income crisis which precipitated food bank use was often outside of an individual's control – rather it resulted from a failure of income which they did not instigate, or the effects of which they were unable to reverse.

Participants told stories of complex lives with interlocking challenges. We heard about the ongoing daily grind of living without sufficient income to make ends meet each month, of struggling to find and be able to keep a job, of trying to cope with mental and physical ill health or bereavement. Many of those who are forced to use food banks are living in, or close to, poverty. Policies to improve their quality of life, their income, their access to services and other assets are covered more fully in wider research projects and reports. By focusing on the immediate crisis, which many of our participants explained had led directly to their food bank referral, our research does indicate changes which might specifically help those people who are having to turn to food banks.

The experiences of food bank users in this study also reveal important truths about the impact of problems with our benefit system on some of the most vulnerable people in society. The very real challenges they face are too often being compounded – rather than assisted – by their experience of the benefit system, and by policy choices regarding the support offered to people who are out of work or who cannot work.

The evidence in this report helps shed light on the factors that are driving food bank use in the UK. Causes of shocks in people's lives are many and varied, and the social security system is a vital safety net for all of us at such moments. Yet, as the report shows, action is needed to ensure that this safety net continues to operate as intended. Achieving this will help to prevent a life-shock becoming a crisis, and ensure the system offers vital protection for vulnerable people like those we met during this research. Our report paints a picture of the challenging, complex lives many food bank users have, and underlines the need to address these wide ranging issues. But we are also able to point to practical, measured changes in policy and practice that will help reduce the need for food banks, and ensure vital support for people in times of crisis.

In a report such as this, it is appropriate that the final say should go not to researchers or policy experts but to the participants themselves. At the end of an interview in which they had shared very personal, often painful stories, participants were asked if, given everything they had talked about, they had a message for people in power. Some reflected in detail on a range of issues including childcare, tax, housing policy or political reform; some simply could not say; others joked that such a message would not be repeatable. For those who reflected on issues directly related to this report, a selection of their messages is included in Box 10.2.

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**BOX 10.2 WHAT WOULD YOU SAY TO PEOPLE IN POWER? – ILLUSTRATIONS OF MAIN RESPONSES****Listen to ordinary people:**

*'For God's sake, listen to real people, real people out there with real lives not... I am sorry... not all these rich people... that have been born with money or have come into money... [listen to] people that are struggling every day to basically pay their bills, keep warm and eat.*

*It's happening, it really is happening out there... where people are just... they can't cope, they are scared to put the heating on, they are scared to, you know.*

*I mean, the real people that really are out there, trying to overcome illnesses and stuff, real things like depression and disability. It just winds me up really that I just feel like this government is just for the rich.'* Wendy, young mother struggling to meet costs of training, North Cotswolds

**Gain real-life insight into poverty:**

*'I would like people in government to understand, from their little white towers that [homelessness and poverty] even with working people is far more widespread than they actually believe it is... It is getting worse. And then for them to do something about it... to have things in place where they are actually helping people, not isolating people. That's what they should be doing.'* Mary, mother with young baby, partner unemployed for last 6 months.

**Improve operation of current benefit system:**

*'Get your bloody fingers out and give me some money... I know they have their jobs to do, I know there is other people apart from me, I know that they have got to get everything right, but it's just... it's taking so long, you know?'* Becky, waiting for mandatory reconsideration of ESA, Durham

**Use the social security system to prevent poverty:**

*'I think... overall the money should be raised a bit. You cannot live off fifty odd pounds a week. I have been doing it since I was 18... [the level of JSA payment] does not help me, it does not help anybody...'* Aileen, young unemployed woman, Scotland

**Take account of how policies work in the real world:**

*'I mean it looks nice on paper... how it physically touches people's lives, they don't understand, they don't even get into communities to talk to somebody... statistically speaking it's perfect, but not physically and emotionally... what they are doing to people.'* Alex, single male, Durham

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## APPENDIX A – METHODOLOGY

### A1 – SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS APPROACH – KEY CONCEPTS

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) adopts a distinctive perspective on poverty by taking as its starting point not deprivation (what people don't have), but instead assets people have (their resources, strengths and capabilities) and the strategies they use to survive.

The analytical framework under-pinning this research, as set out in the box below, which can be explained as follows:

The ways in which people combine their assets to support themselves and their families, the strategies they use and the decisions and choices that they make within the context in which they live, make up their '**livelihood**'.

Personal and household assets are understood in a holistic, multi-dimensional way, according to five types:

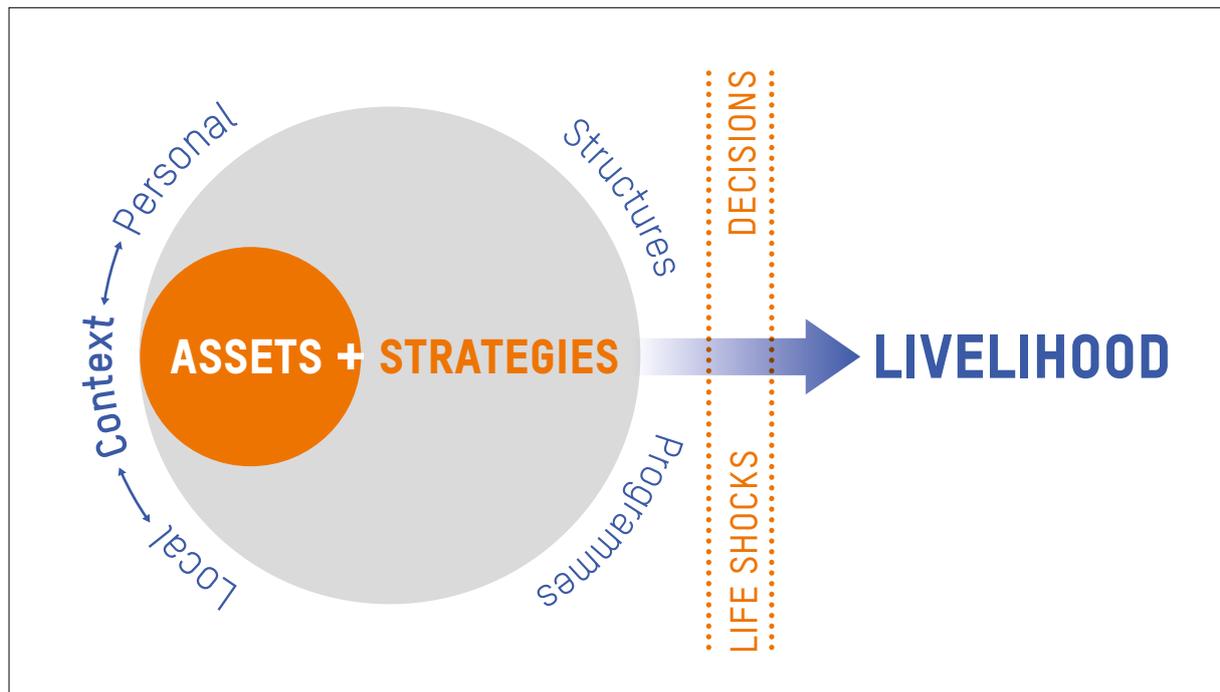
- Social – membership of groups, networks, family and friends.
- Financial – income, benefits, cash, savings, pensions, other items of financial value (e.g. jewellery).
- Public/locational – libraries, parks, public transport, other public services and amenities.
- Human – skills, knowledge, education, ability to work, health.
- Physical – homes, tools, transport, access to information.

Livelihoods projects set out to understand these strategies and how they are situated within an individual's **personal context** (their life story and personal decisions) and **the local, regional and national context** (social and economic). Prevailing social, cultural and religious practices within a community can also have a major impact on livelihoods, for example influencing expectations about responsibility for childcare or domestic responsibilities, or control over finances or particular assets.

Livelihoods are also affected by '**structures and programmes**' – government, voluntary and private sector institutions and their policies and practices (for example, the benefit system, social services, health care, church or local charities) and the individual's ability to negotiate them.

Finally all livelihoods are subject to '**life-shocks**' – major events in the life of the individual or household, such as a bereavement, job loss or birth of a new baby. Whilst fundamentally disruptive to previous livelihood strategies, not all life-shocks are necessarily negative. Life-shocks may have more or less positive effects, often on different areas of the individual or family life at the same time. Individuals and households also differ in their vulnerability to life-shocks (because of their personal or local context) and their ability to respond. Understanding vulnerability to life-shocks and how individuals and households vary in their ability to be able to withstand or adapt to the disruption they cause is a key task of livelihoods projects.

## APPENDIX BOX A1.1 SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD'S APPROACH<sup>1</sup>



A main advantage of this SLA analytical framework is that it allows food bank use to be considered as part of the development or progression of people's lives, taking into account the immediate (proximate) reasons for their food bank referral and the longer-term background. Understanding food bank use can therefore be broken down into:

- The immediate circumstances or 'crisis' which apparently triggered food bank referral.
- The longer-term personal context or 'life story' which led the individual or family to that point.
- The wider local (and indeed national) social and economic context.
- The impact of institutions, structures and programmes (and an individual's ability to negotiate these) on the individual or family's livelihood.
- The other strategies which either exist alongside food bank use or may have been exhausted prior to turning to a food bank.

## A2 – IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW-UP

### Sample design

**Scope:** The in-scope population was defined as working-age<sup>2</sup> clients referred to Trussell Trust Foodbanks.

The decision to restrict the study to Trussell Trust Foodbanks was taken in order to ensure that the research sample could comprehensively represent the study population. There are a large number of food banks which are independent of The Trussell Trust. However there is enormous diversity in those food banks in terms of how they are run and in particular how they select recipients. This diversity posed a huge methodological challenge to the research: it was not clear that we could select non-Trussell Trust food banks in a way which would ensure rigorous representation of types of food bank or their users. Practical limits on the numbers of food

<sup>1</sup> Diagram developed by Jane Perry, adapted from Chambers and Conway (1992), for use in Sheffield Diocese Listen Up! project (publication forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> 'Working-age' was loosely defined to include anyone aged 16+ who might be willing to work; an upper age limit was not set as it was recognised that it was difficult to set an appropriate limit and that it might not be possible to screen participants on age.

banks which could be included and interviews which could be conducted also meant that it would be difficult to ensure that sufficient cases could be included to allow comparisons between different types of food banks.

Early in the design stage the question was raised as to whether to only invite participants on their second or subsequent visit to the food bank, when it was felt they were more likely to have built up trust and therefore be willing to take part. This was rejected when consultation with food banks revealed that up to 80% of food bank users only made one visit, and so a large population would be excluded if not invited to take part at that first visit.

**Sample size:** The research was originally designed to cover six locations in England, with a seventh Scottish location added on the recommendation of the Advisory Group. Conducting research across seven locations allowed a good spread of locations across the country whilst ensuring the research could be managed effectively and within the time frame and budget available. A target of six interviews at each location would generate a total of 42 interviews, which is similar to comparable studies of food aid users in the US.

**Selecting locations:** Types of locations were identified to ensure good coverage of different socio-economic characteristics and regional differences. In line with this breakdown, individual food banks were recommended by The Trussell Trust and agreed with the research team.

#### APPENDIX BOX A2.1 FOODBANK LOCATIONS USED IN THE RESEARCH

Area type	No.	Locations	Details
Post-industrial, North of England	2	County Durham	Started: late 2011 24 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 2) 6,780 vouchers/14,128 people in 2013/14 (Apr 2013 to Mar 2014) Covers all of County Durham, including towns, former mining villages and rural areas
		Burngreave, Sheffield	Started: 2012 2 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 1,192 vouchers/2,296 people in 2013/14 Covers 2 wards Sheffield, inner-city/large housing estate, multi-ethnic former steel work communities
London	2	Tower Hamlets	Started: 2010 7 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 1,070 vouchers/2,272 people in 2013/14 Tower Hamlets Borough
		Kingston	Started: 2011 4 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 2,507 vouchers/5,492 people in 2013/14 Kingston upon Thames is the principal settlement of the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames in southwest London
Suburban, South East	1	Epsom and Ewell	Started: 2012 4 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 947 vouchers/2,279 people in 2013/14 Epsom and Ewell is a local government district with borough status in Surrey, England, covering the towns of Epsom and Ewell
Rural	1	North Cotswold	Started: 2011 5 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 422 vouchers/1,435 people in 2013/14 Covers rural NE Gloucestershire with no urban or medium/large towns
Scotland	1	West Lothian	Started: 2013 7 Distribution Centres (research conducted at 1) 2,268 vouchers/4,095 people in 2013/14 Small towns and villages in the Scottish Central Belt

**Sample composition:** A target sample breakdown was designed to ensure coverage of main groups of interest (see below). A balance was attempted between achieving sufficient interviews with ‘typical’ groups of food bank recipients (as identified from Trussell Trust data) and including participants taken from across the scope of food bank users, representing as far as possible all the diverse constituencies. This was achieved by identifying some core groups which needed to be well-represented (e.g. single males, families with children, households who were not in work) and a number of characteristics which it was considered important to include on policy/research groups (those in work, large families, ethnic minority groups).

Similarly the sample was designed to give good representation of the three main Trussell Trust referral categories (benefit delays, benefit changes and low income) but also coverage of a range of other categories if possible. Five interviews were conducted with both members of the couple present, at all others the participant was either single or only one partner was interviewed. Around one in five interview participants were from non-white British ethnic groups.

#### APPENDIX BOX A2.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SAMPLE COVERAGE

Characteristic	Coverage	Target (per location)	Target (total)	Achieved sample
Gender	Even split	3 Male	21 Male	19 Male
		3 Female	21 Female	26 Female
Family type	Adequate coverage	2 Couple, kids	14 Couple, kids	6 Couple, kids
		1 Couple, no kids	7 Couple, no kids	6 Couple, no kids
		1-2 Single, kids	7-14 Single, kids	11 Single, kids
		1-2 Single, no kids	7-14 Single, no kids	17, Single, no kids
In- and out-of work		2-3 Working	14-21 Working	5 Working
		3-4 Non-working	14-21 Non-working	34 Non-working
Large families	Adequate coverage	1-2 with 3+ children	2-14 with 3+ children	6 with 3+ children
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>40</b>

#### Recruitment

**Maximising inclusion:** A number of steps were taken to maximise inclusion:

- Nearly all interviews were conducted at the food bank location, which was seen to be a safe, warm and accommodating environment which would be familiar to participants. Provision was available for interviews to be conducted at an alternative location if this better suited the participant.<sup>3</sup> For example one interview was conducted in an alternative location closer to where the participant lived.
- Trained food bank volunteers were involved in recruiting participants and conducting the interviews.
- Researchers were permitted to arrange interviews to suit the food bank and participants. In some cases this involved conducting interviews at the time of the food bank visit, thereby avoiding inconvenience to the participant and minimising missed appointments. In other cases, interviews were scheduled for a later date which was more suitable for the participant. Where appropriate, letters or text messages were sent reminding the participant about the interview appointment.
- Food and drink were available throughout the interview, on the recommendation of the pilot interviewer who reported some participants appearing visibly hungry.

<sup>3</sup> Researchers were instructed to monitor carefully to ensure that holding interviews at the food bank was not excluding certain types of people (i.e. those with jobs or with childcare or caring responsibilities).

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- Participants with small children were encouraged to bring them to interviews, if needed. Food banks were often able to provide toys and to assist in entertaining children during the interview.
  - Unfortunately it was not possible to provide formal translation services. However the food bank volunteer in one multi-ethnic location could speak Arabic and was willing to provide informal translation, allowing one interview to continue when it emerged the participant did not have sufficient English to explain their circumstances in detail. In other interviews, simple questions and the interactive research tools helped to clarify information even when the participant did not have strong English.

An introductory leaflet explained the aims of the study, outlining what was involved and encouraging people to take part. This was produced in two versions, a simple, plain English version and a fuller version intended for food bank staff and anyone who wanted more information. This leaflet was given to participants as part of the recruitment, often with the interview time and interviewer contact details on it. It was also left with participants after the study, so they had a record of what they had participated in.

After discussion with the Advisory Group it was decided to provide a £15 supermarket voucher as small token of appreciation for their time. This was designed in part to encourage participation (i.e. to provide an incentive for participants to agree to and attend interviews). However concerns were raised about the potential undue influence of such an incentive with such a vulnerable population. As a result, researchers and volunteers predominantly chose not to mention the payment as part of the standard recruitment procedure. However we still believe the payment acted as an indirect incentive, by assuring food bank volunteers who were doing the recruitment that the participants really would 'get something out of it' and therefore increasing their confidence in introducing the study. In practice, the surprise and gratitude of participants when being presented with the voucher at the end of the interview was at times overwhelming.

**Recruiting participants:** It was considered to be inadvisable to attempt to construct a formal sample-frame prior to recruitment. Practical limitations (no pre-existing list of food bank users, external researchers working to a limited fieldwork period) and the nature of the population of interest (clients visiting food banks, often on a one-off basis) meant the additional stage would have resulted in a lot of non-contact and wasted effort.<sup>4</sup>

Potential participants were identified by the trained food bank volunteer in consultation with the professional researcher. Care was taken to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of food bank users (in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, household composition and employment status) to meet the pre-set sample criteria. In practice this worked well, with a good spread being achieved at each food bank.

It was recognised that exactly how participants were recruited would inevitably differ according to different characteristics of food bank locations. A recruitment protocol was therefore developed, in collaboration with food bank managers, to make sure that variation was minimised. This included:

- Including users on their first and subsequent visits to the food bank (see above).
- Avoiding recruiting too many users who are well known (therefore long-term) users of the food bank – to avoid bias towards those with greatest dependency.
- Attempting to recruit the first available users in any food bank session (who met the sample criteria) to avoid potential for 'cherry-picking' particularly good stories; but also being aware of the danger of recruiting only the 'first-through-the-door' and so introducing an alternative bias. In practice, researchers felt they achieved a good balance of attenders at different times of session.

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<sup>4</sup> The alternative option of using the enhanced administrative data collection procedure as the basis for selecting participants was considered, but rejected when it became clear that not all food banks would be participating in the administrative data collection.

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Researchers were encouraged to record information about the numbers of people approached, consent rate and reasons for non-consent. In practice, the busy nature of food banks and volunteers meant that recording systematic information was not feasible. However in the Sheffield food bank where data was collected, of the ten potential participants approached:

- Five agreed to be interviewed straight away.
- Four agreed to come back for a later appointment – one resulting in a successful interview and three missed.
- Only one family declined to take part outright (the reason given being that they were too angry to report their circumstances in a calm and balanced manner).

Across the locations the ease of recruitment was felt to be remarkable. This was attributed to the difficult situations participants were in, with many having powerful stories which they were keen to tell.

### Conducting interviews

Interviews were carried out by a professional researcher, working closely with a trained food bank volunteer. The researcher was responsible for the interview process but involved the volunteer in the interview process as far as was appropriate, depending on their skills and confidence. Interviewing in pairs meant assistance with other tasks could be given, such as observing, making brief notes and providing practical support (e.g. playing with small children, working recording equipment etc.).

Interviews took place in the food bank, or a similar venue, either in a private room or a secluded corner of public space. This had advantages practically and in terms of health/safety and ethical concerns. Efforts were made to make participants feel welcome and at home, for example providing toys/safe space for young children.

Interviews were expected to last between 60-90 minutes. The mean interview length was 62 minutes, with the longest 103 minutes and shortest 25 minutes. With the participant's permission, interviews were recorded and transcribed. This avoided the need for copious note-taking (allowing the researcher to concentrate on the conversation) and allowed greater detail and objectivity in analysis (by sharing the entirety of the conversation with other researchers/the project manager rather than just the researcher's notes).

**Informed consent:** Interviewees were assured of a number of steps which would be taken to ensure that interviews would be completely confidential:

- Names and contact details would not be stored with interview materials (instead a unique reference number would be used).
- Personal information (that is information which identifies a named individual) would not be shared outside of the research team without the participant's explicit permission – except where required by law or to protect a vulnerable adult/child.
- Names, locations and any other information which would enable an individual to be identified would be changed in all reports and presentations.

On completion of a successful interview, participants were asked to provide written consent, including consent to be contacted for the follow-up interview, and given a letter of thanks (including further information about the study, for future reference) and a £15 supermarket voucher as a small token of appreciation for their time. They were also invited to participate in communications and advocacy work, and, if they agreed, their contact details would be passed to Oxfam.

**Interview coverage:** Researchers were provided with a 'topic guide' giving an outline of the topics to be covered and other information which needed to be collected. The topic guide did not provide specific

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questions, leaving the interviewer free to conduct the interview conversation as they felt appropriate. Instead prompts in the topic guide reminded the interviewer to include detailed coverage of:

- Participant's household circumstances, including financial, social, human, physical and locational assets and strategies used to 'get by' (using the SLA House tool).
- Life-events and other triggers leading to food bank use (SLA Lifeline tool).
- Strengths and barriers to improving their position (SLA Strengths and Barriers tool).

**Piloting:** Contact procedures, interview topic guide and follow-up interview procedure were subject to careful piloting following their co-creation by the research team and advice by the research Advisory Group. This was completed across two sites by the external researchers, with the project manager monitoring the piloting and making any necessary alterations before fieldwork continued.

### **Follow-up telephone interview**

Participants were asked if they were willing to be contacted again by the same researcher after four to six weeks for a short (approximately 15 minutes) follow-up interview by phone.

The aims of the follow-up interview were to:

- Find out if/how the family's situation had changed since the interview was carried out (e.g. had they moved up/down the SLA ladder or whatever tool we decided to use).
- Probe about different types of assets (i.e. not just financial) and strategies used to bring about any changes – or particular barriers that prevented them.
- Follow up any specific issues identified during the interview (e.g. if benefits had been delayed, were they now receiving them, etc.).
- (If it did not come up unprompted) ask if/how emergency food support made a difference (or not).

Telephone interviews were not to be recorded. Interviewers made notes on a standard proforma in a format which could be easily incorporated into the analysis process.

### **Analysis**

Immediately after each interview, researchers produced a short summary of the interview, which was shared across the research team and with communications staff. This initial analysis, together with the participatory tools used and any other notes, were filed by researchers in a secure electronic storage area. This allowed notes and insights to be shared across the research team.

Project level analysis began by bringing the core research team together in March 2014, to debrief following the interview process and to identify initial themes (and sub-themes) emerging from the interview process. These themes were then used as a starting point for more detailed systematic analysis, conducted using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Coding allowed systematic cross-referencing of household characteristics and assets with reasons for food bank referrals, and also to investigate whether there appeared to be significant differences between different types of people/households. From this framework the analysis identified common themes, in-depth illustrations, and the interaction between food bank use and wider assets/strategies.

### **Feedback events**

Researchers organised a feedback event at each food bank location. In keeping with the SLA, the aim of this event was to give participants, volunteer researchers and food bank staff/volunteers the opportunity to hear and reflect on emerging findings. Participants were also given a summary of findings and the opportunity

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to see the full draft report if they wished. Feedback from these events was gathered by researchers. The project team then met again to discuss the draft report, which was also shared with the Advisory Group for comment.

### **A3 – ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTION**

The Trussell Trust routinely collects certain data about the type of clients using their food banks and the reasons for referral. This information is provided by the referral agency on the food bank voucher. However, this data is quite restricted; for example, there are only two main categories for benefits issues ('benefit changes' and 'benefit delays'). In addition the referral agency can only code one reason for referral, not allowing for measurement of multiple issues.

The purpose of our additional data form was to collect additional information about the characteristics of food bank users and more detailed data on specific benefit issues they may be facing (informed by the CPAG caseload analysis). We also wanted to ask clients about their knowledge and use of different hardship payments, short-term benefit advances and local welfare assistance.

An additional aim was to explore whether it would be possible to design a more detailed data collection system, which could be congruent with The Trussell Trust's existing systems, to allow for longitudinal analysis, while being sufficiently simple for volunteers to use. The form was trialled as part of this research, to provide valuable quantitative data to support the qualitative findings and, potentially, to form the basis of a new nationwide data collection system in the future.

All seven food banks participating in the 'Emergency use only' project were invited to take part in piloting the new form. Five food banks initially agreed to take part, but one had to drop out early on due to lack of volunteers and another did not collect sufficient data to be included in the analysis. The final sample consisted of data on over 900 clients from three food banks: Durham, Epsom and Ewell and Tower Hamlets. (The actual sample size varied slightly between questions due to differential response rates.)

Food bank managers were sent hard copies of our additional data form and asked to complete these forms with the help and permission of clients during their visit to the food bank. A short guidance note was provided to ensure that the staff/volunteers understood the purpose of the survey and the meaning of the questions. Clients were asked whether they had already completed the form on a previous visit, to avoid double-counting.

Originally, the plan was to administer the survey over a three-month period (from Feb-April 2014), matching the time period for the in-depth interviews. The survey period was subsequently extended (to the end of June) in order to increase the total number of responses. Whilst one of the food banks, Durham, was completing the forms with every client, the response rate at the other food banks was less comprehensive. For example, at one food bank the forms were only completed when one particular member of staff was on duty, and only at one of their three outlets. It therefore took longer to achieve the desired number of responses. As noted above, one of the food banks achieved fewer than 100 responses in total and was excluded from the analysis.

A copy of the additional data form is provided below. The front page included questions on: family type (number of adult men, women, and dependent children); tenure; employment status (whether anyone in household currently working or has worked in the previous six months); and indebtedness (whether has taken out a loan to pay for essentials, whether in arrears on household bills, and whether has received any debt/money advice). The reverse side asked about specific benefits issues: sanctions, benefit delays, 'bedroom tax', benefit cap, ESA re-assessments, and knowledge/receipt of local welfare assistance.

The data was subsequently entered on to an online database, using Survey Monkey, and analysed using a statistical software package, Stata.

## APPENDIX BOX A3.1 ADDITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE DATA COLLECTION FORM

Date		Full voucher number	
Have you visited a food bank at any point since 17/2/14? <b>If yes, form is now complete</b>		Reason recorded on voucher for visit	
<b>Who lives in your household? Please tick all that apply.</b>			
Number of adult men			
Number of adult women			
Number of dependent children (up to 16 Or 16-19 in full time education and training)			
Are you a single parent?			
<b>What type of housing do you live in? Please tick all that apply</b>			
Local authority housing			
Housing association			
Private rented accommodation			
Owner occupier			
Homeless			
<b>Is/has anyone in your household working?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Currently in paid employment			
If not currently working, has been working at some point in the last 6 months?			
Is/has this work been irregular (variable or unpredictable hours, short term contracts)?			
If you can recall, what was the last date that a member of your household received a wage			
<b>How are you and your household coping?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Using credit cards or loans to pay for essentials e.g. food, heating, housing?			
In arrears with essential bills e.g. housing costs or heating?			
Are you currently receiving any money or debt advice?			
<b>Have any of your household current benefits been stopped or reduced because of a sanction?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , did you know you could apply for a hardship payment from the job centre?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you applied for a hardship payment from the job centre?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you been awarded a hardship payment?			
<b>Has your housing benefit been reduced because of the 'bedroom tax'?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , did you know you could apply for a discretionary housing payment (DHP)?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you applied for a DHP from your local authority?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you been awarded a DHP?			
<b>Has your housing benefit been reduced because of the benefit cap?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , did you know you could apply for a discretionary housing payment (DHP)?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you applied for a DHP from your local authority?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you been awarded a DHP?			
<b>Has anyone in your household claimed a benefit that has not been decided in any way?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , did you know you may be able to apply for a short term benefit advance?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you applied for a short term benefit advance from your job centre?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you been awarded a short term benefit advance?			
<b>Did you know that you can seek support from local crisis support or welfare assistance schemes?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , have you applied for support?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you received support from the scheme?			
<b>Have you, or anyone else in your household previously claimed ESA?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
<b>If yes</b> , has ESA been stopped in the last 6 months because you were found fit for work?			
<b>If yes</b> , have you asked for the decision to be looked at again?			
<b>If known</b> , please provide the date found fit for work and date of challenge			

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#### **A4 – WELFARE CASELOAD ANALYSIS (TOWER HAMLETS FOODBANK)**

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) placed a welfare rights adviser in Tower Hamlets Foodbank from 9 August 2013. In the year to 8 August 2014, 178 individual food bank users received advice. The adviser's role was to provide advice and represent the client with the benefit authorities in order to resolve benefit problems and maximise benefit income. As part of this work, detailed caseload notes were collected and stored on the AIMS database system.

The adviser was located in the food bank distribution sessions. Food bank users had an initial interview with food bank workers, and where a benefit issue was identified could be referred directly to the adviser. A training session was conducted with food bank workers to help them in identifying benefit issues. In addition the location of the adviser at the session meant that if a food bank worker was uncertain as to whether advice was appropriate this could be quickly discussed at the time.

The welfare rights adviser was in a position, due to their knowledge of social security law and their subsequent actions on behalf of the food bank user, to establish the exact cause of the lack of benefit. This overcomes the problems that can occur with survey data or in-depth interviewing where the research participant may not be aware of the precise reason that their benefits are not in payment. It also allows the account of the food bank user to be independently verified.

Because the cases were actually being worked on, the method also allowed data to be gathered about the following through of the problem – for example, how long did the delay continue once advocacy commenced, or how difficult was it to contact the relevant person within the benefit authority?

The starting point of the analysis of cases was the adviser's ongoing knowledge and experience of the sort of problems that food bank users had presented and been assisted with. This knowledge was then used to conduct free text searches of the advice notes to identify cases where common issues had arisen. The case notes could then be looked at in more detail and grouped into types of issue.

Although many cases contained common features each case was different. The method of examining cases meant that cases could be compared so that the actual common legal or administrative issue could be focused on. This inevitably meant that those cases which were about a legal or administrative issue that simply did not affect other (or many other) cases were eliminated from the report stage of the research. This ensures that the issues raised by the research are likely to be those which affect substantial numbers of food bank users – which could then be checked against the additional administrative and interview data.

Rather than being tied to a classification scheme designed before the research commenced, the issues that actually affected food bank users were allowed to emerge from the data itself and could be used to feed into the design of the collection of additional administrative data (see Appendix A3 above).

## APPENDIX B – TABLES

**APPENDIX TABLE 1 REFERRAL REASON (THE TRUSSELL TRUST – NATIONAL FIGURES)**

	England %	Wales %	Scotland %	Northern Ireland %	UK %
Benefit delays	30	30	26	15	30
Benefit changes	15	16	18	8	16
Refused crisis loan	0	0	3	0	1
Unemployed	4	4	3	12	4
Homeless	3	3	3	3	3
Sickness	2	2	2	4	2
Delayed wages	1	2	1	1	1
Domestic violence	1	1	1	2	1
Low income	23	24	21	39	23
Debt	7	9	6	7	7
Child holiday meals	1	0	0	0	1
Other	12	9	15	9	12
<b>All</b>	<b>290,437</b>	<b>29,417</b>	<b>36,086</b>	<b>4,714</b>	<b>360,654</b>

Source: Trussell Trust data, Jan-Apr 2014

**APPENDIX TABLE 2 REFERRAL REASON (THE TRUSSELL TRUST FOODBANK LOCATIONS)**

	Tower Hamlets %	Kingston %	Epsom and Ewell %	North Cotswold %	Burngreave, Sheffield %	County Durham %	W. Lothian, Scotland %
Benefit delays	29	23	26	8	43	37	39
Benefits changes	23	14	15	20	17	20	15
Refused crisis loan	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	5	8	7	2	4	4	3
Homeless	2	8	1	0	6	2	3
Sickness	3	2	2	7	0	2	1
Delayed wages	3	1	4	1	1	1	1
Domestic violence	6	1	1	3	2	1	3
Low income	18	38	24	33	11	20	15
Debt	4	3	10	6	4	7	8
Child holiday meals	0	0	1	17	0	0	1
Other	8	4	8	4	11	6	12
<b>All</b>	<b>678</b>	<b>2,318</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>925</b>	<b>5,468</b>	<b>1,506</b>

Source: Trussell Trust data, Jan-Apr 2014

### APPENDIX TABLE 3 WAITING FOR BENEFITS

	Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
No. of h/holds that report claiming a benefit that has not been decided yet	175	39	50
Total no. of respondents	636	121	146
<b>% of h/holds that have report claiming a benefit that has not been decided yet</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>34%</b>
<b>If waiting for benefit decision:</b>			
No. (and %) of h/holds that know they can apply for a short-term benefit advance	74 (47%)	6	6
No. (and %) of h/holds that have applied for a short-term benefit advance	41 (26%)	5	5
No. (and %) of h/holds that have been <b>awarded</b> a short-term benefit advance	14 (9%)	4	1
No. of respondents waiting for benefit decision (follow-up questions) <i>Not all respondents who reported waiting for benefits answered the follow-up questions about short-term benefit advances, hence the totals in this row are lower than the first row totals.</i>	158	25	46

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

### APPENDIX TABLE 4 SANCTIONS

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
No. of h/holds that report having their benefits reduced due to a sanction	183	28	28
No. of respondents (total)	643	121	148
<b>% of h/holds that report having their benefits reduced due to a sanction</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>19%</b>
<b>If benefits reduced due to sanction:</b>			
No. (and %) of h/holds that know they can apply for a hardship payments	113 (68%)	5	16
No. (and %) of h/holds that have applied for a hardship payment	79 (47%)	2	13
No. (and %) of h/holds that have been awarded a hardship payment	30 (18%)	1	2
No. of h/holds having their benefits sanctioned (follow-up questions) <i>Not all respondents who reported waiting for benefits answered the follow-up questions about short-term benefit advances, hence the totals in this row are lower than the first row totals.</i>	167	19	25

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 5 DISABILITY BENEFITS

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
No. of h/holds that report having their ESA stopped in the last 6 months because they were found 'fit for work'	89	10	16
No. of respondents (total)	557	106	149
<b>% of h/holds that report having their ESA stopped in the last 6 months because they were found 'fit for work'</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>If ESA stopped recently:</b>			
No. of h/holds that have asked for the decision to be looked at again	53	6	14
No. of respondents that have had their ESA stopped (follow-up question) <i>Not all respondents who reported waiting for benefits answered the follow-up questions about short-term benefit advances, hence the totals in this row are lower than the first row totals.</i>	74	9	16

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 6: 'BEDROOM TAX'

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
% of h/holds that report having their Housing Benefit reduced due to the 'bedroom tax'	118	11	9
No. of respondents (total)	635	119	147
<b>% of h/holds that report having their Housing Benefit reduced due the 'bedroom tax'</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>If affected by 'bedroom tax':</b>			
No. (and %) of h/holds that <b>know</b> they can apply for a DHP	66 (65%)	7	6
No. (and %) of h/holds that have <b>applied</b> for a DHP	47 (46%)	7	6
No. (and %) of h/holds that have been <b>awarded</b> DHP	8 (8%)	3	5
No. of respondents affected by 'bedroom tax' (follow-up questions) <i>Not all respondents who reported waiting for benefits answered the follow-up questions about short-term benefit advances, hence the totals in this row are lower than the first row totals.</i>	102	8	9

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 7: BENEFIT CAP

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
No. of h/holds that report having their Housing Benefit reduced due to benefit cap	56	14	5
No. of respondents (total)	644	120	145
<b>% of h/holds that report having their Housing Benefit reduced due to benefit cap</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>If affected by benefit cap:</b>			
No. of h/holds that <b>know</b> they can apply for a DHP	26	7	4
No. of h/holds that have <b>applied</b> for a DHP	19	5	3
No. of h/holds that have been <b>awarded</b> a DHP	9	2	3
No. of respondents affected by benefit cap (follow-up questions) <i>Not all respondents who reported waiting for benefits answered the follow-up questions about short-term benefit advances, hence the totals in this row are lower than the first row totals.</i>	48	10	4

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 8: LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
...% of h/holds that <b>know</b> they can seek support from Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS)	36%	48%	51%
...% of h/holds that have <b>applied</b> for support from LWAS	21%	120	145
... % of h/holds that have <b>received</b> support from LWAS	11%	18%	35%
No. of respondents (total) <i>This is the total number of respondents to the first question. Not all respondents answered the second and third questions, so the totals are slightly lower.</i>	633	120	145

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 9 HOUSING TYPE

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
Local authority	30%	8%	19%
Housing association	21%	63%	54%
Private rented	36%	18%	12%
Temporary	5%	7%	8%
Owner-occupied	3%	3%	1%
Homeless	4%	3%	7%
No. of respondents	668	120	156

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 10 EMPLOYMENT STATUS

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
% of h/holds reporting that someone in their household is currently in paid employment	6%	19%	4%
No. of respondents (total)	651	121	156
% of h/holds that report having worked at some point in the last 6 months	16%	16%	11%
No. of respondents (follow-up question)	484	97	140
No. of respondents <i>Not all respondents who responded to the first question also answered the follow-up question about their recent employment history, hence the totals in this row are lower than the second row totals.</i>	668	120	156

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

## APPENDIX TABLE 11 DEBT

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
% of h/holds using credit cards or loans to pay for essentials e.g. food, housing	19%	18%	21%
% of h/holds in arrears with essential bills e.g. housing, heating	50%	59%	73%
% of h/holds currently receiving any money or debt advice	30%	42%	9%
No. of respondents (total) <i>This is the total number of respondents to the first question. Not all respondents answered all three questions, so the totals vary slightly.</i>	608	119	149

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

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**APPENDIX TABLE 12 HOUSEHOLD TYPE**

	County Durham	Epsom and Ewell	Tower Hamlets
Single man	33%	17%	37%
Single woman	12%	16%	15%
Two or more adults, no children	21%	17%	11%
Single with children	14%	28%	26%
Two or more adults with children	21%	23%	11%
No. of respondents (total)	663	121	154

Source: Additional administrative data, 3 locations, Feb-Jun 2014

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## APPENDIX C – BACKGROUND TO BENEFIT ISSUES

This appendix provides a brief explanation of the legal rules and guidance concerning those areas of the benefit system where food bank users commonly experienced problems (discussed in Part A: Section 4), along with background information on Local Welfare Assistance Schemes (Section 7).

### C.1 - WAITING FOR BENEFITS

#### BOX C1.1 SUMMARY OF RULES ON DECIDING AND PAYING BENEFIT CLAIMS

##### Claims and decisions

1. In order to be entitled to an award of a particular benefit at a particular rate, it is almost always the case that a person must make a claim for that benefit.<sup>1</sup> Entitlement to an award for a period before a claim is submitted is extremely limited, so those who do not claim on time often miss out on money they may have been entitled to had they acted more quickly.<sup>2</sup> Claims are completed in various ways (on paper claim forms which can be posted to DWP, via telephone with details given, then confirmed to the claimant in writing or online). Sometimes, it will be necessary for further questions to be asked of the claimant, or further information provided after the initial claim form is completed.

2. Once a claim for a benefit is made, it is the duty of a decision maker at the DWP to make a decision on whether the person making the claim meets the statutory conditions for an award of benefit, and, if so, at what rate, and from which date.<sup>3</sup> There is no statutory time limit within which a claim must receive a decision. However, the general duty is that decisions must be made as soon as reasonably practicable. What counts as 'reasonably practicable' can depend on the volume of other claims currently outstanding, the resources of the Department, and the urgency of a particular case.

3. Following a decision that a claimant is entitled to a particular amount from a particular date, notice of the decision must be sent to the claimant.<sup>4</sup> The decision then needs to be implemented as soon as reasonably possible – e.g. payment should be made.<sup>5</sup>

4. Broadly speaking, similar principles apply for claims of tax credits.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Section 1, Social Security Administration Act 1992.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Regulation 19 of Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (SI No. 1968)

<sup>3</sup> Section 8, Social Security Act 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Regulation 28, Social Security and Child Support (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 1999 (SI No. 991).

<sup>5</sup> Regulation 20, Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1987 (SI No. 1968).

<sup>6</sup> Section 3 Tax Credits Act 2002 deals with claims, Section 14 with decisions on claims, and Section 24 with payment.

## BOX C1.2 DWP TARGETS FOR PROCESSING CLAIMS

The DWP Business Plan in 2010–2011 had targets for ‘Average Actual Clearance Time’ of claims for IS, ESA and JSA as per the table below.<sup>7</sup> These targets were dropped from subsequent Business Plans.

### DWP Business Plan (2010–2011) – Average Actual Clearance Time Targets

<i>Benefit</i>	<i>Average Actual Clearance Time</i>
JSA	9 days
IS	11 days
ESA	14 days

Ministerial answers to questions in the House of Commons now reveal that the targets are to process a certain percentage of all claims for a particular benefit within a fixed number of days.<sup>8</sup>

### Clearance time targets as per Ministerial answer

<i>Benefit</i>	<i>November 2013 – % of claims to be processed within X number of days:</i>
JSA	90% within 16 days
IS	90% within 13 days
ESA	85% within 16 days

Note that, because the target times are different (the 2010–2011 time is an average of all claims and the 2013 one is a target that a fixed % are done within the specified number of days), it is not possible to compare them.

In terms of performance against the target measure now used, figures are available for the period April 2010 to September 2013.<sup>9</sup> For ESA, the target was met in the last four months of that period (as well as at other points). For IS, the target was hit consistently over the last ten months of the period (again, as well as at other points). For JSA, the picture is similar.

## BOX C1.3 HMRC TARGETS ON PAYMENT TIMES

HMRC are responsible for the administration of Child Benefit and of tax credits. The HMRC Business Plan 2014–2016 sets out targets for how long processing new claims should take, as follows:<sup>10</sup>

‘For our benefits and credits customers we will continue to:

- handle all new claims and changes of circumstances for UK customers within 22 days
- handle all new claims and changes of circumstances for international customers within 92 days’

<sup>7</sup> ‘Jobcentre Plus Business Plan 2010 – 2011’, DWP, page 16. Retrieved 15th October 2014, via <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130102205834/http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/jppb-1011.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Hansard, House of Commons, 6 November 2013, Column 188W.

<sup>9</sup> Hansard, House of Commons, 6 November 2013, Columns 188W to 196W.

<sup>10</sup> ‘HMRC business plan: 2014 to 2016’, 14 April 2014, Section 4.2. Retrieved 15th October 2014, via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmrcs-business-plan-2014-to-2016/hmrc-business-plan-2014-to-2016>.

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## BOX C1.4 RULES ON SHORT-TERM BENEFIT ADVANCES

1. The main situation in which short-term benefit advances (STBAs) can be made by the DWP is where a person:<sup>11</sup>
  - Has made a claim for an eligible benefit<sup>12</sup> and it has not been awarded;
  - It appears likely to the decision maker that they will be entitled to the benefit; and
  - The person is experiencing 'financial need' because the benefit is not yet in payment.
2. 'Financial need' is defined as the situation where there is a serious risk of damage to the health or safety of the claimant or a member of their benefit family (e.g. claimant's partner and any children for whom claimant or partner is responsible for whom they could in theory claim Child Benefit) due to non-payment of the benefit.
3. An STBA can be requested either via a telephone call or in person at a local Jobcentre Plus.
4. People making claims for benefits are not given any information by the Jobcentre, in the course of making their claim, that an STBA may be payable if they are in financial need whilst awaiting a decision and payment on that claim. Nor are there posters or other information leaflets available at Jobcentres. A search of the '.gov.uk' website for 'short term advance' does not reveal any information.<sup>13</sup> The detailed guidance issued to decision makers is not published by the DWP online.
5. When an STBA is requested, DWP guidance suggests that the decision maker should first consider whether it is possible to make a full decision on the benefit claim and put it into payment.
6. Decisions on STBAs are not communicated to claimants in writing, and there is no right of appeal against a refusal to make an STBA.
7. There is no provision for interim payments of tax credits prior to a decision to award being made.

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<sup>11</sup> Regulation 5, Social Security (Payment on Account of Benefit) Regulations 2013 (SI No. 383).

<sup>12</sup> All the main means tested benefits, IS, irESA, ibJSA, SPC etc., are eligible benefits. The main exclusions are HB, DLA, AA, PIP and CTC/CB.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/search?q=short+term+advance> (search conducted 26th June 2014).

## BOX C1.5 URGENT PAYMENTS IN DELAY CASES – REDUCTION IN PROVISION

Prior to April 2013, where a person was experiencing hardship because a claim for benefit had been made but had yet to be decided and an award put into payment, a common solution was the obtaining of a Social Fund Crisis Loan (known as an 'alignment payment').

As indicated in Box C1.4, when an STBA is requested then the decision maker will first consider whether the benefit can simply be awarded. The data in the table below compares the volume of alignment payments made in previous tax years with the volume of the combined total of STBA payments and cases where a request for an STBA payment led to an immediate award.

The number of Crisis Loans for Alignment peaked at 1,162,500 in 2010/11 and then fell to 834,500 in 2012/13. By contrast, in 2013/14, the first full year under the new system, the DWP responded positively to just 177,401 STBA requests - either awarding an STBA (79,773 cases) or accelerating payment of the main benefit that the applicant was waiting for (97,628 cases).

Part of the explanation is that many fewer people are applying for STBAs (335,036 in 2013/14). Unless there has been a huge decrease in the need or demand for such payments, which seems very unlikely in the current economic climate, this strongly suggests that a large number of potential applicants are either unaware of the existence of STBAs or are being deterred from applying.

Crisis loan alignment payments <sup>1</sup>	Total number of awards
2007/08	690,000
2008/09	865,800
2009/10	1,099,600
2010/11	1,162,500
2011/12	971,400
2012/13	834,500
<b>STBA payments</b> <sup>2,3,4</sup>	
2013/14	177,401

1. Figures are from a response to an FOI request to the DWP (#3207) on 10 September 2014.
2. Figures for April 1 to Nov 29 2013 are from the response to a written PQ by Mr Godsiff MP on 6 January 2014. Data for the remainder of the financial year are from Fol 3207 (see footnote 1).
3. This includes the total number of STBAs 'referred to the decision maker and allowed' and the total number of STBA requests that were 'refused because the primary benefit can be paid'.
4. The footnote to the FOI request states that 'due to differences between Crisis Loans and Short Term Benefit Advances, it is impossible to directly compare these advances to Crisis Loans for alignment to benefit'.

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## C.2 - SANCTIONS

### BOX C2.1 CURRENT JSA SANCTION REGIME

The two most common sorts of JSA sanction are those imposed because a claimant is judged to have failed to be actively seeking work (or to have been available for work – although sanctions for not actively seeking work are more frequent) and because a claimant is judged to have failed to participate in a ‘Scheme of Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment’ (e.g. the Work Programme). There are various other things which a JSA claimant can be sanctioned for doing or failing to do, but we concentrate here on the most common reasons for sanction.

It is a requirement of entitlement to JSA that the claimant is ‘actively seeking work’. This requires the claimant to take such steps as they can reasonably be expected to take in a given week to give them the best prospects of securing employment. A claimant who does not meet that test in a particular week is not entitled to JSA. From 22/10/2012, a failure to actively seek work also results in a sanction (e.g. a reduction in JSA for a period even when the claimant is actively seeking work).

JSA claimants are also required (although not as a condition of entitlement to JSA) to participate in schemes for assisting persons to obtain employment when correctly notified that they are required to do so. This requirement is enforced through the imposition of sanctions on those who fail, without a good reason, to participate in the schemes.

For both of the above, the length of sanction imposed is four weeks’ reduction of benefit for a first failure, and 13 weeks for a second or subsequent failure within a rolling 52-week period. The amount of the sanction is 100% of the JSA for single people or a couple with children. Thus, for many JSA claimants who are sanctioned, the effect of the reduction is to leave them with zero income for the sanction period (those who have children will keep Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit).

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## BOX C2. 2 CURRENT ESA SANCTION REGIME

People claiming ESA must, as a condition of entitlement, have a health problem which means that it is not reasonable to expect them to work ('limited capability for work').<sup>14</sup> However, unless such a claimant is assessed as being in the 'support group' (i.e. so disabled by their condition that it is also unreasonable to expect them to perform any activity whatsoever connected to work preparation, etc.), or in one of a very limited number of other exceptional groups (such as having a child aged under three), then they can be required to:

- attend 'work focused interviews'; and
- participate in 'work-related activity' (typically the Work Programme).

Failure to participate in either form of activity, without good reason, results in a sanction being imposed equal to £72.40<sup>15</sup> per week for each seven-day period in which the claimant does not come to an agreement with the Jobcentre to participate in the activity that they are judged to have failed to undertake.

Once such an agreement is reached, the sanction is imposed for a further period of at least 7 days (or 14 days if there has been a previous failure to participate within the last 52-week period, and 28 days if there have been two or more).

The typical weekly payment of ESA for a single claimant in this situation would either be £72.40 or £101.15. In most cases, for a single claimant, that is their only income (other than Housing Benefit). A claimant subject to a sanction must be left with at least £0.10 per week (to preserve entitlement to Housing Benefit and other 'passported' benefits). The typical consequence of a sanction, absent without hardship payments (see Box C2.3 below), is therefore that the claimant will be left with either £28.75 or £0.10 per week.

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<sup>14</sup> Sections 1(3)(a) and 8, Welfare Reform Act 2007.

<sup>15</sup> For a claimant aged 25 or over.

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### BOX C2.3 HARDSHIP PAYMENTS WHEN SANCTIONED

It is possible to obtain 'hardship payments' at 60% of the normal JSA rates. However, unless the claimant is in a 'vulnerable group' (e.g. pregnant, responsible for children, has a long term health condition which would get significantly worse within two weeks if hardship payment not made, etc.), no hardship payments are payable for the first two weeks of the sanction period.

The DWP guidance on hardship payments makes it clear that it is an intended effect of sanctions that they will harm the health of some JSA claimants. As stated above, the general rule is that, unless the claimant is in a vulnerable group, they are not entitled to hardship payments for the first 14 days of a sanction period. One of the vulnerable groups is defined in law as someone in a situation where they:

'suffer [...] from a chronic medical condition which results in functional capacity being limited or restricted by physical impairment and the Secretary of State is satisfied that

The suffering has already lasted, or is likely to last for not less than 26 weeks; and

Unless a jobseeker's allowance is paid to the claimant the probability is that the health of the person suffering would, within two weeks of the Secretary of State making his decision, decline further than that of a normally healthy adult and that person would suffer hardship.'<sup>16</sup>

DWP guidance makes clear that it is fully expected that a normally healthy adult's health will deteriorate when they are without food for two weeks:

'It would be usual for a normal healthy adult to suffer some deterioration in their health if they were without :

1. essential items, such as food, clothing, heating and accommodation or
2. sufficient money to buy essential items for a period of two weeks. [...]

The DM [decision maker] must determine if a person with a medical condition would suffer a greater decline in health than a normal healthy adult and would suffer hardship.'<sup>17</sup>

The rules provide<sup>18</sup> that, where a person claiming ESA has been sanctioned and the effect of the benefit reduction will be that the claimant experiences 'hardship', a hardship payment of £43.45 (60% of the basic amount of £72.40) can be made.<sup>19</sup> 'Hardship' is not defined in legislation, but factors to be taken into account include other resources available to the person, and whether essential items like food will be completely unavailable or only available at considerably reduced levels if the payment is made.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Reg 140(1)(g), Jobseeker's Allowance Regulations 1996 (SI No. 140).

<sup>17</sup> 'Decision Maker's Guide', para 35099.

<sup>18</sup> Reg 64B, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI No. 794).

<sup>19</sup> Reg 64D, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI No. 794).

<sup>20</sup> Reg 64C, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI No. 794).

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#### BOX C2. 4 TYPICAL LETTER SENT TO CLAIMANT ABOUT SANCTION

'We have looked at your claim again following a recent change.

We cannot pay you Jobseeker's Allowance from X date.

[...]

This is because we recently told you that a decision would be made about a doubt:

On whether you failed to comply with the requirements of the scheme to which you have no longer been referred. We have now decided that this doubt no longer applies.'

From Y date, your allowance will be £72.40 per week.

[...]

HOW YOU WILL GET YOUR MONEY

[There follows a calculation of how much will be paid from Y date]'

#### BOX C2. 5 ANALYSIS OF THE WORDING OF THIS LETTER

The typical letter (above- Box C2.4) sent to claimants regarding benefit sanctions presents a number of difficulties:

- It does not indicate clearly that a sanction is being imposed.
- It does not state the date on which the claimant is alleged to have failed to participate in the scheme.
- It does not spell out the fact that a decision has been made that the claimant did not have a good reason for failure to participate in the scheme.
- The statement 'this doubt no longer applies' is unclear – it is taken to refer to a doubt as to whether the claimant took part in the scheme, which has now been resolved against them.
- It would be plainer English and clearer to say 'we have now decided you did fail to comply with the scheme without good reason. As a result, you are not entitled to JSA for a four-week period'.
- The letter goes on to explain how much the claimant will be paid when the sanction comes to an end, but what really needs to be stated unequivocally is that the claimant will not be paid for a four-week period in the interim.

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## BOX C2.6 IMPACT OF SANCTIONS ON HOUSING BENEFIT

1. As well as directly affecting the income which the claimant has available to cover their own contribution to their rent, JSA sanctions and suspensions have a particularly severe knock-on effect on Housing Benefit, leaving sanctioned claimants at real risk of homelessness.
2. Benefit rules dictate that receipt of an income benefit (such as JSA, ESA and Income Support) means that the claimant passes the means test for entitlement to Housing Benefit. The impact of sanctions or suspensions on Housing Benefit differs according to the benefit claimed:
  - With ESA, the sanction always leaves the claimant with £0.10 per week. This means that entitlement continues during the sanction, so Housing Benefit is not affected.
  - For JSA, the DWP notifies the local authority that the claimant is longer receiving JSA, without necessarily revealing that this is the result of a sanction, or how long the sanction will last. Housing Benefit rules treat a sanctioned claimant as still in receipt of JSA, so there should be no effect on housing benefit; but, where a local authority is unaware that JSA has stopped due to a sanction, they cannot apply that rule.
  - A local authority informed that JSA has ceased should write to the claimant, reporting that they have had notice that the JSA entitlement has been stopped/suspended, and requesting new notification of income. Claimants then have one month (officially from the date of JSA suspension/sanction) to provide proof of income, and therefore entitlement to Housing Benefit.
3. We have identified a number of problems with how the procedure for JSA works in practice:
  - Immediate termination of Housing Benefit – where local authorities don't send a letter, instead moving straight to termination of Housing Benefit.
  - Non-receipt or acknowledgement of letters – some claimants report that they did not receive the letter. In other cases, the letter is received but not acknowledged or responded to, often because the sanctioned claimant is not able to deal adequately with their correspondence because of language/literacy issues or as the result of stress or anxiety.
  - Timing – claimants have a month to re-establish their proof of Housing Benefit eligibility. However, local authorities frequently appear to ignore this time period, terminating Housing Benefit before the month is up.
  - Re-establishing eligibility – sanctioned claimants are required to submit evidence of their financial eligibility for Housing Benefit; however, it is very difficult to provide evidence of no income.
4. Housing Benefit is terminated because of sanctions either as a result of maladministration on the part of local authority or of failure of the claimant to respond adequately to notification. One potential solution would be to leave the claimant with £0.10 a week (as for the sanction of ESA), so that entitlement to Housing Benefit would continue throughout the sanction. This would provide housing security for the claimant; it would also create considerable savings in administration costs, and, potentially, in the additional financial and social costs created by homelessness.

## C3 - PROBLEMS WITH DISABILITY BENEFITS

### BOX C3.1 WHEN A CLAIMANT HAS LIMITED CAPABILITY FOR WORK

In order to be awarded ESA, a person must have, or be treated as having, limited capacity for work (LCW). ESA cannot be paid if the person does not have or is not treated as having LCW.

1. When a person first claims ESA, and for the first 13 weeks of entitlement, they are in the 'assessment phase'. During this period, and for a longer period in cases where the assessment (see below) has not been conducted by DWP, such people are treated as having LCW simply on the basis that, after the first seven days of entitlement, they are providing medical certificates (Form MED 4) from their GP which certify them as having LCW, and which cover them for the dates of their entitlement.<sup>21</sup> Thus, if, for some reason, the DWP has not logged receipt of the medical evidence for a period in respect of a person claiming ESA in this stage, no payment of ESA can be made.
2. At some stage, a person who has claimed ESA and has been providing medical certificates will be asked to complete a form (ESA50). Four weeks are given from the date on which the form is issued to complete and return the form.<sup>22</sup> If the person does not return the form and is not regarded as having a good reason for not doing so, then they are treated as not having LCW, and ESA is brought to an end.<sup>23</sup>
3. Usually, the person will then be called to attend a medical examination conducted by ATOS on behalf of the DWP. Seven days' notice in writing must be given of the appointment in most cases.<sup>24</sup> If the person fails, without a good reason, to attend and participate in this medical examination, then they are treated as not having LCW, and ESA is brought to an end.
4. Where a person is treated as not having LCW for failing to return the ESA50 or attend the medical examination, they cannot reclaim ESA and again be treated as having LCW simply by providing medical certificates as most people claiming ESA can do (see (1) above) for a six-month period, unless they have a new medical condition or an existing health condition has significantly worsened. Persons who try to reclaim ESA within that six month period, and who cannot show a new or worsened condition, can only be paid ESA on their new claim once they have in fact been assessed as having LCW – and, of course, they cannot be assessed in most cases until they have attended a medical, which can take a long time to arrange. Thus, those whose ESA has been stopped for failing to return the ESA50 or failing to attend a medical face a six-month period where it is particularly difficult for them to obtain ESA again.
5. Following attendance at the medical examination, that report and any ESA50 returned by the person claiming is placed before a DWP decision maker, together with any other medical evidence collected from the GP or provided by the person. The decision maker assesses whether that evidence shows a person has LCW according to a points-based test of various functional abilities set out in legislation.<sup>25</sup> Those people not deemed to achieve sufficient points can no longer be treated as having LCW simply on production of medical certificates. They do not have LCW, and their ESA stops.

(Box C3.1 Continued on next page)

<sup>21</sup> Regulation 30, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

<sup>22</sup> Regulation 21, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

<sup>23</sup> Regulation 22, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

<sup>24</sup> Regulation 23, Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

<sup>25</sup> Regulation 19 and Schedule 2.

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(Box C3.1 Cont. from previous page)

6. Until 28/10/2013, a person whose ESA stopped following their being judged as not achieving sufficient points to qualify as having LCW could simply file an appeal to a Tribunal against that decision (the appeal was filed by filling in a short form and providing it to the DWP office which made the decision). As soon as an appeal had been filed, then the person could again be treated as having LCW whilst the appeal was ongoing, subject to the requirement that they provided medical certificates. However, for decisions made on or after 28/10/2013, it is no longer possible to go straight to appeal. Instead, a person must first ask the DWP to look again at the decision that they do not have LCW (a 'mandatory reconsideration').<sup>26</sup> No appeal can be filed until the DWP has refused to reverse its own decision. During this period (i.e. until an appeal is made) then the person cannot be treated as having LCW,<sup>27</sup> and therefore cannot get ESA (unless there is evidence their health has deteriorated, etc. as at (4) above). There are no time limits for the DWP to conduct the mandatory reconsideration. As recounted by Citizens Advice Scotland,<sup>28</sup> the time taken can often be months. Thus, those people who have been found not to have LCW, and who are seeking to challenge that decision through mandatory reconsideration, experience a period where it is particularly difficult to obtain ESA.

7. In the event mandatory reconsideration is refused, an appeal can be made. The law provides that a claimant must be paid ESA pending that appeal, providing medical certificates are supplied on an ongoing basis.<sup>29</sup> Two factors can cause problems with such payment:

(a) the notice of appeal must now be posted directly to the Tribunal Service (HMCTS). There is then a few days' wait whilst HMCTS log the appeal and send notification that an appeal has been filed to the DWP. It appears that this notice takes about two weeks in the DWP internal postal system before reaching the relevant section, which must then inform the section that pays the benefit to rebuild the award and pay arrears owing. Thus, the whole process can take in excess of a month.

(b) should the person not provide a medical certificate, or should the DWP not log receipt of the medical certificate promptly, then payment of ESA cannot be made.

#### **C4 – LOCAL WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEMES (LWAS)**

The UK's social security system has long recognised that benefit levels do not allow claimants to build up financial reserves which would enable them to manage unexpected or one-off expenditures. As a result, for many years, additional public funds have been provided to assist those on low incomes with such costs. In April 2013, the discretionary Social Fund which had performed this function for many years was disbanded, and key elements of provision were 'localised'. Responsibility for community care grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses was given to local authorities in England (and the devolved authorities in Scotland and Wales). Each local authority was tasked with designing a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme (LWAS) to provide broadly comparable support to residents.

In practical terms, LWAS cover the costs (or provide directly) essentials such as beds and cookers for those leaving institutions or fleeing domestic violence; provide goods for people with disabilities to help with independent living; enable families to replace broken white goods and essential furniture; and enable vulnerable individuals to afford food and heating.

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<sup>26</sup> Regulation 3ZA, Social Security and Child Support (Decisions and Appeals) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 991).

<sup>27</sup> Regulation 30(3), Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794) does not apply.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.cas.org.uk/publications/voices-frontline-mandatory-reconsideration>

<sup>29</sup> Regulation 30(1), (2)(b) and (3), Employment and Support Allowance Regulations 2008 (SI 2008 No. 794).

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Wider research has demonstrated that that 10 months into the 2013/14 financial year, nearly half (49%) of the funding allocated to local welfare assistance schemes remained unspent.<sup>30</sup>

In early January 2014, it was announced that, from April 2015, local authorities will offer LWAS from within their general fund, and DWP's grant to Department for Communities and Local Government to fund LWAS will cease from that point forward. This decision was legally challenged, and, in September 2014, following settlement of the judicial review, the government committed to making a fresh decision on how LWAS would be funded. This new decision will be informed by a review that commenced in summer 2014, a consultation and consideration of equalities duties, and will be made in time to inform local government settlements due in December 2014.

The localised nature of LWAS means that their delivery varies according to area. Examples of differences between schemes operating in just two of our locations – Epsom and Ewell and County Durham – are given below:

### **Epsom and Ewell<sup>31</sup>**

The Epsom and Ewell Borough Council area is covered by Surrey County Council's Local Assistance Scheme. The application requirements are broad, with assistance available for claimants 'to meet their basic needs or needs of their dependants', or 'to keep or set up a home in the community'. Application is made via a Citizens Advice Bureau, and assistance takes the form of a one-off grant made as a VISA payment card and/or household items from a local social enterprise, the Surrey Reuse Network.

The scheme is intended to 'provide one-off support... to cover a short period of time in an emergency'. In line with this, there is a guideline limit of no more than three awards per 12-month period, with 'exceptions made where there is an exceptional need'. Repeat applicants will generally be signposted to local advice services. The scheme will not normally consider housing costs, debts, or costs normally met by state support or benefits.

There are no published criteria for decisions on local welfare assistance in Surrey, but 'consideration will be given to the nature, extent and urgency of the need in every case where an application for assistance is made'. There are provisions for a review of the application to be conducted within the team running the scheme, followed by a general Surrey County Council complaints process, and finally investigation by the Local Government Ombudsman.

### **County Durham<sup>32</sup>**

Durham County Council's Welfare Assistance Scheme is run by the Help and Advice Network Durham (HAND), a partnership between the local authority, Civica, Five Lamps, and the Family Fund. The scheme is comprised of two elements: Daily Living Expenses (DLE), and Settlement Grants. DLE grants are up to a maximum of £60 in value, and an additional £25 per child, to cover living expenses, emergency utility expenses, and emergency travel expenses. To qualify, claimants must have no other form of immediate financial assistance such as family, friends or their employer. Applicants must also fit into one of 11 categories of vulnerability, e.g. must have a dependent child at immediate risk, or have a learning disability.

Payment is made in the form of food (via a PayPoint store), direct payment to utilities providers, or direct payment to travel operators, but not in cash. DLE awards are limited to one per household per financial year, other than in exceptional circumstances. Settlement Grants have the same qualifying conditions, with a maximum limit of £500 in value (with no cash payments offered). The scheme significantly underspent in its first year of operation.<sup>33</sup>

No criteria for assessing applications are published, though decisions are based on the qualifying conditions. Appeals can be made to HAND in the event of an unsuccessful application.

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<sup>30</sup> based on the 139 authorities who responded – Freedom of Information request by CentrePoint.

[http://www.cypnow.co.uk/digital\\_assets/417/Centrepoint-FOI-summary.pdf](http://www.cypnow.co.uk/digital_assets/417/Centrepoint-FOI-summary.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Sources: 'Surrey's Local Assistance Scheme: An information guide', and 'Surrey County Council Local Assistance Scheme: Policy', both accessed via [www.surreycc.gov.uk](http://www.surreycc.gov.uk).

<sup>32</sup> Sources: 'Welfare Assistance Scheme', Help and Advice Network Durham, V3 15 October 2013, and 'Durham County Council: Draft Welfare Assistance Fund Policy V7 2013/14', both accessed via [durham.gov.uk](http://durham.gov.uk).

<sup>33</sup> 'Row blows up over Durham County Council's welfare budget', The Journal, 2 April 2014.

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## Benefits

# Jobcentre was set targets for benefit sanctions

- Inquiry launched after league tables revealed
- Leak shows pressure on staf to refer claimants



A manager at a jobcentre has leaked an email revealing the existence of a league table in her region for referrals to the stricter benefits regimes. Photograph: Rui Vieira/PA

**Patrick Wintour, political editor**

Thursday 21 March 2013 21.37 GMT

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18



The government has launched an inquiry after it was forced to admit that jobcentres have been setting targets and league tables to sanction benefit claimants despite assurances to parliament this week that no such targets were being set.

A leaked email shows staff being warned by managers that they will be disciplined unless they increase the number of claimants referred to a tougher benefit regime.

Ruth King, a jobcentre adviser manager, discloses in the email that she has received "the stricter benefit regime" figures for her area, adding: "As you can see Walthamstow are 95th in the league table out of only 109" – the number of jobcentres in London and the home counties. The employment minister, Mark Hoban, had assured MPs on Tuesday: "There are no league tables in place. We do not set targets for sanctions. I have made that point in previous discussions."

The league table could only have been drawn up through information provided by senior managers in the Department for Work and Pensions.

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Hoban had told MPs that decisions on sanctioning claimants "need to be based on whether people have breached the agreements they have set out with the jobcentre, and there are no targets in place".

Faced with the email, the DWP said: "We are urgently investigating what happened in this case. If a manager has set a local target for applying sanctions this is against DWP policy and we will be taking steps to ensure these targets are removed immediately."

King says in her email: "Our district manager is not pleased ... because senior managers are under pressure to improve our office output and move up the league he has to apply some pressure downwards." She continues: "Guys, we really need to up the game here. The 5% target is one thing – the fact that we are seeing over 300 people a week and only submitting six of them for possible doubts is simply not quite credible."

The email reveals that along with other area team managers King had until 15 February to show an improvement, adding that if she does not do so she will be subject to a performance improvement plan, the first stage of disciplinary action.

She says if she is threatened with disciplinary action to improve performance, she will have to threaten her own staff in the same way. She writes: "Obviously if I am on a PIP [performance improvement plan] to improve my team's Stricter Benefit Regime referral rate I will not have a choice but to consider implementing PIPs for those individuals who are clearly not delivering SBR within the team."

She also discloses that the jobcentre customers manager is looking for about 25 referrals a week. "We made six last week and so far this week have made four. There is a shortfall here."

The shadow work and pensions secretary, Liam Byrne, is due to raise the matter in parliament on Friday. He said: "This explosive letter lays bare the climate of fear in jobcentres as league tables and threats of disciplinary action are used to perpetrate a culture of sanctioning innocent people to hit targets. That is just plain wrong and must be stopped now. Either ministers have no grip on their department or they misled parliament. Either way they must now face the consequences."

The Labour MP for Walthamstow, Stella Creasy, said: "We have to get to the bottom of this. It is quite horrible that jobcentre staff feel they have to set people up to fail."

The DWP maintained that this was an isolated case. Hoban said: "I'm clear there should be no chasing of targets because I believe we should be making the right and fair decisions."

In the email King sets out ways jobcentre staff can catch out claimants, saying: "You should consider every doubt – if you are unsure then please conference with me." Her advice includes: "Do not accept the same job search every week, do not accept 'I dropped of CV to shops like Asda or Sainsbury's', listen for telltale phrases 'I pick up the kids', 'I look after my neighbours children/my grandchildren' or just 'I am busy' – all of which suggest that the customer may not be fully available for work, even cases where a parent shares custody can be considered."

She says someone can be deemed not to be actively seeking employment, and therefore subject to sanction "if someone is going away from home, but is not willing to return to take up employment, not willing to leave details of how they can be contacted should a job become available or not looking for work whilst away".

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# Freedom of Information request 2012-5156

Received 21<sup>st</sup> December 2012

Published 14<sup>th</sup> January 2013

## Information request

The number of individuals who had a Jobseekers Allowance sanction applied in Great Britain in each of the last five financial years and what percentage this figure represents of the total number of individuals claiming JSA; April 2007 to March 2012

## DWP response

In response to your specific question regarding the number of individuals who have had a Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) sanction applied in Great Britain, broken down by each year is shown in the table below;

**Please note that the proportions are derived from unpublished information which have not been quality assured to Official Statistics publication standards. They should therefore be treated with caution.**

**The number of individuals who had a Jobseekers Allowance sanction applied in Great Britain in each of the last five financial years and what percentage this figure represents of the total number of individuals claiming JSA; 1st April 2007 to 31st March 2012**

Financial Years	Number of individuals with a JSA sanction applied	Percentage of the total number of individuals claiming JSA
2007/2008	254,670	12%
2008/2009	287,830	10%
2009/2010	388,200	11%
2010/2011	528,700	15%
2011/2012	473,210	14%

### Source:

DWP Information, Governance and Security Directorate: JSA Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database.

**Notes:**

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Percentages are shown to the nearest whole number.
2. The number of sanctions applied is the number of Varied, Fixed Length and Entitlement Decision referrals where there has been an adverse decision.
3. Whilst claiming JSA, a customer can have a Labour Market 'doubt' raised against their claim. LM doubts are normally identified by staff at the Jobcentre Plus office and are referred to the Sector Decision Makers (SDMs). Once the SDM has made a decision on whether to sanction or disallow/allow a referral, they enter their decision on a system called DMAS (Decision Making and Appeals System). The decision is also sent back to the Jobcentre Plus office for entry to LMS (Labour Market System) and JSAPS (JSA Payment System) which then makes the appropriate changes to the actual payment to the customer.
4. Varied Length sanctions: A sanction of between 1 week and 26 weeks is imposed for leaving employment voluntarily without just cause, refusing employment without good cause, or losing employment through misconduct. The actual period in each case is at the discretion of the Adjudication Officer who makes the decision.
5. Fixed Length sanctions: A sanction of between 1 week and 26 weeks is imposed for refusal, without good cause, to attend an employment programme or carry out a Jobseeker's Direction. Payment of benefit continues in full pending the Adjudication Officer's decision on a sanction question.
6. Entitlement Decisions: These are questions on which entitlement to JSA depends. For example, if there is doubt around whether the Jobseeker's agreement (JSAg) is suitable, whether they are actively looking for work or making themselves available for work. In most cases payment of JSA will be suspended by benefit processing until the doubt is resolved.
7. Individuals claiming JSA are those who have had a live claim at any point throughout the period: 1st April to 31st March.
8. JSA claimants who have had more than one sanction applied in the period 1st April to 31st March will only be counted once in the figures above.

## ISSUES THAT MATTER

# Sanctions

## Getting them right

Community Links is a social action charity rooted in east London and nationally focussed. We learn about what works through our frontline service delivery in one of the UK's most socially and economically deprived areas. We share the lessons and promote innovations with a national audience of decision makers. We want to make policy work better for people.

Community Links is in a unique position to put forward a considered, evidence-based view on a range of key issues that affect the services we provide and the people who we work with. It is currently crucial for us to consider sanctions – how they are used, their application and their consequences. Sanctions for those claiming benefits have more than doubled under the coalition government. Community Links is exceptionally well placed to be considering sanctions; as an organisation we both “raise doubts”<sup>1</sup> through the Work Programme AND we offer support to clients who have been sanctioned.

<sup>1</sup> Work Programme advisors do not have the power to apply sanctions; they merely ‘raise doubts’ about a client (for missing an appointment, not actively searching for work etc.). Once they have raised a doubt this is communicated to the Jobcentre who apply the sanction.

### What are sanctions?

People claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA) who do not follow the terms of the Jobseeker's Agreement may have their benefit reduced or stopped for a period of time. This is known as a sanction<sup>2</sup>. Sanctions can be applied in a number of circumstances including failure to attend meetings, not putting sufficient effort into looking for work, turning down a job, and/or leaving a job voluntarily.

New sanctions regimes for JSA and ESA were introduced late 2012 with broad aims to toughen and align them. The Government say sanctions encourage people to engage with the support being offered by Jobcentres by making it clearer to claimants what they are expected to do in return for their benefits – and that they risk losing them if they don't stick to the rules.

<sup>2</sup> JSA is the benefit that individuals who are unemployed but fully capable of work are entitled to claim whilst they try to find employment. ESA is for those who are ill or disabled and need extra help in either finding a job or, if they cannot work, supporting them unconditionally in their unemployment.

## What is the process?

The amount and length of a sanction depends on whether the claimant is single or in a couple and what level sanction has been applied. Lower, intermediate and higher level sanctions can be applied depending on the severity of the misconduct. For example, the first time a lower level sanction is applied claimants lose JSA for four weeks, but can lose JSA payments for up to 156 weeks when a higher level sanction is applied. The ESA sanctions regime differs slightly: sanctions are applied for similar reasons, but they are open-ended at first and followed by a fixed-period sanction of up to four weeks when the claimant re-engages.

A sanction should not be applied if a claimant can show that they had 'good reason' for actions that led to sanctions. 'Good reason' is not clearly defined in legislation but depends on the circumstances of the individual case. Claimants have the right to appeal in writing against sanction decisions.

## What do the new sanctions regimes mean?

DWP published data on the use of sanctions under the new regimes in November 2013<sup>3</sup>. The overarching picture is that the number and length of sanctions has increased. The data showed that:

- Sanctions have more than doubled since 2010, under the coalition government.
- Since the new sanctions regime was introduced in late 2012 referrals have increased by 30 per cent.
- Of these referrals, the number of sanctions imposed has increased by 13 per cent.
- Over half of all reconsideration requests and appeals against JSA sanctions are successful.

## Why do sanctions matter to Community Links?

Community Links Work Programme staff may initiate a process that could lead to sanctions and our Advice Team supports clients who have been sanctioned – so we know both sides of the issue. We have seen a substantial increase in the numbers of people who need support due to sanctions. Our early action approach aims to assist people before they reach crisis point, so we offer these individuals help to appeal sanctions as well as other wrap-around support such as debt advice. However, we have also seen an increase in the number of clients who don't come for support until they are already in crisis. For these individuals we offer informal support such as food donations.

We also refer to official food banks and have seen an increased reliance on donated food and other support as a direct result of the sanctioning process. Many individuals are unaware of why they have been sanctioned – and sometime even that they have been sanctioned at all. Those that experience sanctions often don't know of official crisis or hardship payments.

Much of our advice work is responding to 'failure demand' – demand caused by failures in the system of public administration. Reducing this would save significant amounts of money and free up advisors to carry out valuable work with clients, supporting them to resolve their long-term problems.

Meeting the recent increased demand for support in relation to sanctions is challenging and has an impact on service delivery, however we hope to increase our advice provision in the near future with new grant-funding.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-june-2013>

## Case-study

Rita\* is a young woman who has lived alone in a one bedroom council flat for about five years. She is strongly work-oriented and has been employed for the past six years until being made redundant. She has a degree in journalism and aspires to a career, not just a job. However, Rita has put this on hold whilst she works in retail to pay the bills. A big barrier to work for her is a lack of internet access, for which she must use local library services.

Rita has been sanctioned several times, often incorrectly. She was sanctioned for non-attendance at a meeting, even though she had agreed with her Jobcentre advisor to participate in work experience elsewhere. Having no notification by official letter, she first heard about the sanction at a meeting with her advisor. Rita was also incorrectly sanctioned for missing a meeting whilst at a pre-arranged hospital appointment; even though she had informed her advisor using official documentation. She avoided the sanction but only by insisting to speak to the line manager at the Jobcentre. One sanction meant Rita did not have enough money to attend a job interview; she directly blames the Jobcentre for preventing her from potentially getting a job.

It is possible to appeal incorrect sanctions, but Rita did not know about this until she approached Community Links and she was told about the appeals process. The Jobcentre, gave her a leaflet with the necessary information, and her Community Links advisor put in a lot of time and effort to help. Her appeal was eventually successful, after five weeks, during this time, she had very little money on which to survive. There is an official process for those who are suffering following a sanction to get a hardship payment. However, she was told not to bother applying for this as she “probably wouldn’t get it”.

Rita experienced adverse impacts from being sanctioned; most stark was the impact on her health, which she made very clear during her interview:

*“I had times when I literally had no food and no gas. I just lay in my bed looking at the walls. I couldn’t travel or make any calls. I couldn’t even afford to get the bus to sign-on, but I knew that if I didn’t go I’d be suspended again. It’s like a vicious cycle. I turned up to the Jobcentre actually hungry. I hadn’t eaten for two days and I was scared that if I was five minutes late they might suspend me again - it really wasn’t easy.”*

*“During the time I’ve been on benefits, I’ve suffered depression. I’ve had times when I didn’t want to go out... I didn’t know how to say to people that I couldn’t afford to eat. I wasn’t in a mental state to go to an interview. The experience has made me feel inferior and nervy.”*

*“All I was thinking about constantly was not having money. It was terrible. I felt physically sick and I was getting headaches... this is not a way to live. I couldn’t look at myself in the mirror or go out and see my friends because they would say – “I didn’t know it was that bad!” It’s really affected me in ways I didn’t know it would.”*

The sanctions process also put Rita into debt, she was forced to borrow money from a friend who she then could not pay back; a very embarrassing experience. Although tempted to take out a payday loan, she avoided further debt even in a time of such hardship:

*“You see those adverts and you think all I need is £100 to buy some food or shoes. The only thing that stopped me at the time was that I couldn’t find my passport. If I had had it then I would have just gone for the loan because I was so desperate. I’m so glad I didn’t do it.”*

\*Our client’s name has been changed to preserve anonymity

## Experiences of and problems with the process

The Department for Work and Pensions have commissioned an independent review of sanctions, focussing particularly on JSA claimants<sup>4</sup>. The aim is to understand how the system is working and to make recommendations for how the Government might make improvements, partly in response to concerns coming from across the voluntary and community sector that the regime is not having a positive effect on claimant behaviour. The review therefore is focused on client understanding and official communications.

To link up with this activity and explore sanctions in more detail, Community Links has contributed to a number of forums. Key findings on the issues which emerged from discussions with other providers and our own staff are set out below grouped around four main themes:

### Understanding

- People tend not to understand sanctions and the sanctioning process, (including the potential severity of a sanction) until they are applied. Particularly certain groups, including those with learning difficulties or mental health problems.
- Initial meetings with clients are crucial in explaining face-to-face the potential consequences of non-compliance.
- There is a culture of fear and misunderstanding surrounding sanctions: some people are afraid of making tiny mistakes such as being one minute late for a meeting.
- There is, however, a group of well informed people who know how to better navigate the system and avoid being sanctioned.

## Communication

- More often than not claimants do not hear about a sanction until after it has been applied.
- The lack of plain English communication often means people either do not understand what is happening or ignore it.
- Lack of understanding is compounded by the fact that information is not always communicated in accessible formats for example in community languages.
- Communication is inconsistent.
- Crisis support and hardship payment arrangements are little known or understood.

### Application of Sanctions

- The sanction regime is too blunt. There is not enough flexibility for Work Programme or JCP advisers to apply discretion. This means sanctions are at times implemented in circumstances where good reasons explain clients' failure to comply; or in ways which hinder, rather than help job searches.
- The reinstatement of benefits following an incorrect sanction can take weeks.
- There is a time-lag between raising doubts and a sanction being applied.

### Ownership of the Sanction Regime

- There is a lack of ownership and accountability surrounding the sanctions process. JCP often do not take responsibility for upholding sanctions which can lead to antagonism between claimants and Work Programme advisors.
- There is not enough clarity between the roles of Jobcentre and Work Programme staff.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-independent-review>

## Recommendations for Work Programme Providers and DWP

Information about sanctions needs to be communicated more effectively to all customers so that they better understand their rights and responsibilities. We recommend:

- Reinforcing information at regular intervals in the customer journey.
- Offering information in a variety of formats so that it is accessible to everyone, and so that all clients can fully engage with the system.
- Explaining the consequence of failures should be a part of all induction processes.
- Providing better information and support to help people appeal sanction decisions and claim available financial support and hardship payments.

Careful thought needs to be given to where the accountability lies for sanctions and which agent customers perceive to be issuing and upholding sanction decisions. At the very least, there needs to be more effective collaborative working between JCP and WP providers. This could include:

- A Joint IT system would be useful - especially in terms of sharing client information.
- More interaction with Benefit Delivery Offices who currently process sanctions and sit separately from front-line advisors.
- A national steer to work in partnership

Work Programme providers would benefit from having greater autonomy and flexibility to deliver the sanction regime. Control should help providers to align and embed sanctions into delivery models (but not to directly apply sanctions) to ensure that they are effective and support productive customer-provider relationships. Providers should at least have the power to:

- Issue warnings before applying sanctions.
- Overturn sanction decisions (where appropriate).
- Apply common sense discretion to the application of sanctions; advisors at all levels should have the authority to over-rule the process wherever necessary.

Other more radical changes could include:

- Non-financial sanctions should exist within the system so that customers can choose another positive activity rather than lose their benefit
- Sanction regime should sit entirely within the 'black box' and providers should have complete autonomy to deliver the regime as they see fit.

### Learning for Community Links

- Provide detailed information about sanctions in different formats and/or languages and make these resources available to Work Programme customers. Information should include details on claimant rights and how to appeal.
- Maintain good relationships and open lines of communication with JCP staff to ensure that information can be shared and issues resolved quickly. This is something that has particularly suffered since the introduction of the Work Programme.
- Continue to lobby and campaign for system and process changes within the regime to ensure that it is as effective as possible.



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Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Government's response to the Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013

Presented to Parliament  
by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
by Command of Her Majesty  
July 2014

Cm 8904



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## Foreword by the Minister of State for Employment

Rights and responsibilities have been an ever-present feature of our benefits system and can be traced back to the Beveridge Report in 1942. I believe that it is only right that where a claimant does not meet their responsibilities, benefit payments are withheld or stopped.

But I also believe that sanctions should only be applied where appropriate – where the claimant has failed to meet a reasonable requirement with no good reason.

I am determined to review and improve the system on an ongoing basis to ensure this is the case.

It is in this context that I welcome Matthew Oakley's review. The review team have rigorously examined the Department for Work and Pensions' (the Department's) sanctions processes and communications.

The review concluded that the current system largely functions well, but concedes that in an operation of this scale there are almost inevitably areas for improvement. In line with this, while Matthew Oakley has made a wide range of recommendations, he has also pointed out the Department is already making improvements to the system.

I welcome the findings of the review. I have always said it was my intention to respond positively, and this response makes clear the Government will be accepting all of the recommendations.

The implementation of these recommendations will add to a programme of work already in motion to improve our sanctions system. Together I believe these changes will make a significant difference, but I will be continuing to keep the system under review and seeking further opportunities to make improvements.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Esther McVey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

**Esther McVey MP**

Minister of State for Employment

# Background and context

# 1

## 1. Jobseeker's Allowance and sanctions

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) provides financial support to individuals while they look for work. Through Jobcentre Plus and other programmes, the Government invests significant resources in helping claimants move into employment as quickly as possible. This includes access to adviser support, training, work experience and work placements.

In return for benefit payments and this support, claimants must take all reasonable steps to give themselves the best prospects of securing employment. They must also meet specific mandatory requirements set by their adviser that are designed to help them into work. If they do not – and they do not have a good reason for doing so – their benefit payments will be 'sanctioned' i.e. stopped completely or reduced for a period of time.

The Government strongly believes that this system is right and that sanctions are an essential part of JSA (and have been since the introduction of the benefit in 1996). Sanctions aim to motivate claimants to take the necessary action to find work, and to ensure the system is fair to the taxpayer. The JSA regime, which includes sanctions, is very effective at moving people off JSA and into work – around two-thirds of JSA claimants end their JSA claim because they find paid employment<sup>1</sup>. Over half of new JSA claims end within three months, three-quarters within six months and 90 per cent within a year. Seventy-two per cent of claimants say that they are more likely to follow the rules due to the presence of sanctions<sup>2</sup>.

1 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214578/rrep791.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214578/rrep791.pdf)

2 p157: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261656/rrep852.pdf)

## 6 Background and context

Since 2010, this Government has made a number of significant changes to the way the JSA system operates. Two areas that are particularly relevant here are:

- the increased expectations on JSA claimants. The Jobseekers Act 1995 (the primary legislation governing JSA) is clear that, in order to be entitled to the benefit, a claimant must take all steps they reasonably can to give themselves the best prospects of employment. Jobcentre Plus has strengthened its approach to making sure claimants are meeting this condition of entitlement. The Government has also put in place – through the Work Programme and Help to Work – more focused engagement with the long-term unemployed, and across the board has ensured compliance is checked more rigorously than it has been before.
- Changes to the sanction system. From the end of October 2012 a new structure for sanctions was introduced. The new system aims to provide a better incentive for claimants to comply by providing clearer and tougher consequences (in particular for claimants who repeatedly fail to meet their responsibilities, and for the most important requirements such as failing to accept a suitable job offer).

## 2. Sanction levels

The Government monitors and publishes on a quarterly basis, detailed statistics on the use of JSA sanctions. The most recent publication (May 2014) provides information on sanctions until the end of December 2013. Since early 2010, the volume of sanctions has been increasing, as have sanctions as a proportion of the JSA caseload. It remains the case, however, that the vast majority of JSA claimants do not receive a sanction (in 2013, on average, five per cent of JSA claims resulted in a sanction in any month).

It is clear that the increases have been driven by a rise in sanctions on claimants who have failed to take all reasonable steps to find work and those who have failed to participate in the Work Programme – claimants who largely require more support and encouragement to move into work.

## 3. Ensuring appropriate application of sanctions

The Government does not want any claimant to be sanctioned, the aim is for claimants to comply with requirements that will help them into employment. However, where a claimant wilfully, and for no good reason, fails to meet a requirement a sanction must apply. The Government believes this is right, and it is underpinned by legislation.

A range of safeguards are in place to help ensure that sanctions are only applied where appropriate:

- Requirements must be reasonable, designed to help the claimant move into work, and reflecting the claimant's particular capability and circumstances.
- No sanction should be applied where the claimant has good reason.
- An independent DWP decision maker, not the claimant's adviser, considers whether or not the claimant had good reason and decides whether a sanction should apply.
- Claimants have a right to request a sanction decision be reconsidered and to appeal to an independent tribunal.

Claimants may also apply for hardship payments if they are facing hardship as a consequence of a sanction. Hardship payments reinstate payments at 60 per cent of the level of normal JSA payments. All claimants can apply immediately for hardship. If eligible, claimants considered vulnerable, including anyone with responsibility for a child, can receive payments straightaway. Others must wait 14 days for payments to start. Other benefits, such as Housing Benefit, should not be affected by a JSA sanction.

The Government believes the vast majority of JSA sanction decisions are correct and have followed a process that reflects these safeguards. In 2013 our decision makers considered nearly two million cases, out of which they imposed 871,000 sanctions or disentitlements. Only around 13 per cent of the decisions were changed on reconsideration or appeal, and often that was because the claimant brought forward new evidence.

The Government is, however, committed to continually improving this system, in particular to ensure safeguards are applied as intended. The Government will also keep the effectiveness of the policy under review, drawing on planned evaluations to ensure that it continues to meet the intended outcomes.

#### **4. Continual improvement – the Oakley review**

The 'Oakley review' provides an important contribution to this ongoing work.

The review was established as required by the Jobseekers Act 2013, with a specific remit to prepare a report on the operation of the sanctions system for failures to participate in mandatory employment schemes. Matthew Oakley was appointed to lead the review by the Minister for Employment, in September 2013. His report makes a number of recommendations: on communications; processes (particularly around the gathering of good reason); and on closer working with our partners, particularly Work Programme providers.

The Government welcomes these recommendations, recognising they will help improve the operation of our system and, wherever possible, and subject to detailed feasibility and securing the necessary resources, has accepted them. The next section summarises each of the recommendations in the Oakley review and sets out the Government response. Where a response has been accepted, the Government intends to apply the recommendation not just to sanctions around mandatory employment schemes, but to go further and apply them to the sanctions system as a whole.

#### **5. Continual improvement – changes already made and planned**

The Oakley review will add to changes the Government has already made or set in motion to improve the operation of the sanctions system. The Government has already:

- Introduced the Claimant Commitment approach (from October 2013, with rollout completed by in April 2014) to JSA, which has had a positive impact on the adviser role and improved claimant understanding of the requirements placed upon them. The Claimant Commitment is at the heart of a new personalised approach to job search, which centres on active discussion between advisers and the claimant so that claimants establish their own detailed plan of action, tailored to and owned by them. The Claimant Commitment provides job seekers with clear job seeking actions so that they are clearer about expectations, what evidence they should be recording and the steps they need to take to demonstrate compliance.

## 8 Background and context

- Started development of a new process where advisers identify doubt about whether a claimant has been actively seeking work. This will change the longstanding system where benefit payment is suspended without a decision from a decision maker. Instead we will ensure that a decision is made before benefit payment is stopped. We expect this to take effect from July 2014.
- Introduced (from October 2013) a quality assurance check for sanction decision makers, to drive standards and consistency in decision making. Under this system all decision makers are subject to checks on a proportion of their decisions.
- Introduced (in October 2012) a telephone line (Provider Direct) for providers to check whether a sanction referral would be appropriate before making a referral, for example, checking the claimant is still on benefit.
- Revised the organisation of sanction decision makers (from January 2014), so that specific decision-making teams work with particular Jobcentres or providers. This aims to ensure closer working, in particular to discuss and address variations in the quality of referrals or decisions.
- Introduced a quality assurance framework and checklist for advisers making referrals to decision makers (effective from the end of April 2014). This aims to ensure that advisers gather the right evidence from claimants and make appropriate referrals – helping to further improve the efficiency and consistency in decision making.
- Set up a new communication unit and a review of all our claimant communications to ensure we are producing clear standard letters, drawing on high quality research and best practice. These teams will take forward Matthew Oakley's recommendations on improvements to our letters and other communications.

# Government's response to the Oakley review recommendations

# 2

## **Recommendation 1**

All letters sent to claimants (including those at referral, good reason and decision notification stages of the sanctions process) should be reviewed to improve claimant understanding. They should give a personalised description of exactly what the sanction referral or decision relates to and include clear information about reconsideration, appeals and hardship.

## **Accept and already underway**

We recognise how important it is that all our communications on sanctions are clear. This will ensure that claimants understand the sanction process and can take the necessary action. We are prioritising improvements to communications on sanctions as part of our wider commitment to raise the quality and consistency of the Department's claimant communications. As such, we have:

- created a Claimant Communications Unit to improve effectiveness on the Department's biggest communications challenges, and to define professional standards on claimant communications for the wider department; and
- set up an operational Claimant Communications team to centralise the production of communication products, and identify and take forward areas for improvement.

These teams are currently undertaking a detailed mapping exercise of all claimant communications relating to sanctions. This will identify any necessary improvements to our letters to ensure understanding and encourage claimants to take the appropriate action. This will include steps a claimant can take to prevent a sanction, including the provision of good reason evidence, clearly explaining the reason for the sanction when applied, and communicating rights of appeal and the availability of hardship payments.

## 10 Government's response to the Oakley review recommendations

We will complete this review by summer 2014 and, by the end of 2014, we will report on progress and further plans to improve claimant communications on sanctions.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Department should work with experts in communication and behavioural insights to test whether variations in the style and content of letters could boost the proportion of claimants who open and engage with the letters they have been sent.

## Accept and already underway

It is vital that claimants open and understand all letters that we send to them, as they will contain important information about their benefit. We accept that sometimes this does not happen, which means that they may miss information, such as an appointment request, that may lead to a sanction. If they have already been sanctioned, they may miss critical information about the sanction process, including the opportunity to supply evidence of good reason.

Primarily, claimants must take responsibility, and be contactable and engage with correspondence while on JSA. However, we recognise that we can do more work to improve engagement with our letters.

The Department's Communications team is bringing together internal and external expertise to look at how behavioural insights can be employed to help achieve this.

As part of this the Communications team will work with Jobcentre Plus to test a range of variables around our communications, including how we deliver letters, envelope format and branding. We will focus on the most critical communications products, i.e. those delivered at key stages in the sanctions process, and use these tests and trials to help ensure that claimant's engage with important information at the right time. We will also examine the use of text messages to prompt and encourage claimants to open and react to the letters.

This work will sit within our Communications Review which commenced in May 2014.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Department should work with Local Authorities to improve the coordination of their approach to delivering Housing Benefit for claimants who have been sanctioned. In the short-term, all letters and communications informing claimants of the application of a sanction should advise claimants already in receipt of Housing Benefit to contact their Local Authority about their claim.

## Accept and already underway

The department accepts that the Housing Benefit of claimants should not be stopped following a sanction and we are taking immediate action to ensure that this does not happen.

When a claimant's JSA is stopped, for whatever reason, the JSA computer system sends an automatic notification to Local Authorities. This information is essential where entitlement to JSA has ended, for example, because they have found work. In such cases, their entitlement to Housing Benefit will need to be reviewed (for example, because of increases in their income). However, the information that is sent also includes those where a sanction has been imposed. In order to allow the Local Authority to distinguish between these cases and those where entitlement has ended we have proposed a short- and long-term solution.

In the short term, as part of our overall communications review we will ensure that wherever necessary claimants will be advised to keep their Local Authority informed to stop them inadvertently closing their Housing Benefit.

In the long term we will implement an IT solution so that Local Authorities are given the information they need to suspend Housing Benefit only in cases where it is appropriate to do so. We are currently planning to implement this by autumn 2014.

**Recommendation 4**

The Department should ensure that an accessible guide to benefit sanctions that includes information and links to details of the process of reconsideration, appeals and hardship payments is available in both hard-copy and on-line through the gov.uk website.

## Accept and already underway

The Department recognises the importance of producing communications which can be easily understood by our claimants and are accessible in a number of formats, including GOV.UK.

As part of our communications review, our Claimant Communications team has produced a plain English guide to benefit sanctions which is currently being tested with claimants, staff and stakeholders. Once tested, this guide will be provided to all Jobcentres, providers and stakeholders, and will be published on GOV.UK by the end of July 2014.

**Recommendation 5**

The Department and providers should work together with stakeholders and advocates for groups with communication support needs to develop an approach for identifying and engaging claimants who might require third party support to understand letters sent while they are on mandatory schemes.

## Accept

The Department is already reviewing the process for putting alternative formats in place for communications within JSA and other benefits.

The review is specifically focusing on providing a consistent service to those who require alternative formats such as email, braille, large print or audio. The review has consulted with 35 external stakeholders, current customers and is also conducting a Department survey of its people to better understand knowledge levels for these alternative formats.

This review was commissioned by the Minister for Disabled People and is being developed in partnership between the Department and the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). The report will be published externally in late July 2014.

We also plan to continue the work Matthew Oakley has done in engaging with stakeholders for the purpose of writing his review. We are already working closely with many of these organisations and we plan to create a group with a specific focus on helping the Department create clear and accessible communications on sanctions. We will formally invite stakeholders with a view to establishing the group in summer 2014.

## 12 Government's response to the Oakley review recommendations

This group will help ensure the content of our letters and other communications are as effective and as clear as possible so that claimants fully understand responsibilities and actions required of them. Where claimants need extra support to understand communications we already involve third party support. We will further strengthen our guidance on this provision so that advisers continue to identify when third party support is required. The group will also aim to draw on stakeholders' expertise in communicating effectively with claimants with support needs, and to explore how we can use their contact with these groups to maximise reach and understanding of information.

### **Recommendation 6**

After sanction decisions have been made, the Department should consider how vulnerable groups might be identified and helped to claim hardship payments and/or access support services offered through Jobcentre Plus and contracted providers.

## Accept and already underway

The Department is undertaking a thorough review and improvement of the hardship process and associated communication activities, and we will strengthen guidance so that hardship provision is clear upfront to all claimants who are sanctioned. We will have this new process in place by August 2014.

As part of this review we will address the issue of identification of vulnerable claimants and avoid discontinuity of payment. This covers a range of activities, including, where appropriate, staff discussing with claimants how to make applications, support for claimants in making applications and ensuring decisions are taken and hardship payments received as soon as possible with the aim of preventing the disruption of benefit for vulnerable claimants. Under this new process, the Department will make a commitment that if vulnerable claimants claim for hardship on or before their signing day, they should receive a hardship payment at their normal payment date.

In addition to these immediate measures, we are also investigating and impacting further enhancements to the process. For example, the use of SMS text throughout the process to keep claimants informed, reviewing electronic forms and making improvements to decision quality and speed of processing.

### **Recommendation 7**

As well as helping claimants to understand letters, the Department should also consider other forms of communication that could be used alongside letters. For instance, a number of respondents discussed using text messaging, e-mails and phone calls to back up and complement the more standard forms of communication.

As recommended by the Social Security Advisory Committee, the Department should ensure that claimants' communication preferences are routinely recorded and that communications are delivered through the requested channel. This information should also be shared with providers of mandatory schemes and guidance adjusted so that they also communicate with claimants in the manner requested.

## Accept in principle

We already use alternatives to letters, including text messages and emails, for example, confirming appointments, informing claimants of job opportunities etc. As described under Recommendations 2 and 6 we will consider what further use we can make of alternative forms of communication. This will also form part of our discussions with stakeholders under Recommendation 5.

We see clear value in recording and responding to claimants' communications preferences and will, as a matter of course, record alternative contact details provided by the claimant. Our advisers and decision makers will then have the option to supplement any communications with additional contact via this channel (typically an e-mail address).

Where a claimant has a particular communication need, for example because of a disability, we already record that information and ensure contact is made via those channels, where we have permission. However, there are potentially significant costs in terms of staff time if our advisers have to vary communication channels to every claimant according to their particular preferences.

As part of the implementation of Recommendation 2 we will also consider further how information recorded can be best used more widely, including amendment of guidance so that alternative contact details and communication preferences are sent to the provider when referring a claimant to the Work Programme.

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Department should work with providers to review procedures to ensure that claimants on mandatory back to work schemes have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to both the provider and Jobcentre Plus. The Claimant Commitment should be shared with providers of the scheme so that they are able to tailor their provision to fit around Jobcentre Plus requirements and any easements that have been highlighted.

## **Accept in principle**

When a claimant is referred to the Work Programme while in receipt of JSA, the provider is responsible for helping the claimant into work, but the Jobcentre retains responsibility for ensuring that the claimant continues to meet their conditions of entitlement to JSA (the requirements to actively seek work and be available for work). We accept that this dual accountability puts an onus on us to ensure the claimant is absolutely clear as to their responsibilities and the different roles of the provider and Jobcentre Plus; and in addition, that both advisers and providers fully understand the totality of requirements being placed on claimants.

To improve this position, we are making changes to our guidance to strengthen the message to claimants about the joint responsibility that advisers and providers have in helping them into work.

We already have a system in place where we share relevant details in the Claimant Commitment with the provider to help them to understand the claimant's individual circumstances. We do, however, recognise the value of sharing the full Claimant Commitment. Guidance for Jobcentre Plus advisers will therefore be revised to ensure claimants are made aware of the importance of sharing their Claimant Commitment with the provider at first contact. This will be reinforced through a revision to guidance for providers – where they will also be advised of the benefits of requesting a copy of the Claimant Commitment from the claimant. This will enable the provider to fully understand any adjustments that may have been made for the claimant so they can consider these when developing an action plan.

We will also introduce a revised version of the Claimant Commitment which will be discussed with the claimant at the Jobcentre Plus referral interview, before the claimant joins the Work Programme. The revised Claimant Commitment will aim to clearly explain the roles of the provider and Jobcentre Plus, and the requirements that can be placed on the claimant. In particular, the commitment will make clear that claimants will need to continue to demonstrate they have met their conditions of entitlement to JSA when they sign on at the Jobcentre, but that activity they have been asked to do by the provider will count towards this. We will also ensure this is clearly explained by the adviser at the referral interview.

## 14 Government's response to the Oakley review recommendations

On an ongoing basis, the claimant is already advised to present evidence of what they have done with their provider at their fortnightly jobsearch reviews. We will strengthen guidance to ensure claimants are aware of the importance of presenting evidence, including any written information from providers at the fortnightly jobsearch reviews so that advisers have all the relevant information to take into account when assessing whether the claimant has met the job search elements of entitlement.

### **Recommendation 9**

Where claimants are being referred to the Work Programme, the Department should test whether understanding and compliance could be improved by agreeing the Claimant Commitment between Jobcentre Plus advisers and the claimant, in consultation with the adviser from the provider.

## Accept in principle

The Department is committed to looking at how we can improve claimant understanding and compliance when they attend the Work Programme. Bringing the provider into the Claimant Commitment process is a sensible recommendation and we agree in principle.

We will need to undertake further work on how this would actually work in practice and we need to be mindful that to implement this change could be a large burden on resource, so we need to ensure it represents value for money.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Department should consider whether the current model of dual requirements from Jobcentre Plus and providers could be adapted to improve claimant understanding.

## Accept

We will consider the interaction between Jobcentre Plus and contracted work provision as part of the development of the next phase of the Work Programme.

### **Recommendation 11**

To test potential opportunities to improve claimant understanding, the Department should work with providers to pilot a new approach using warnings and non-financial sanctions following a first failure to comply with conditionality on the Work Programme.

## Accept in principle

The recommendation to test potential opportunities to improve claimant understanding by piloting new approaches such as the use of warnings and non-financial sanctions is sensible. However, the current sanctions system is heavily prescribed in legislation and tests are likely to need new legislation to enable them to proceed. The Department will consider further the potential options and the likely timescales.

### **Recommendation 12**

The Department should revise guidance and/or enabling legislation so that, in some circumstances, providers of mandatory back to work schemes are able to accept good reason from claimants.

## Accept in principle

Providers of mandatory back-to-work schemes already have the discretion to set and amend mandatory requirements. This gives considerable flexibility. For example, if a claimant participating in the Work Programme contacts them before they are due to undertake a mandatory activity, such as attending an interview, the provider can decide whether to re-arrange this to a more suitable date. In such circumstances, because the mandatory requirement (the interview) has changed, there is no need for the provider to consider good reason or make a sanction referral. We have expanded current guidance to ensure that this discretion and flexibility is as clear as possible to the provider and are taking steps to ensure that all providers and sub-contractors are aware of this guidance and utilising it.

However, where a sanctionable failure has already occurred, the provider has no discretion and must refer all failures to a decision maker. This is different to the system for our advisers who have the ability not to refer cases where a claimant clearly has good reason. These are known as treat as straightforward cases.

We accept that in principle there are some circumstances where these straightforward good reason decisions could be made by providers (i.e. circumstances where it is quite clear a sanction should not be applied). However, new primary legislation would be required to enable this and this would need to compete with other priorities in the legislative programme. We will therefore consider this as part of the general development work for the next phase of the Work Programme.

In the meantime, we have ensured that providers are given the maximum amount of discretion within the boundaries of existing legislation. We will also explore ways in which to improve the interaction between providers and decision-makers so that straightforward decisions are made swiftly, where possible, building on the improvements we have already made through the introduction of the Provider Direct telephone helpline service for Work Programme providers.

### **Recommendation 13**

Providers should also be required to check all potential sanctions referrals through the Provider Direct system to ensure that administrative errors have not led to ineffective communication.

## Accept

Provider Direct was introduced in October 2012 to give providers direct and immediate access to the Department so that, where needed, providers can clarify a claimant's current circumstance before making a sanction referral. The Department has been working with providers to encourage use of the tool and has received positive feedback from users.

We agree that there is value to making this interaction mandatory to help improve the quality of referrals. We will seek to ensure that providers are obliged to use Provider Direct in all future contracts and will explore earlier implementation.

### **Recommendation 14**

Guidance for providers should be revised to require that providers have an obligation to take proportional steps to seek good reason from claimants. All subsequent referrals for a sanction should outline the attempts that a provider has made to do this and provide accurate details of any good reason that has been given.

## Accept

The Department will build on its existing process of obtaining good reason from providers. We have worked with providers to ensure that they understand their obligations and have made it clear that providers can record any good reason offered to them from the claimant. To ensure that this is accurately communicated to us we have also created a referral form and detailed guidance which can be found at the following link:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/306488/wp-pg-form-wp-08.xls](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306488/wp-pg-form-wp-08.xls)

We will continue to encourage providers to take all reasonable steps to record good reason where possible and within the appropriate format.

### **Recommendation 15**

Referrals for sanctions from mandatory schemes should be automatically flagged to the claimant's Jobcentre Plus adviser. Following this, advisers should attempt to explain, via the claimant's preferred method of communication or at their next fortnightly sign-on, that a referral for a sanction decision has been made. This should also be an opportunity for the claimant to give good reason.

## Accept in principle

It is important to note that when a claimant is participating in a mandatory scheme it is the responsibility of the provider to manage any activity that will help them to find a job – this includes setting requirements and utilising the sanction system to encourage compliance. This system was designed to ensure that claimants were clear on who they should be engaging with on their work activity.

The Jobcentre will continue to see the claimant on a fortnightly basis to ensure that they are meeting the conditions of entitlement, actively seeking and being available for work. They do not set any additional requirements during this stage.

All sanction referrals from the Work Programme and Mandatory Work Activity therefore go directly to the decision maker who will make every effort to collect evidence through various channels including telephone, post and text message to ensure the claimant is aware of the referral and seeks their reason for non-attendance. To supplement this, referrals are also recorded on our systems so that Jobcentre advisers are fully aware of any provider sanction referrals that have been made and can signpost the claimant to the correct contact.

We will revise guidance for those undertaking jobsearch reviews, instructing them to routinely check systems for information about any provider originated sanction referrals and if there are, to provide the claimant with supplementary information, for example, about the importance of responding to a decision-maker request for reasons for non-compliance, what will happen next and, should a sanction be imposed, access to hardship payments and the reconsideration and appeals process.

**Recommendation 16**

The Department should build on the approach it has taken for the appeals process and introduce a commitment to make decisions over sanctions referrals within a set timescale. This should include both initial sanction decisions and reconsiderations.

## Accept

The Department is committed to delivering quality and timely decisions and we recognise the benefits of a clear commitment to resolve decisions within a set timescale. As the review notes, when a claimant appeals we are already committed to providing a response to Her Majesty's (HM) Courts and Tribunals Service within 28 days of the appeal being received.

To take forward the recommendation we are currently reviewing our end-to-end process and will consider what timescales we should set from referral to initial decision, and from a reconsideration request being raised to a reconsideration decision being made to allow sufficient time for the claimant to provide good reason, and for a robust decision to be made swiftly. Within this we will ensure that initial decisions are made within three days of all relevant information being presented to the decision maker. We will set out the full timescales for the end-to-end process once our review is complete.

**Recommendation 17**

The Department should revise procedures and guidance to ensure that proportionate steps are taken to inform all claimants of a sanction decision before the payment of benefit is stopped. Again, claimants' preferred method of communication should be used to convey this message.

## Accept

It is important to note that claimants are informed when they are referred for a sanction and would have received the opportunity to provide good reason to the decision maker before a sanction decision is taken, so they should be fully aware that their benefit could be stopped. Once a sanction decision has been taken, claimants are also currently notified in writing in advance of the payment being stopped.

We agree that there should be no circumstances where the claimant is not informed of a sanction decision before the benefit payment is stopped. Where payment is due imminently and there is not enough time to inform the claimant that their benefit will be stopped, we will make it clear within guidance that a decision maker should postpone making a decision until after the forthcoming payment. This should allow sufficient time for the claimant to be notified about a sanction being imposed before their next payment is due.

We will commit to review and, where necessary, strengthen guidance and messaging to decision makers to make sure that procedures are followed accordingly and that the situation does not arise where someone leaves a jobsearch review expecting a payment that is not made following a sanction decision.

Alternate approaches to communications and customer preferences will form part of our wider communications review.

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# Sanctions within conditional benefit systems

## A review of evidence

Julia Griggs and  
Martin Evans

December 2010

**This study reviews and consolidates international evidence on sanctions operating within welfare systems where benefits are conditional upon claimants' behaviour.**

Recent reform of (workless) benefit systems in Britain and other post-industrial nations has sought to promote employment through work-related conditions backed by financial sanctions; the rationale being that sanctions will promote desired behaviour, and therefore favourable outcomes. This review examines an international body of evidence on sanctions, their impacts, outcomes and context, and explores how far the theoretical and political 'assumptions' that underlie them are met in practice.

The report:

- considers the different ways in which benefit sanctions may (theoretically) affect claimant behaviour;
- examines evaluative evidence of sanction impacts within unemployment benefit and US welfare systems;
- contextualises impact evidence within literature on the operation and administration of sanctions as well as the results of surveys and qualitative studies conducted with claimants;
- explores the effect of sanctions and conditionality on other (non-employment-related) behaviours;
- discusses how this evidence relates to the political justifications voiced in support of benefit sanctions.

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## Introduction

This study reviews and synthesises international evidence on sanctions operating as part of conditional welfare systems. It considers evaluative evidence of sanction impacts, the wider literature on operational context and the qualitative experience of sanctioned claimants. It then discusses how this evidence relates to the political justifications voiced in support of benefit sanctions.

## Background

The rolling programme of welfare reform under Gordon Brown's Labour Government sought to change the fundamental assumptions of many social security programmes to promote employment. This approach of increased sanctioned-backed conditionality has grown incrementally over time but has also broadened to include 'new' claimant groups. The move to conditionality has also extended purely work-related issues into a policy model that sees conditionality and sanctions as tools to change other behaviours, for example housing benefit sanctions as a means of preventing anti-social behaviour.

The extension of benefit conditionality and use of sanctions has not been confined to the UK, but is in evidence throughout Europe, North America and Australasia, with international and European bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), overtly promoting the use of (sanction-backed) activation policies (see, for example, OECD, 1996).

## The theoretical approach to sanction effects

When considering the impact of benefit sanctions it is important to be aware of the different types of effect sanctions have (or might have) on claimants. There are four key dimensions to these differences:

- 1 The type of sanction: whether the sanction results from an administrative failure (e.g. not completing required paperwork/ failure to attend a meeting), or from a behavioural 'misdemeanour' (e.g. not 'actively looking' for work, or refusing employment). In practice this distinction may not always be clear-cut.
- 2 The type of effect: whether a sanction impact arises directly from lower levels of benefit entitlement (i.e. welfare use/caseloads and spending) (entitlement effects), or from the changed behaviour of claimants (treatment effects).
- 3 The timing of the impact: whether the effect is created by the threat of a sanction, or the sanction itself. There are three points at which sanctions can have an impact: 1) before the claim: the presence of sanction-backed conditions and the prospect of (potentially) being sanctioned in the future may deter potential claimants from entering the system (take-up effects), 2) during the claim, but before the sanction: either the result of the general threat of sanctions or an actual warning (threat effects) and 3) during the claim, following a sanction: a behavioural change or reaction to being sanctioned (imposition effects).
- 4 The type of outcome: whether the impact is short-lived and limited, or is sustained over the longer term. Sanctions have the potential to impact on claimants and their families in many ways. In the short term they may promote compliance or participation (intermediate outcomes), or encourage claimants to end their claim (thus affecting caseloads and spending), possibly to enter employment. In the longer term they may affect child welfare, earnings and material hardship.

## Impacts: sanctions linked to employment-related conditionality

Despite the wide range of potential effects identified in theory, empirical studies exploring the effectiveness of sanctions focus almost exclusively on the post-claim impacts of imposed sanctions, with a small number also looking at the impact of direct warnings. Effects on take-up and on the presence of sanctions on the behaviour of the general claimant population are not considered. This limits the messages we are able to draw from impact studies, as well as their potential application to the current policy context.

Consolidating findings of the unemployment benefit and welfare evaluations identified, we can conclude that sanctions for employment-related conditions (full-family sanctions in the case of US welfare systems) strongly reduce benefit use and raise exits from benefits, but have generally unfavourable effects on longer-term outcomes (earnings over time, child welfare, job quality) and spill-over effects (i.e. crime rates). However, beyond this the evidence is harder to reconcile. For example, while unemployment benefit programmes tend to demonstrate positive impacts on employment, this is not the case for welfare studies.

To summarise:

- There is compelling and consistent evidence of the short-term effects of sanctions in unemployment benefit (UB) systems – raising unemployment benefit exits and job entry.
- Evidence of sanction effects in the US welfare system is more mixed. While more severe sanctions (in particular, immediate full-family sanctions) significantly reduce welfare caseloads, evidence on employment and earnings is far less conclusive or favourable (two studies indicating a negative impact, the third a positive one).
- Recent evidence from a single study of unemployment benefit sanctions (Arni *et al.*, 2009) suggests earlier UB exits prompted by sanctions result in poorer quality employment (lower earnings and job instability).

- The one study exploring spill-over effects found that sanctions had unfavourable impacts on local crime rates (Machin and Marie, 2004).
- An exploration of earning expectations found no effects from imposed sanctions (a finding that runs contrary to job search theory) (Schneider, 2008).

Despite this evidence there are still many unknowns. This creates a need for more evidence on the duration of effects, differences by claimant characteristics (e.g. gender) and inflow and take-up effects, as well as on a range of exit destinations and longer-term impacts, such as income, post-unemployment work sustainability and earnings.

## Contextual studies of employment-related sanctions

The nature of the impact studies identified means that there are potential effects that are poorly covered by high-quality evidence. Thus the wider contextual literature that surrounds the 'core' impact and outcome evaluations is very useful both in its own right and in interpretation and generalisation of findings on sanction effects, particularly those studies offering direct insights into claimant experiences. Also of importance are those factors that affect the way that sanctions operate (for example, claimant knowledge of the system and bias in administration), factors which play a role in how efficient, effective or equitable they are.

Claimant knowledge and understanding: studies conducted with claimants demonstrate low levels of awareness of sanctions; while people knew penalties were part of the system they rarely knew when they could be imposed or how they could be reversed. This is significant because claimants who do not know what is expected of them and what will happen if they fail to meet these expectations are effectively being punished for a lack of understanding rather than (deliberate) non-compliance.

Administrative capacity and consistency: evidence suggests that administration of

sanctions is not rational and equitable. Studies conducted in the US have identified racial bias in the imposition of sanctions (Schram *et al.*, 2008; Schram *et al.*, 2009); there is also evidence from both Europe and the US of considerable geographical variation in sanction likelihood.

Characteristics of sanctioned claimants: a large body of research exploring the characteristics of sanctioned claimants demonstrates that the most vulnerable are the most disadvantaged. Claimants with human capital deficits (i.e. lack of work experience and qualifications), and/or facing practical barriers to work (e.g. not having access to a car) are more likely to be sanctioned. Exploration of demographic differences shows that young claimants, those with large families and those belonging to black and minority ethnic (BME) groups are at heightened risk.

Claimant motivation and behaviour: qualitative research with claimants offers little indication of deliberate non-attendance or non-engagement with services or in programmes; failure to attend or participate was more often a product of poor information and non-intentional behaviour such as forgetfulness. Studies also suggest that although claimants may be encouraged to attend meetings and participate in activities in order to avoid sanctions, they do little to change motivation or claimants' attitudes to work.

Such evidence raises important questions about the ability of sanctions to operate as intended, preventing or punishing deliberate non-compliance, and about whether they may merely compound existing inequalities and create further barriers to work for some claimants.

## Other forms of conditionality

The use of conditionality and sanctions has not been confined to unemployment and social assistance benefits. Some important developments have taken place in which attempts have been made to make other kinds of benefit payments conditional on certain behaviours (for example, the Sure Start Maternity Grant and Conditional Cash Transfers).

Although covering a wide range of programmes in different policy areas (health, education, child

support, substance misuse) with very different objectives, the overriding message within each strand of policy is the inconsistency of results. For example, the US programmes PIP and PPI, which although closely matched in terms of content and purpose (both sanction parents who are unable to show that their child has been immunised), performed very differently. While the evaluation of PIP showed exceptionally favourable results on vaccination rates, PPI appeared to have very little, if any, impact. Similarly, evaluations of family cap policies, which sanction those having babies while claiming welfare benefits, show very mixed results against their objective of reducing birth rates.

## Justifications

The majority of commentary on benefit sanctions and conditionality has focused on underlying issues of rights and responsibilities largely based on moral philosophy arguments. Critics have questioned the viability and fairness of such approaches, often from a social rights perspective. This review comes from a different perspective, a rigorous analysis of the evidence base on the outcomes of sanctions in practice, based on a clear set of theoretical a priori assumptions on the nature and basis of such evidence. To extend the review into the realms of moral philosophy would be difficult and inappropriate, and therefore we consider only those justifications of sanctions that can be informed by evidence. This means we focus on whether measurable aims of policies couched in terms such as 'equality, effectiveness and efficiency' have supporting evidence to underlie them.

Equality-based justifications: while sanction-backed conditionality ensures that claimants cannot 'opt out' of programmes designed to benefit them there are clear (yet under-researched) effects on benefit take-up. This means that although all claimants are subject to the same work-related activities and have access to the same services within mandatory programmes, those who are most disadvantaged may be (disproportionately) deterred from entering the programme or inclined to leave into inactivity or informal work. These same claimants are also those more likely to be sanctioned than others (indicating inequality in the imposition of sanctions). Equal access

to programmes and services does not mean equal quality in those provisions, neither does it necessarily lead to equality in outcomes. Indeed, evidence suggests that sanctioned claimants are less likely to enter sustainable employment or to make longer-term gains in income.

Efficiency-based justifications: it is argued that sanction-backed conditionality is efficient; that these approaches are best able to use available resources to maximise positive outcomes by ensuring claimants are better informed and realistic about opportunities (managing, in most cases lowering, expectations and reservation wages), that job search is 'optimised' and 'deliberate' job loss minimised. While sanctions may be efficient in terms of shortening unemployment spells, consideration of longer-term sanction impacts (see, for example, Arni *et al.*, 2009), in particular the negative effects of sanctions on job and earnings progression, demonstrates the problems of such efficiency arguments. Furthermore, while cutting caseloads is an efficient way of reducing expenditure, other factors, such as spill-over effects on crime rates, along with higher spending on in-work benefits, offset savings.

Effectiveness-based justifications (optimal models for changing behaviour): sanctions are designed to promote or prevent particular behaviours or actions, encouraging compliance with, or participation in, activities or programmes deemed to be in the best interests of claimants. This means that in order to operate effectively claimants must understand the behavioural conditions of entitlement and the penalties for breaching them. Crucially, however, qualitative evidence suggests the majority of claimants have only a limited understanding of the sanctions system. Additionally, descriptive statistics show that only a minority of sanctions imposed reflect a clear behavioural aspect (they are more frequently retrospective moral hazard sanctions, those imposed for leaving employment voluntarily or for misconduct), and are therefore unable to prevent 'undesirable' behaviour. There are also wider questions around the effectiveness of sanctions compared with rewards (sticks versus carrots). The psychological literature indicates that rewards may

produce better longer-term behavioural outcomes than negative punishments.

## Conclusions

This report finds a gulf between the rhetoric and evidence on benefit sanctions. The evidence base is both small and limited in its coverage, and is hard to fit across the differing approaches to preventing poverty and promoting opportunity that arise in international policy design. The evidence from sanctions on US lone parents in receipt of social assistance is a small and inconclusive part of a very large evidence base. The quality and coverage of such evidence is mostly about aggregate falls in caseloads and gains to employment, with no specific attention to the independent causal effects of sanctions. Evidence from European unemployment benefits has more precise estimates of the effects of sanctions and shows both the risks of lower wages and higher job churning alongside the gains from reduced durations of unemployment.

The UK has committed itself to reducing and ultimately eliminating child poverty with a primary focus on parental employment to achieve this. In a policy approach that is committed to a high quality evidence base, future policy on 'welfare reform' that relates to sanctions needs to take a more rounded approach to the assessment and use of evidence. The rhetorical approach that sees no fundamental problem in ratcheting up conditionality and sanctions is too narrowly based on principles of moral philosophy, and takes too selective and ambivalent an attitude to the evidence.

The review leads us to make a number of recommendations:

- 1 To replicate the Arni *et al.* (2009) study in the UK – to test the effect of sanctions on earnings and sustainability of work;
- 2 To put in place better, more wide-ranging cost-benefit studies of conditionality and sanctions that look at displacement and spill-over effects;

- 3 To look more closely at the (potential) spill-over effects of conditionality and sanctions on the grey economy and informal work;
- 4 To ensure longitudinal datasets can capture the changes to conditionality that have already been put in place, for example by ensuring that the next wave of the Millennium Birth Cohort Survey has a module of questions to assess the effects of the new benefit conditions on lone parents according to their youngest child's age.

# 1 Background

Since the late 1980s British ‘welfare reform’ has brought significant change to programmes intended to promote employment for working-age people, highlighting the potential gains of increasing obligations to both change the culture of benefit systems and ensure behavioural compliance. Since 1997 more general employment conditionality spread from the unemployed across to other groups, primarily lone parents and people with incapacities for work. Such conditional entitlement has increasingly focused attention on the issue of sanctions: the removal of entitlement where behavioural obligations are not met. Arguments for this ‘ratcheting up’ extend on a continuum which at the most lenient end suggests perfectly informed claimants will act appropriately and thus changes will not result in heavy sanctioning. At the other end of the spectrum are the advocates of strict and frequent sanctioning as a means to tackle fraud and fecklessness and to improve incentives to leave benefits and enter work.

The extension of benefit conditionality and the use of sanctions has not been confined to the UK, but is in evidence throughout Europe, North America and Australasia, with international and European bodies, such as the OECD and the EU, overtly promoting the use of (sanction-backed) activation policies (see, for example, OECD, 1996). Different approaches to sanctions within welfare systems reflect the balance between the use of sanctions as a deterrent (in which their use is minimal) and as a punishment and a means of controlling claimant numbers (Holcombe *et al.*, 1998). Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) have also been introduced in developing countries, largely tied to conditions linked to child development: immunisation, health checks and school enrolment/attendance; this model is now being piloted in New York City (see Miller *et al.*, 2009). In the UK conditionality has also spread to areas other than employment, for example the Sure Start Maternity Grant and the Health in Pregnancy Grant – which are conditional upon receiving health advice from a doctor or midwife.

A large body of literature provides a lot of discussion and commentary on the overall policy approach and its justifications. The evaluation of outcomes is a much smaller literature (see Griggs and Bennett, 2009 and SSAC, 2006), especially where it attempts to distinguish the particular outcomes of benefit sanctions. This report aims to fill the gap and to focus specifically on the evidence from the design and use of benefit sanctions themselves, rather than the wider conditional approaches, and to draw together high quality impact studies.

This is contentious territory with a high political profile and both the pro- and anti-sanction advocates are often too certain that they are ‘right’. It is not our role here to engage with the ideological content of the debate or its place in overarching political strategy. Instead, our role is to take a rigorous approach to evidence. But being rigorous is not just a blinkered consideration of quantifiable ‘impacts’ of benefit sanctions, but also to have a clear understanding of the context in which the evidence arises. Interpretation is key, and interpretation without context carries the danger of ending up in an empirical cul de sac with little ability to generalise to other situations.

Any international body of evidence is both varied and skewed. Looking at benefit sanctions across countries, and across programmes, means standing over the differences in underlying policy contexts, in the particular aims and objectives of programmes, and in the rationales for sanctions. For instance, programme reforms that prioritise reducing expenditure over improving poverty outcomes often measure caseload and employment changes alone, while those prioritising poverty often have a wider set of outcome measures. In countries where policy objectives are more closely connected to taxpayer buy-in and public support irrespective of empirical evidence, one could argue that even the best specified impact results are of little, or at least secondary, importance to the political impetus for reform.

Current UK reform is subject to some uncertainties around the prospect of a new Government. However, the Welfare Reform Act 2009 and its preceding green and white papers, together with the Gregg review (2008) and accompanying discussion paper (*Realising Potential*), have all occurred in the absence of a high quality, publically available review of the evidence of sanction effectiveness.

The combination of policy reform and deficit reduction will lead to public spending constraints and a search for new gains in efficiencies and effectiveness. This potentially raises the stakes on benefit sanctions further, as they could be seen as a 'win-win' of lowering spending and increasing obligations, unless there is a fuller and wider appreciation of costs and consequences.

This report assesses the underling evidence base for the effects of sanctions, employing a systematic review of (pure) impacts, and contextualising this within qualitative and other evidence on the operation of sanctions and the experiences of sanctioned claimants. It culminates with a discussion of how this evidence relates to the equality, efficiency and effectiveness justifications voiced in support of benefit sanctions.

The report is broadly structured as follows:

- overall theory and approach for the review;
- the impact of sanctions linked to employment-related conditionality;
- context and interpretation of employment-related sanction effects;
- evidence of sanctions linked to other types of conditionality;
- justifications for sanction-backed conditionality;
- conclusions and recommendations.

## 2 The review's theory and methods

The aims of this report are:

- To produce a systematic review of international evidence on the impact of benefit sanctions on clients; and
- To critically explore the justifications behind them.

Our approach brings together a traditional social policy literature review with a Cochrane-style systematic review. We thus cover a wider range of evidence type and quality than is typical for a systematic review; this allows us to explore justifications and to look at qualitative evidence on outcomes as well as more discursive overviews of reform. All literature is reviewed in a systematic manner (i.e. with transparent search terms, search on relevant databases, and quality criteria for selecting publications for inclusion in the review – see Appendix 1).

Systematic reviews require limits to be placed on the scope of the study and the material under investigation. In this case the search was restricted to studies identifying the specific and distinct effects of sanctions within a conditional benefit system, published after 1985 (to correspond with the year the Restart scheme was introduced in the UK), available in English and which included a comprehensive and examinable methodology. Experimental, quasi-experimental and econometric observational studies were prioritised as true 'impact' studies. Contextual evidence, including complementary qualitative research, was also identified but was managed separately.

### Theoretical approach to sanctions and their effects

Identifying sanction impacts requires a clear understanding of what sanctions are, how they

(are intended to) operate and of all potential causal effects within a conditional benefit system. All programmes have conditions of eligibility – age, residence, nationality, a contribution record – but failing to meet these eligibility conditions is rarely considered a sanction, rather as a 'disqualification' from entitlement. For instance, when a child reaches the age of 19 they are not entitled to child benefit.

Sanctions are intended to counter work disincentives created by benefits by ensuring claimants comply with the behavioural conditions of entitlement – individuals being 'required to regularly undertake some pre-specified action' (Bastagli, 2008, p. 127), reflecting what people do, or don't do, rather than who they are. Sanctions are essentially the enforcement of these conditions during a period of claim through the application of (financial) 'penalties'. As Besharov and Germanis argue:

*Sanctions are essential to enforcing mandatory participation, because participation is not truly mandatory unless there is a consequence for not participating.* (2004, p. 99)

### The effects of sanctions in theory

Thinking about the different potential effects of sanctions led to the construction of a theoretical framework (Figure 1). This framework summarises our approach to the literature and has been used to assess the range and quality of evidence from the evaluations in the review. It also acts as a starting point for our discussion of effects of sanctions found in the theoretical literature.

There are four key dimensions within this framework: type of sanction, type of effect, timing of effect and type of outcome. The first distinction, 'type of sanction', while not an effect, is significant in that different types of sanction

have the potential to impact in different ways – administrative sanctions being more closely linked to entitlement effects.

### Types of sanction

These different ‘categories’ of sanction are imposed for different types of non-compliance. It is wise to distinguish in theory between two such types, recognising that in practice it may be difficult to make such a clear distinction (in some cases administrative conditions being a proxy for wider behaviour):

- Administrative sanctions: primarily relate to issues of eligibility and directly to the claim such as responding to letters, attending interviews, giving information and other behaviour that is primarily to do with the process of the claim and continued entitlement.
- Behavioural sanctions: reflect failure to behave in accordance with ongoing (behavioural) conditions of receipt. In unemployment-related benefits these are primarily related to job search, e.g. actively looking for work, remaining available for employment and taking up offers of employment. In the widening ambit of conditionality (e.g. CCTs) such behaviour may be enrolment and attendance of children at school, taking up immunisation and being a ‘good’ tenant.

Where descriptive data from unemployment benefit programmes distinguishes sanctions by cause it frequently shows that administrative sanctions constitute a large proportion of those applied. For instance, Australian data demonstrates that, in 2008, 54 per cent were for a ‘failure to attend interviews’ with providers, against only 4 per cent for a refusal to take up an offer of employment.<sup>1</sup>

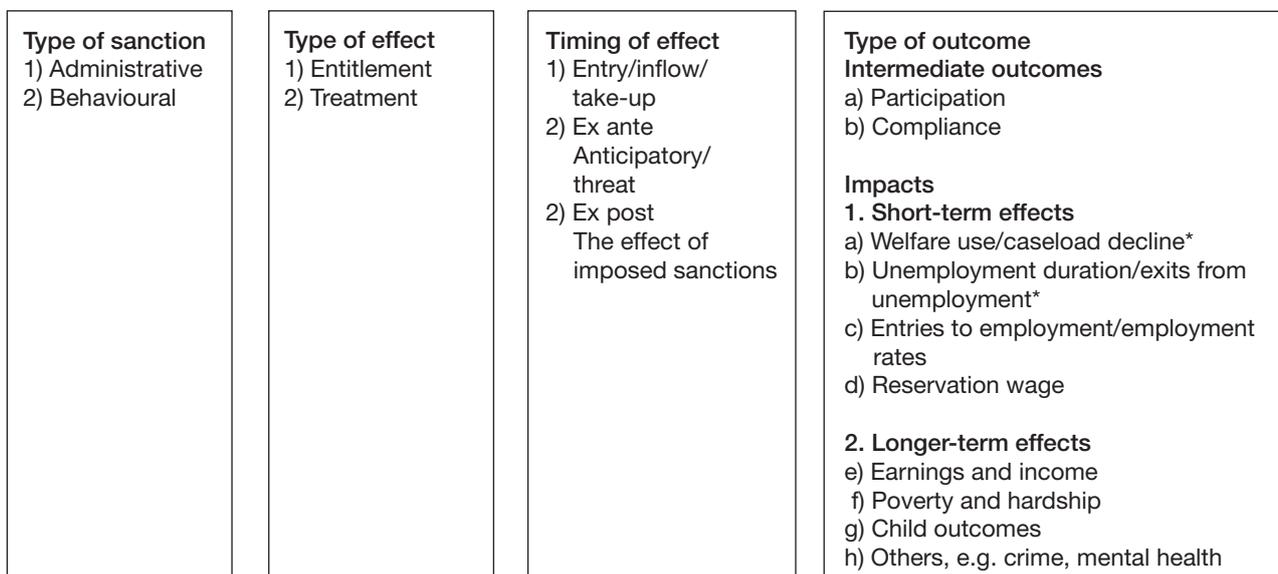
### Type of effect

In this report we distinguish two (theoretically) distinct types of sanction effect:

- Entitlement effects: impacts that arise directly from lower entitlement to benefits (i.e. welfare use and spending). For example, if fewer people claim benefit then caseloads fall, resulting in savings to the benefit budget; and
- Treatment effects: impacts that arise from the changed behaviour or the changed circumstances of claimants caused by sanctions (e.g. employment rates, poverty and spill-over effects).

Increasingly, benefits are being made conditional to achieve a treatment effect (such as increasing employment) although in reality this aim may be coupled with entitlement objectives, such as reduced spending. Making participation in

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for identifying sanction effects



\* Possible instances where pure entitlement effects may occur.

treatments mandatory is a way of ensuring that those with worse characteristics do not exclude themselves as they can (and disproportionately do) in voluntary schemes. But increasing conditionality also raises the likelihood of producing entitlement effects brought about by the mechanics of the system, for example US welfare claimants losing entitlement after receiving a full-family sanction and being removed from the rolls.

Emphasis on this type of short-term effect in evaluations reflects different policy objectives and priorities from those looking at treatment effects (beyond the simple calculation of who is on or off benefits, in or out of work, to wider and longer-term impacts). As a consequence, we find different emphasis placed on these two types of effect in the studies included in this review (some focusing entirely on entitlement effects, others exclusively on treatment). However, in reality, there is always a 'mixture' of entitlement and treatment effects and distinctions are rarely explicitly made in evaluative terms.<sup>2</sup>

### Timing of effect

There are also important distinctions to be drawn on the basis of timing: first, the prospect of sanctions may impact on eligible individuals' decisions about making a claim (inflow effects); second, the prospect or threat of sanctions may influence the behaviour of claimants in the system (threat effects); finally, enforcement may affect the sanctioned claimant's behaviour (perhaps prompting compliance, perhaps an exit from the system). Figure 2 shows our approach to distinguishing effects by their timing in the benefit claim process.

### Inflow: take-up effects

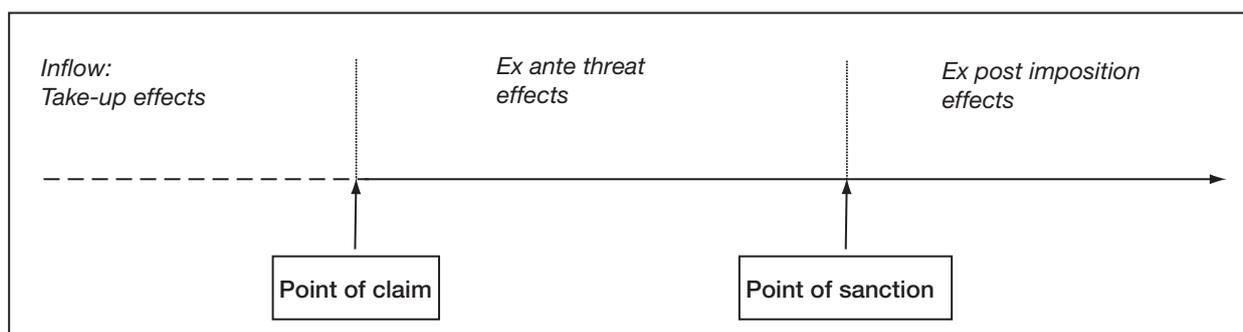
Take-up effects occur because increasing conditionality and sanctions increase the 'compliance costs' of the programme (Bennett *et al.*, 2009).<sup>3</sup> These are well known and empirically proven to affect take-up through 'hassle' and stigma (see Currie, 2004).

Take-up effects can be either intended or unintended. In a number of US states high levels of up-front conditionality are part of an intended 'diversion' approach that includes tough requirements (such as pre-claim work conditions [Moffitt, 2003]) that put many hurdles in the way of entering the benefit programme (Meyers *et al.*, 2006).<sup>4</sup> Wu *et al.* offer the following example to illustrate this point:

*If a woman is told at an initial visit with a worker that she must participate in work-related activities before she can receive any benefits, she would not typically be counted as sanctioned if, failing to follow work requirements, she never enters the system. But in a state that requires work activities to begin only after 2 months of receiving benefits, the same person might receive benefits for 2 months and then would typically count as being sanctioned if she did not follow work requirements.* (2004, p. 5)

Unintended (or, perhaps, less intended) effects on take-up result from the combination of compliance costs and the value of entitlement. This means that an exactly similar set of (tough) conditions for the receipt of unemployment benefits will have potentially higher impacts on take-up in countries or localities with a low flat-

Figure 2. Timing effects of sanctions



rate benefit than they would in countries where benefits are higher and earnings-related.

### Ex ante threat effects

There are actually two potential direct effects of sanctions: 1) from anticipation of sanctions (whether general effects, resulting from the presence of sanctions in the system, or specific to those receiving warnings) and 2) from the imposition of sanctions. *Ex ante* effects (referred to as threat effects in this report) are the former and relate to impacts arising from the pressure placed on claimants to comply in order to avoid a sanction, whatever its precise nature. Such effects are often high in policy-makers' minds because they 'help influence the decisions benefit recipients make' (Kauff *et al.*, 2007, p. 2) and are seen as key to changing the culture of benefit systems. This is particularly true of general threat effects – the perception being that the mere existence of sanctions will change behaviour, without the need to impose more than are necessary to demonstrate the validity of the threat (i.e. the threat is a greater agent for changing behaviour than actual sanctions themselves). Claims for the efficacy of this approach extend to motivating and compelling recipients to move towards self-sufficiency (Bryner and Martin, 2005) while holding them 'accountable for their actions' (Holcombe *et al.*, 1998). Implementation of sanction policies reflects how the state perceives and attempts to balance the threat effect versus the punitive effect of sanctions (Holcombe *et al.*, 1998).

However, threat effects are often very difficult to identify and measure (in particular, separating general threat effects from those arising from the raised conditions they often accompany) and are often assumed to be a costless additional outcome from increased conditionality. Anticipation of a sanction will be higher in systems with high levels of conditionality and a high risk of sanctions than in less conditional systems with a lower sanction risk. In general there will be a raised likelihood of 'giving up' entitlement while on benefit in the face of such higher compliance costs in addition to the more direct effects from specific anticipation and warnings about sanctions.

### Ex post imposition effects

Imposition effects are those directly brought about by a sanction. There are four primary behavioural responses to a sanction:

- (a) comply and remain on the programme;
- (b) not comply and remain on the programme (on reduced support);
- (c) exit the programme (with or without complying);
- (d) dispute and appeal against the sanction.

It is easiest to deal with d) first, the underlying administrative legal and adjudication aspects of conditionality and sanctions, because this does not feature much in the evaluation literature. Many regimes effectively do not allow formal rights of review (although this is not the case in the UK) and this, in part, reflects the position that a large proportion of sanctions are administrative ones based on simple failure to do something rather than on a more complex assessment of behaviour.

Outcome c), exiting the programme, is one that is easiest to identify from administrative data, although the destination of exit is sometimes unclear.

Distinguishing between a) and b), remaining on the programme and complying, and remaining on the programme and not complying (taking the hit of a sanction), depends upon how claimants respond to changes in their benefit income, and on the level of the reduction. There is also the potential to 'comply at the minimum level' – to do the least possible to remain on the programme and avoid a sanction but without optimal behavioural compliance.

### Quality of evidence

Analytical rigour requires a clear approach to assessing evidence type and quality. We use common assumptions about differences between impacts and outcomes to ensure that the former refers to the results of programmes that are identified against a measured control (what would have happened in the absence of the programme), using either an experimental design or econometric

modelling techniques that enable evaluators to isolate and measure net effects of the intervention.

The length of time the impact is observed (the length of the evaluation period) is an important consideration. We know from long-term experimental studies of welfare reform in the USA that differences between the treatment and control groups can decline over time, so that five-year impacts are often much smaller than one-year and two-year impacts (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005).

The standard set of 'core' evaluation measures (e.g. caseload decline and employment rates) often represents an evaluative 'black box' that allows only partial understanding of how programmes work and their effects on participants. The wider contextual literature that surrounds the 'core' impact and outcome evaluations is thus very useful in interpretation and generalisation, particularly those studies offering direct insights into claimant experiences (this is presented in Chapter 4).

## Policy context

It is often difficult to identify specific sanction impacts due to the complexity of different national benefit systems – programmes often being part of a 'patchwork' of provision and treatments. Conditional Cash Transfers in developing countries avoid this problem because, usually, there are no other programmes available to the target group. But for the majority of evidence from industrialised OECD countries, understanding where conditionality and sanctions in one programme fit alongside other 'sister' programmes is essential. Exits from the conditional programme may not mean exits from *all* benefit programmes. In Europe, unemployment insurance schemes tend to be underpinned by means-tested social assistance schemes and exits from the first into the latter would not constitute an exit. In the US, however, few programmes beyond Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAPs<sup>5</sup>) exist for non-insured unemployed people. In the UK, the categorical means-tested safety net has for a long time meant that those exiting from one category sometimes reappear in another.

Income 'packaging' comprised of a number of different benefits is also common. In the UK for instance, Income Support (IS) and

Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) are only for adults and a separate Child Tax Credit pays money for co-resident children. Thus in the UK a full benefit sanction for a lone parent is equivalent to a partial sanction in the US Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) system.

## Selection effects, characteristics and interpretation

Understanding sanction outcomes must also tackle 'selection effects'. In simple descriptive profiles 'the sanctioned' will be observed to have poor outcomes, but this is partly because of their underlying characteristics. Those most at risk of being sanctioned may not match the assumptions evident in the underlying principles and justifications. For example, the 'feckless' and the 'dependent' may be the targets of sanctions, but in practice it may be those with language and literacy difficulties and multiple disadvantages that are most affected.

It is important to know whether the characteristics of families affected by sanctions differ notably from those of the non-sanctioned, and whether these characteristics make compliance with benefit/welfare conditions more difficult (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). Only by developing an understanding of the 'determinants' can we fully contextualise the evidence on impacts and effectiveness (Lee *et al.*, 2004). This is discussed in Chapter 4 of the report.

# 3 Sanctions linked to employment-related conditionality

Benefits for unemployment have conditions that claimants should be economically active or otherwise preparing for work. In the UK, for example, receipt of JSA is conditional upon being available for and actively seeking work, demonstrating this every two weeks at the jobcentre. The evidence for this type of conditionality and enforcement through sanctions is long-standing. Being available for work and accepting job offers have been conditions of entitlement for unemployment benefits since their introduction in the early twentieth century.

Thus provision to the unemployed has always rested on the assumption that they behave as such and seek employment rather than being economically inactive.<sup>6</sup> However, the history of the UK public Employment Service (see Price, 2000) shows how approaches to entitlement and conditionality came under closer scrutiny in the mid-1980s.

The study of the economics of employment and unemployment also developed rapidly from the mid-1970s and clearly demonstrated that future employment prospects were progressively worsened by longer unemployment spells. Reducing unemployment duration (by moving jobseekers into employment) thus became a key aspect of policy.

The academic literature of the 1980s focused primarily on unemployment and programmes for the unemployed. The widening of employment-related conditionality to lone parents began in the late 1980s in the USA, along with the introduction of the US Government ‘waiver’ that allowed states to vary eligibility rules and treatments as long as an experimental evaluation was in place to assess impacts. This ‘waiver’ evidence led to a body of literature that today still dominates amongst high-quality studies of impacts (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005).

In the 1990s employment conditionality became a cross-national concern through a larger strategic discussion of active labour market programmes in both the OECD and the EU (Grubb, 2000). After 1997 the UK began a strategic widening of employment focus to groups who were not unemployed – lone parents and people with work-limiting health conditions. This began as a set of voluntary programmes, but over time has become more conditional, with the threat of sanctions being applied to a wider population. Planned reforms suggest a continuation of this trend in the future (see Griggs and Bennett, 2009).

Our discussion of the impacts of employment-based conditionality with sanctions proceeds in line with this historical development. We first look at the evidence of increasing conditionality and sanctions on unemployment benefit programmes. Then we consider such conditionality and sanctions on lone parents claiming social assistance in the US welfare reform literature. This approach to the evidence also allows us to cumulatively build the evidence base from a small number of direct measures of unemployment and employment to more complex evidence that looks at longer-term effects, such as poverty and child outcomes.

## Theoretical approach to employment-related effects

There are two major areas of theory that relate to unemployment benefit sanctions. The first, job search theory (see Mortensen, 1986), focuses on three linked issues:

- 1 Job search intensity: the number of vacancies considered and applied for;
- 2 Job search effectiveness and job matching: the appropriateness of vacancies to the

skills, experience and 'employability' characteristics of the jobseeker; and

- 3 Reservation wage: the wage level sought by the jobseeker and the net income resulting from such a wage after taxes and benefit transfers.

The second, optimal unemployment insurance (see Fredriksson and Holmlund, 2006; Boone *et al.*, 2007; and O'Leary and Wandner, 1997), considers four:

- 1 The design of benefit provision to optimise job search.
- 2 The design of benefit provision to prevent abuse and 'moral hazard' (i.e. deliberate job loss).
- 3 Duration of entitlement and claims.
- 4 The cost-effectiveness of associated employment services – monitoring and administrative practices.

But how do these theoretical approaches fit alongside our discussion of potential sanction effects outlined in Chapter 2?

### **Moral hazard disqualification sanctions**

At this point we can see that part of the second theoretical aim of optimal insurance, the prevention of moral hazard (failing to guard against job loss, because of the existence of the benefit 'safety-net'), does not fit into our theoretical model of sanctions and their effects in Chapter 2. This is because the sanction is a disqualification based on pre-claim behaviour, rather than on behaviour during the claim. Unemployment insurance systems have eligibility rules that seek to minimise this sort of risk by refusing entitlement where unemployment is linked to voluntary or reckless behaviour, specifically resignation or misconduct in work.

Sanction practice in unemployment benefits is dominated by this form of sanction. The proportions of disqualifying sanctions across British, US and Australian unemployment schemes show that they represent the largest single source of sanctions made. In Great Britain between 2000 and April 2009, such sanctions

represented 55 per cent of all those imposed by Jobcentre Plus and its predecessor.<sup>7</sup> In Australia, 84 per cent of all 'serious failures' that led to sanctions in 2008 fell into this category.

This type of sanction can fit into the 'time' dimension of our theoretical framework as another factor that will reduce inflow into unemployment programmes. However, we must also be aware that such sanctions may be part of an undifferentiated count of incidence thus interpreted as job search sanctions in evaluations.

### **Job search sanctions**

The basic job search model is based on the premise that receiving benefits will lessen search intensity by lowering the 'cost' of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> Monitoring work-related obligations thus ensures that a level of intensity of job search continues and sanctions can enforce conditionality where there is insufficient activity.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, job search will increase in advance of the end of entitlement; it is well established that the exit rate out of unemployment tends to increase shortly before the maximum entitlement date (Meyer, 1995; van den Berg, 1990) or prior to the introduction of compulsory Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMPs) (Geerdsen, 2006).

Svarer summarises the theoretical impact of unemployment benefit sanctions as follows:

*Workers face a trade-off between keeping a reduced search level and facing the risk of being caught [and sanctioned] or increasing their search level to comply with the eligibility criteria. Clearly, in both circumstances the utility of being unemployed decreases and the unemployed respond by lowering their reservation wages and if everything else is equal the exit rate from unemployment increases.<sup>10</sup> (2007, p. 13)*

Lalive *et al.* (2002) built on the theory to posit sanctions as acting in two ways: first, by their anticipatory effects on claimants through the awareness of potential sanctions, and, second, by the effects that occur after sanctions are imposed. Laboratory experiments using economics students (with obviously different profiles of motivation, risk aversion and social skills to many unemployed) confirmed the

theoretical point that anticipatory (threat) effects of sanctions can be higher than effects that stem from imposing sanctions (Boone *et al.*, 2007).

At the heart of theoretical approaches to both job search and optimal benefit design are the improvements in effectiveness of job search and thus in the efficiency of the programme brought about by sanctions accompanying conditionality and monitoring. We can think of these potential changes as follows:

- Job search intensity could increase both in anticipation and on imposition of sanctions. Sanctioned individuals are often more closely monitored before entitlement is restored.
- Job search quality could be negatively affected by feelings of duress or optimised by treatments.
- Expected (reservation) wages, where they are 'too high', could be revised downwards through improved information about job vacancies, from job coaching and from the threat of lower income on benefits after a sanction, raising the relative attractiveness of lower wages.

This simple theoretical world is, however, complicated by the context of unemployment programmes and by the characteristics of the unemployed. There are, for example, several crucial characteristics that alter behaviour: motivation, risk aversion, social skills and ability. Such characteristics make interpretations of laboratory experiments on economics students (such as Boone *et al.*, 2004) difficult to apply to the real world. Because unemployment provision exists in specific policy contexts the evidence from evaluations, no matter how robust, can only be fully understood in context.

## Evidence from evaluations of unemployment benefit programmes

Our literature searches produced a multitude of international studies of high evidential quality on employment conditionality and mandatory treatments, but only eleven that showed a distinct impact of unemployment benefit sanctions. All

are European and follow on from changes to unemployment programmes introduced across the continent since the mid-1990s. The work of Dutch labour economists has been at the forefront of the estimation of sanction effects. The work of Abbring *et al.* and van den Berg on Dutch UI and social assistance sanctions were the first studies to test the effects of sanctions using econometric analysis of administrative data. This data forms the main source for most of these studies, but has differing characteristics across them. Because data is collected post-claim, studies have not been able to capture any pre-claim inflow effects from non-take-up. Schneider (2008) uses specifically designed survey data that captures individual estimates of past, actual and expected earnings.

The majority of studies employ sophisticated econometric (statistical) modelling techniques to post-claim administrative data, controlling for selection into sanctions while estimating sanction effects. Approaches differ between those based on Abbring *et al.* (1996) and more recent studies that have adopted forms of propensity score matching to produce controls. We do not review the econometric approaches. However, there are three measurement issues that have to be borne in mind across all such studies:

- 1 How 'unobservable' characteristics that affect the likelihood of being sanctioned can be controlled for. Given that most data is administrative there is no ability to observe 'softer' characteristics (e.g. social skills). Similarly, previous labour market experience and history is only available in some of the studies.
- 2 The type of sanction, whether 'administrative' or 'behavioural', is mostly not identified. This means that there is a likelihood of bias in estimating the unemployment exit effects because it may be an exit that brings about the imposition of an administrative sanction (for instance, where claimants do not attend an appointment because they have found a job/are attending a job interview).
- 3 The type of 'exit'. While some studies look only at reduced unemployment spells, most

are able to follow an exit from unemployment by observing a job entry. Few studies look at other exits alongside 'job entries'. A minority equate benefit exits with work entry without sufficient evidence on the destinations of claimants.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the studies look at a limited number of short-term outcomes, often unemployment spells, exits and job entry, in line with underlying concerns about the negative impact of long-term unemployment on work prospects. Just two look at longer-term or wider outcomes of sanctions: Arni *et al.* (2009) explore both threat and imposition effects on subsequent earnings and employment stability (alongside unemployment exits and job entry), and Machin and Marie (2004) look at the effects of sanctions on crime rates (described as spill-over effects). One study, Schneider (2008), estimates the impacts of sanctions on claimants' reservation wages.

A final general point from these studies is that almost all identify effects from a fairly low sanction rate (typically 2 per cent of claimants). There is no ability to generalise from these studies to assess what effects would come from a higher, more widespread and severe sanction approach. Indeed, Abbring *et al.* (2005) point out 'we should be careful in extrapolating our findings to a much stricter monitoring and sanction regime without considering the equilibrium effects of such a broad reform of the UI system' (p. 629).

We review the evidence from these studies through a series of questions and give a summary table of main characteristics of the studies and their findings in Appendix 2, Table 4.

### **What (and who) do the studies cover?**

While all eleven studies look at unemployed claimants, it is to be expected that there is no common definition of such groups. Studies divide into those that consider:

- unemployment insurance (Abbring *et al.*, 2005; Arni *et al.*, 2009; Hofmann, 2008; Lalive *et al.*, 2002; Müller and Steiner, 2008; Svarer, 2007; Røed and Westlie, 2007). Svarer (2007) used an insured unemployed sample aged over 25;

- a specific unemployment assistance inflow sample – job-losers (Schneider, 2008; van den Berg *et al.*, 2004);
- a subgroup of general social assistance claimants that are defined as 'unemployed' (van den Berg *et al.*, 2004);
- a specific subgroup of the unemployed population – the young unemployed (Jenson *et al.*, 2003);
- the general unemployed population on both contributory UI and unemployment assistance – Jobseekers Allowance (Machin and Marie, 2004).

### **What types of sanction, with what range of severity, are observed?**

Different types of sanction policy are evaluated in these studies and each system has a different mix of short, 'mild' penalties and longer more severe ones. Shorter, less severe sanctions tend to be associated with administrative sanctions that do not relate directly to observed job search behaviour. Van den Berg *et al.* (2004) report that Dutch social assistance sanctions consist of temporary reductions of 5 per cent, 10 per cent or 20 per cent of the benefits level for a potential maximum of six months but usually of only one or two months. Abbring *et al.* (2005), looking at Dutch unemployment insurance, identify sanctions as a temporary or permanent, full or partial reduction of the benefit level that, in practice, ranges from 5 per cent for four weeks to 30 per cent for 13 weeks. Røed and Westlie (2007) cite the Norwegian practice of 'discretionary sanctions' – a temporary loss of UI benefits usually for eight weeks, but which are underpinned by rights to alternative social assistance (at lower levels of payment). Svarer (2007) shows that the vast majority of sanctions are both of short duration and reflect missed appointments and that these sanctions 'drive the main results' (p. 9). Lalive *et al.* (2002) report Swiss 'policy relies more heavily on close monitoring and sanctioning than in other countries' (p. 25) and that sanction rates are the highest among these studies.

No study separately estimates the effects of different types of sanction and only a minority

estimate differences in effect that arise from differing severity.

### **What sanction effects are estimated?**

All studies estimate the effects of actually imposed sanctions; in addition, Arni *et al.* (2009), Lalive *et al.* (2002) and Svarer (2007) estimate the effects of threatened sanctions. None consider take-up effects.

Of those studies looking only at short-term effects, Lalive *et al.* (2002) and Svarer (2007) both look only at unemployment exit rates, with Lalive *et al.* defining exits as a combination of those to a regular job, an ALMP and out of the labour market (to 'inactivity') (but do not decompose results between destinations) and Abbring *et al.* (2005) measuring 're-employment rates' with a wide definition that includes all 're-employment durations' (p. 615). Other studies looked at a broader range of post-unemployment destinations. For example, Müller and Steiner (2008) consider 'confirmed employment entry' and distinguish by type of employment, including subsidised employment and self-employment. Van den Berg *et al.* (2004) look at different 'exit destinations', but note that the most common is to employment (p. 223). Unknown destinations and migration out of the locality (reflecting the Netherlands' highly decentralised system) are also considered. Hofmann (2008) and Røed and Westlie (2007) attempt to separately measure the different destinations of programme leavers. In Hofmann's case to 'regular employment', 'other employment' and out of the labour force to 'inactivity', in Røed and Westlie's to regular employment, another benefit, education, non-participation (i.e. out of the labour market) and to an ALMP. Jensen *et al.* (2003) have distinctive exits dictated by the nature of the Youth Unemployment Programme (YUP) they are evaluating.

The most recent study by Arni *et al.* (2009) makes a large contribution to the literature by considering both short- and longer-term effects. It isolates both threat and imposition effects in terms of not only unemployment exits and entry to employment but also subsequent earnings and employment stability. This study significantly takes forward the empirical study of sanction effects.

### **What are the sanction effects?**

The basic evidential finding across all studies that deal purely with short-term effects is a consistent, large and significant reduction in unemployment durations and/or increasing employment entry rates (see Table 4 for details of raw results). Müller and Steiner (2008), for example, find convincing evidence of an imposition effect: that sanctions increase 'regular employment' especially when they occur early in a claim. Additionally those studies looking both at imposition and threat effects (Lalive *et al.*, 2002 and Svarer, 2007) identified positive impacts on job entry (although in the case of Svarer's study these threat effects were only evident for men).<sup>12</sup>

However, the most recent study in this field takes analysis of effects further and while Arni *et al.* (2009) not only confirm such findings of short-term effects, they additionally show longer-term effects of reduced employment sustainability and of lower earnings. Specifically, employment duration following the unemployment spell was reduced by sanctions (a direct imposition effect). Controlling for such differences in employment duration, there were also consistent effects of lower earnings both immediately after leaving unemployment and after two years. Reduced earnings resulted from both threatened and imposed sanctions.

Of course, it is possible to argue that the overall effect of sanctions is an efficient one despite different short-term and longer-term impacts. The argument is that if sanctions reduce unemployment duration this can give rise to an overall net increase in income from longer periods of earnings despite any changes in earning levels or job retention. However, Arni *et al.* (2009) demonstrate that this is not the case: 'over a period of two years following the exit from unemployment, the net effect of benefit sanctions is negative' (p. 33). This is an extremely important additional finding from this study. It has significance for the empirical justifications of sanctions that we return to consider further in Chapter 6.

Exits from unemployment benefit spells are not always to employment. Røed and Westlie (2007), for example, find more exits to education than to employment. They also find that the probability of exiting to a different type of benefit falls after a sanction. However, the generalisability of findings

on such 'other' exits tend to be fairly low, as there are often specific features of national systems which dictate these pathways. A similar problem of generalisability comes from Jensen *et al.*'s (2003) study of youth unemployment in Denmark. The fixed-term nature of the benefit, together with clear seasonality of entry into education programmes (i.e. the start of each academic year), leaves estimates of distinct sanction effects uncertain.

Schneider's exploration of impacts on earning expectations (2008) finds no effects from imposed sanctions (a finding that runs contrary to job search theory, which indicates that sanctions will directly reduce the reservation wage [*ibid.*, p. 4]). It is not clear how such a finding would be generalisable to other samples or countries as the claimants observed were social assistance claimants and had expectations for earnings at the bottom end of the wage distribution.

The only study to consider wider spill-over effects explores the role of sanctions in property and violent crime (Machin and Marie, 2004). Authors find that property crime rates in areas that had more sanctioned individuals rose. Additionally, they find that areas with higher levels of exits from unemployment that were not into employment (dropping off the register but not being in education/training or on other benefits) also had higher crime rates. These effects were measured before and after the introduction of JSA in 1996/7 and were seen to be persistent for two years. Machin and Marie discuss a crude cost-benefit approach that discounts the savings from benefit budget with the increased costs of crime and find a 22 to 28 per cent of the reduction in gross benefit expenditure was netted off by higher spending on crime.

### **Do sanction effects persist over time?**

While there is consistent evidential support for sanction effects on unemployment exits and job entry, there is greater difference across the studies about how long the sanction effect lasts during an unemployment spell. Abbring *et al.*'s evidence tends to support the hypothesis that the sanction effect persists over time and suggests that sanctioned populations are more closely monitored during the sanction period and perhaps subsequently. Lalive *et al.* also find imposition

effects do not significantly drop over time, but do suggest that the effect of a warning decreases by 16 per cent after 30 days (if not followed by a sanction). On the other hand, Røed and Westlie (2007) find that 'most effects are short-lived ... After the sanction is completed (and the job-seeker again receives benefits)' only entry into an ALMP or to a repeat sanction remains at a higher level (p. 35). Svarer (2007) finds the highest effect during the first month post-sanction; these are still positive but lower at two months post-sanction. At three months the effect is no longer significant. Müller and Steiner (2008) also find that over longer durations the differences between the sanctioned and non-sanctioned narrow to insignificance. Similarly, other studies tend to see some weakening of sanction effects over time.

Arni *et al.* (2009) is the only study to look at persistence of effects after leaving unemployment, finding sustained reductions in earnings levels two years after exit alongside increased churning in employment.

Therefore, we see a clear problem of inconsistent findings in the literature on the persistence of effects over time. It may be that these differences spring from the methodological estimation of econometric models, with 'timing of effects' based models more likely to find sustained effects while other approaches find less persistence.

There is another potential problem interpreting differences by the timing of sanctions. The overall picture from the studies is that sanctions imposed early in the claim have more effect. Svarer (2007) finds that sanctions imposed 15 months or later in the unemployment spell produced no employment exit effects, and this is also found in the German studies of employment outcomes (Müller and Steiner, 2008; Hofmann, 2008). However, sanctions imposed early in the claim are more likely to be administrative sanctions (or disqualifications on the grounds of intentional job loss) and thus there is no clear causal link to changed job search behaviour.

### **How are different subgroups affected?**

There is a common finding across a number of studies that macro-factors influence sanction outcomes. Hofmann's (2008) study, for example,

shows that sanction effects differ with regional unemployment rates. Women in low unemployment regions are likely to have regular employment outcomes following a sanction, and men in high unemployment regions respond more to early period sanctions than men in low unemployment regions. Hofmann concludes that ‘the effectiveness of sanctions not only depends on the individual reaction but also ... on labour market conditions’ (ibid., p. 21). Additionally, office or regime effects are found where different levels of sanctions operate due to differences in the organisational culture, in interpretation of policy and/or the operation of discretion (ibid.).

Svarer (2007) decomposes results by both sanction severity and gender and finds that for both men and women tougher sanctions are more effective among older, long-term and immigrant subgroups. Svarer also considers and differentiates by type of sanction, finding the risk of administrative sanctions to be highest during the first 15 weeks of the claim (often the result of missed meetings) and that while ‘men tend to avoid meetings, women are more reluctant to accept job offers or attend job Interviews’ (ibid., pp. 9–10).

Müller and Steiner (2008) find that aggregate sanction effects are mainly driven by the younger unemployed, and by younger women amongst a female sub-sample. Effects of sanctions on exits to ‘low-quality’ jobs (poor pay and conditions) are positive for women and negative for men. Additionally, they find sanction effects on exits out of the labour force (to inactivity) are stronger for older women; and for men when the sanction is imposed in the middle to late period of the claim.

### **Summary of findings on UB sanctions**

Overall we find compelling and consistent evidence of short-term sanction effects, raising unemployment exit and job entry rates. However, there are far more mixed results concerning the sustainability of these effects over time, as well as regards impacts on different claimant subgroups. Furthermore, studies looking at longer-term effects demonstrate less favourable results: for example, the one study to look at longer-term post-unemployment effects finds

persistent negative impacts on earnings and job churning two years after exit. And Machin and Marie’s study of sanction spill-over effects identifies an unfavourable impact on crime rates.

Despite some strong findings there are still many unknowns, for example in terms of sanction duration and severity. Indeed as Schneider reminds us, ‘the exact behavioural effect of a sanction is still undetermined in an ongoing and vivid research debate’ (2008, p. 43).

## **Evidence of evaluations of US welfare programmes**

US welfare reforms that took place in the 1990s led to a large expansion in the use of sanctions which have become central to most state TANF programmes. Although influenced by federal rules,<sup>13</sup> under the current block grant system states are left to make their own decisions regarding the shape, nature and implementation of their own sanctions policies, which has given rise to large variation in practice (Blank and Haskins, 2001). Sanctions may be partial (decreasing assistance by a fixed proportion or by removing the adult component of a family benefit<sup>14</sup>) or full (‘full-family sanctions’, which remove all entitlement) (Bryner and Martin, 2005), temporary or permanent (Bryner and Martin, 2005), in some cases having long-lasting consequences for future eligibility. The W-2 programme in Wisconsin, for example, has a ‘strike’ system: failure to participate in work requirements without good cause can lead to one strike and three such strikes to a lifetime ban (Wu *et al.*, 2004). These differences are highly important, because those states with severe sanction policies that remove significant proportions of sanctioned claimants (and their families) from their rolls have (potential for) considerable entitlement effects and also high corresponding effects on inflow, longer-term outcomes and spill-over effects.

### **Incidence and intermediate outcomes**

Two pieces of information are important in order to contextualise evidence on impacts:

- 1 An estimate of sanction incidence (the number of claimants affected by sanctions); and

- 2 An understanding of intermediate outcomes (the proportion of claimants coming back into compliance following a sanction versus those exiting welfare rolls thus ending their spell on welfare).

Both are problematic. Figures on incidence, for example, range from 5 to 60 per cent of the caseload. This variation stems from differences in the way incidence is measured, the state or area the incidence applies to and the timing. While the GAO study, which found a nationwide sanction rate of 5 per cent, is widely interpreted as a low count of incidence<sup>15</sup> (Wu *et al.*, 2004), cohort studies (e.g. Fein and Lee, 1999), by their nature, show a very high, although arguably more accurate, incidence (figures of 45 to 60 per cent have been reported [see Pavetti *et al.*, 2003, Table 3]). Few sources of evidence consider issues of compliance versus removal from the rolls. However, we can make some tentative judgements based on limited data; for example, Pavetti *et al.* (2003) suggest that approximately a third of claimants come into compliance after receiving a sanction (see also Fein and Lee, 1999 and Meyers *et al.*, 2006), while a further 17 to 51 per cent remain sanctioned (Meyers *et al.*, 2006) and between 7 and 33 per cent are removed from the rolls<sup>16</sup> (Fein and Lee, 1999; Kalil *et al.*, 2002; Wu *et al.*, 2004; Schram *et al.*, 2008). Pavetti *et al.* suggest that the proportion of claimants ‘sanctioned-off’ caseloads may have risen over time (2003).

In a consideration of the relationship between sanctions and participation, the National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS) found higher sanctioning rates ‘were not associated with higher participation rates’ (Blank and Haskins, 2001, p. 255). However, in a rare specification of the threat effect, Lee *et al.* (2004) estimate that claimants receiving a sanction warning were more than twice as likely (odds ratio = 2.09<sup>17</sup>) to be participating in job search and training as other claimants (*ibid.*, p. 390). This same study, unusually, also considers the reasons behind the sanction: approximately 60 per cent being imposed for failing to undertake one of the work-related activities or refusing a job offer, the remainder being for missing meetings or failing to provide verification papers (*ibid.*).

### **What aspects do these studies cover?**

The theoretical approach discussed earlier also applies to employment-related conditionality for ‘welfare’ populations but with the obvious underlying point of how far lone parents are ‘available for work’ given their childcare responsibilities.<sup>18</sup> With social assistance being an anti-poverty programme and with the obvious potential for child outcomes to be affected alongside the circumstances of the parent, evaluations have tended to look a little more prominently at longer-term effects. We rely on the excellent systematic review of ‘welfare reform’ by Grogger and Karoly (2005), which cites eight individual studies that have evidence of distinct impacts of sanctions. This evidence is supplemented by three studies identified during our literature search – Lee *et al.* (2004), Peck (2007) and Wu (2008).

Despite a greater focus on longer-term outcomes, the evidence from US welfare reform is, however, dominated by ‘entitlement’ effects, of measured falls in caseload and welfare exits in the main. The preoccupation with caseload decline stems from the political economy of US welfare reform and the incentives on states to reduce caseloads, federal grants being set at year one caseload levels (the bigger the caseload drop the greater the savings and potential to use grant aid for related, but other, purposes).

The studies extracted from Grogger and Karoly’s meta-analysis all applied econometric methods to observational (mostly administrative or national survey) data. Of the three additional studies, Peck (2007) uses propensity score matching (PSM) and experimental data from the NEWWS evaluation to compare treatment and control-group members who are high sanction risks; Wu (2008) uses event history analysis and longitudinal administrative data and Lee *et al.* (2004) control for potentially explanatory variables in their longitudinal survey and administrative dataset. In some cases (CEA, 1997 and 1999; Moffitt, 1999) the sample periods begin in the late 1970s and run through to the mid- to late 1990s – encompassing pre-PRWORA and waiver periods. Different state-level reforms introduced over this period and around PRWORA created a ‘natural experiment’ (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 61) that

has been used by quantitative researchers to ‘isolate the causal impact of welfare reform on welfare related behaviour’ (ibid.). However, the same measurement issues discussed in reference to the econometric UB studies also apply here. It is worth noting that while observational econometric analysis is (technically) able to capture the effects of reform on welfare entry/take-up (by studying the entire ‘at risk’ population), the ‘bundled’ nature of reform makes isolating the effect of specific measures (e.g. sanctions) extremely difficult.<sup>19</sup> A similar problem occurs for general threat effects, which may be so intrinsically tied to the conditions they accompany that it becomes near impossible to disentangle them.

Indeed, the majority of studies in this area do not attempt to separately estimate sanction effects, most looking at ‘bundles’ of reforms (Grogger and Karoly, 2005) rather than components. This distinguishes the ‘welfare’ literature from the unemployment benefits studies, where evaluation was specifically concerned with changes to sanction practice. In common with the unemployment literature, welfare reform evaluations tend to look only at imposition effects; rarely do they look at the timing of exits, or at the different destinations of sanctioned leavers. Neither do they distinguish between the effects of different types of sanction (behavioural or administrative), although one does contain basic descriptives (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

### **What (and who) do the studies cover?**

All studies included here look at (current or past) welfare claimants – generally TANF or its predecessor ADFC, although some TANF programmes are referred to by their state names (e.g. Wisconsin’s W-2). Studies use a number of different sources:

- annual state-level administrative data (CEA, 1997; CEA, 1999; Moffitt, 1999);
- monthly state-level administrative data (Wu, 2008; Ziliak *et al.*, 2000 in Grogger and Karoly, 2005);

- changes in state-level administrative data (MaCurdy *et al.*, 2002; Mead, 2001; Rector and Youssef, 1999 [all in Grogger and Karoly, 2005]);
- longitudinal survey data combined with administrative records (Lee *et al.*, 2004);
- experimental data (Peck, 2007);
- state child protection system aggregate data (Paxson and Waldfogel, 2003).

### **What types of sanction, with what range of severity, are observed?**

As introduced above, different US states have different sanction policies, as well as different grant values. Therefore the ‘severity’ of a sanction in both proportional and real (cash value) terms is highly variable (as is incidence or likelihood). These differences are evident in the studies reviewed here.

Although some (CEA, 1999; MaCurdy *et al.*, 2002; Mead, 2001; Rector and Youssef, 1999; Wu, 2008) attempt to break down impacts by sanction severity, there is often little consistency between studies in the classifications used (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 119), making comparison difficult. Just one study (Wu, 2008) considers the duration of sanctions.

### **What sanction effects are estimated?**

Like the UB studies, all welfare evaluations consider imposition effects; just one, Lee *et al.* (2004), looks at threat effects, that is of sanctions ‘initiated but lifted prior to grant reduction’ (p. 377). Peck (2007) is unique in that the author compares sub-samples with different levels of sanction risk in treatment and control groups – coming closer to identifying a more general threat effect.

The lack of studies directly exploring *ex ante* effects means that much of the supposed impact on behaviour and other outcomes as a result of ‘threat’ or ‘anticipation’ will be part of undifferentiated effects in most evaluations. The absence of studies on threat effects thus joins the absence of studies on inflow or take-up effects as a weakness of US welfare evidence that ‘fails to separate the impact of grant reductions caused

by a sanction from the sanction as a tool to induce behavioral changes' (Lee *et al.*, 2004, p. 378).

Entitlement effects predominate in the studies identified, being the sole consideration of virtually all those included in the Grogger and Karoly meta-analysis (CEA, 1997; CEA, 1999; Moffitt, 1999; MaCurdy *et al.*, 2002; Mead, 2001; Rector and Youssef, 1999; Ziliak *et al.*, 2000); in this case all studies look specifically at 'caseload/welfare use' (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 121).

The three other studies looked at both entitlement effects and a wider range of outcome measures. Wu (2008) tracked W-2 participant employment and earnings by merging a TANF dataset (CARES<sup>20</sup>) with a UI one. Thus the study considers a small range of outcomes: welfare exit, employment and level of earnings in the quarter after exit.<sup>21</sup> Lee *et al.* (2004) considered welfare, work and hardship outcomes – including participation in informal work and in job or vocational training programmes. And Peck (2007) used PSM to explore the impact of 'sanction risk' (that is the participant subset most likely to experience sanctions) on work, earnings and income.<sup>22</sup>

Uniquely, Paxson and Waldfogel (2003) considered the impact of welfare policy (including sanctions) on child maltreatment outcomes. These authors used a variety of outcome measures including: out-of-home care, reports and substantiated cases of abuse and neglect.

### What are the sanction effects on caseloads?

Caseload numbers have been used to gauge

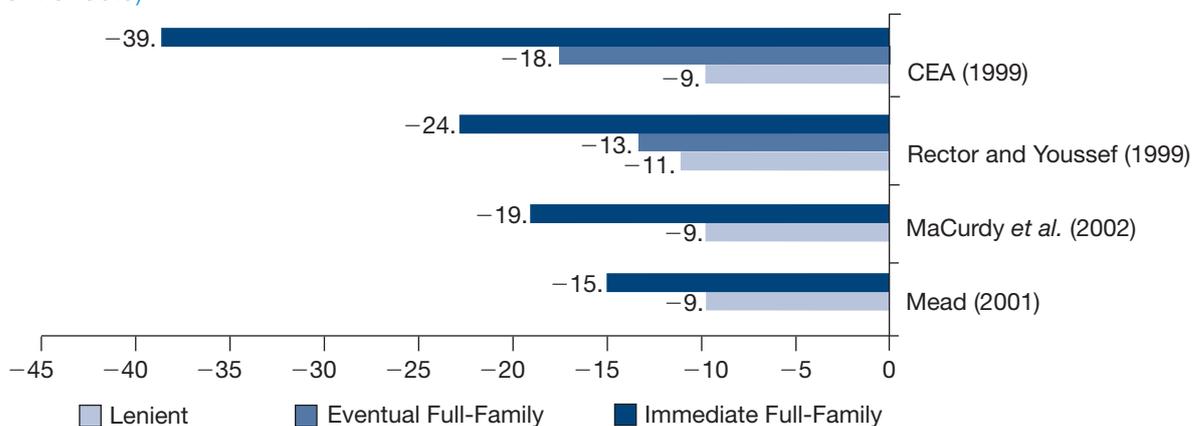
the overall success of welfare reform (Grogger and Karoly, 2005) but as we demonstrate in Chapter 2 these are mostly short-term and instrumental. Nevertheless, the most robust US evidence lies here.

Across virtually all studies looking specifically at welfare use and caseloads we find that more severe sanctions result in significant reductions. Indeed, the five studies separating impacts by sanction severity (CEA, 1999; MaCurdy *et al.*, 2002; Mead, 2001; Rector and Youssef, 1999; Wu, 2008) all found that the most severe sanctions (immediate full-family) produced the largest declines (see Figure 3) (an average of 25 per cent).<sup>23</sup>

Where sanction effects are not broken down by severity (i.e. a simple sanctioned or not sanctioned binary), the results are far less clear. Findings from the early (pre-1996 reform) studies (CEA, 1997; Moffitt, 1999; Ziliak *et al.*, 2000) produce just one statistically significant finding between them, a 9.7 per cent caseload reduction (CEA, 1997), although all suggest a decrease in welfare use (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, pp. 116–17). Lee *et al.* (2004) found no evidence that sanctions, or the threat of sanctions ('initiated but lifted prior to grant loss' [p. 383]), were related to a statistically significant degree to being off welfare.

Likewise, impacts of partial (or more lenient) sanctions are more ambiguous. Figure 3 shows that only half the impact results of eventual full-family and lenient sanctions are significant, although all suggest a decline. Wu (2008), however, found that the smallest sanctions (<10 per cent) were significantly associated with lower welfare

Figure 3. Results from post-reform observational studies on the effects of sanctions on caseload/welfare use (per cent effects)<sup>24</sup>



Source: Grogger and Karoly (2005): figure 5.5

exit rates. Furthermore that moderate sanctions (11–50 per cent) had little significant effect (p. 38).<sup>25</sup>

### What are the sanction effects on employment and earnings?

We must begin with a warning about the potential limitations of the impact studies addressing outcomes other than welfare use. While all studies (Lee *et al.*, 2004; Peck, 2007; Wu, 2008) adopt what we consider to be a robust methodology, all are subject to different problems. Peck, for example, is reliant on self-reported sanction data in her PSM study (2007). Lee *et al.* (2004) overcome the problem of self-report data by merging survey and administrative data but note that although a ‘comprehensive set of control variables is used’ (p. 381) the possibility of selection effects in unobserved differences between sanctioned and non-sanctioned recipients makes inferences of causality problematic. Wu (2008) experiences a similar problem being unable to control for ‘unobserved covariates and unmeasured variables’, and notes that findings may not be generalisable outside Wisconsin thanks to high sanction rates and heavy work orientation (pp. 41–2).

Perhaps a product of methodological differences and difficulties are the mixed results we find in terms of destinations of leavers. While findings from both Wu (2008) and Lee *et al.* (2004) indicate that sanctioned claimants are less likely to be employed, Peck (2007) suggests that being at a higher risk of sanctions induces greater work levels. Specifically Wu (2008) indicates that ‘compared to those not currently sanctioned, those currently sanctioned are 18 per cent more likely to leave welfare without work’ (p. 35; see table 1, column

1 – ‘current sanction’). However, the effect varies with the severity of the sanction, the largest impacts on the odds of leaving welfare without work being generated by full-family sanctions (see Table 1). Lee *et al.* (2004) report that those who experienced sanctions were 44 per cent less likely to be employed than those who did not, but also found higher rates of informal working among sanctioned claimants.<sup>26</sup> Sanction threats did not appear to have a significant effect on formal employment, but like imposed sanctions were related to an increased likelihood of informal work (odds ratio = 3.23) (*ibid.*). This is an important finding as it highlights a distinction in the type of work claimants with different sanction histories are likely to enter. Both studies are thus comparing sanctioned with non-sanctioned claimants while employing methods to control for selection effects. However, while Wu compares exits and breaks effects down according to sanction severity, Lee looks at participation in formal employment in quarters two and three of 2001, and participation in informal work.

Peck’s study is rather different in that it uses propensity score matching (PSM) to compare subgroups of those at high sanction risk and low sanction risk in treatment and control groups. Thus unlike Wu and Lee the author is not comparing sanctioned and non-sanctioned, but estimating the effect of a treatment (the NEWWS programme) on these two subgroups. Rather than describing the effect of being sanctioned on employment, Peck tells us that those belonging to the high sanction risk treatment subgroup are significantly more likely to be employed than their control counterparts. This is true across all five follow-up years (although

Table 1. Sanctions and the destinations of welfare leavers – odds ratios

	Current sanction	Low sanctions (<10%)	Medium sanctions (11%–50%)	High sanctions (51%–90%)	Full sanctions (>90%)
Likelihood of leaving welfare without work	1.18	0.65	0.92	1.23	2.13
Likelihood of leaving to lower earning job	1.01	0.68	0.95	0.95	1.47
Likelihood of leaving to higher earning job	0.74	0.7	0.6	0.81	0.97

Source: Wu (2008): tables 2 and 3

the effect was smaller in years four and five). However, it is interesting and important to note that those belonging to the low sanction risk treatment subgroup also significantly outperformed its control, but only in the first year: by year five the control group had overtaken the treatment group on this outcome measure.

Earnings impacts are subject to the same comparison difficulties. While Wu measured the likelihood of exits to 'higher-earning' and 'lower-earning' jobs alongside exits to worklessness in the first quarter after exit, Lee *et al.* (2004) considered mean earnings from formal employment in quarters 2 and 3 of 2001 for sanctioned, non-sanctioned and threat-of-sanction groups (thus corresponding directly with impacts on formal employment – reported above). Peck (2007) compares earnings of the two sanction risk groups with their control counterparts across the five follow-up years.

On the basis of the basic higher/lower-earning measure, Wu demonstrates the lesser likelihood claimants with a current sanction have of exiting to a higher earning job.<sup>27</sup> Breaking this down by sanction severity it is only full sanctions that are associated with increased exits to work – specifically to lower-paying jobs.<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, Lee *et al.* (2004) identified an association with lower earnings; the authors found that 'those who were sanctioned, on average, earned about \$1,320 less in the last two quarters of the study period than those who were not sanctioned' (p. 390). The threat of sanctions (those initiated but lifted prior to grant reduction) did not impact significantly on earnings (*ibid.*).

Peck (2007) found the average earnings of the high sanction risk group to be significantly higher for recipients in the treatment group when compared to their control counterparts. This was true of all but one of the five follow-up years (the exception being year four with a non-significant impact). Again the low sanction risk subgroup 'outperformed' its control, but only in year one. Interestingly there was no corresponding increase in income for either group, the rise in earnings seemingly offset by the welfare grant reduction (see Peck, 2007, p. 268).

### **What are the sanction effects on hardship?**

The relationship between sanctions and economic hardship is explored in just one impact study. Lee *et al.* (2004) considered claimants' experience of food, rent and general hardship.<sup>29</sup> Their study determined that whilst sanctioned claimants were more likely than others to experience food and general hardship (the effect on 'food hardship' being particularly pronounced), the threat of sanctions appeared to impact on rent hardship – a higher incidence of problems meeting housing payments.

### **What are the sanction effects on child welfare?**

A number of studies have identified links between welfare receipt and child safety (Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). For example, Courtney *et al.* (2001) suggest that in Milwaukee more than half of TANF claimants had been investigated by Child Protective Services (discussed in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). And in California 27 per cent of children belonging to families in receipt of welfare in 1990 had experienced a maltreatment report within five years (Needell *et al.*, 1999 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). However, there is little by way of impact evidence. Indeed just one study was identified, Paxson and Waldfogel (2003). This investigated the impact of sanctions, work requirements and time limits on child maltreatment and out-of-home care, and found, among many insignificant results, that a first full-family sanction under TANF raised reports of physical abuse, reports of neglect and substantiated cases of abuse (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 223). However, the reliability of results has been challenged by the absence of controls for some potentially influential policy variables.

### **Do effects vary by the timing and duration of sanctions?**

Just one study (Wu, 2008) analysed exits according to the timing and duration of sanctions.<sup>30</sup> Findings indicate that (holding current sanction status constant) 'families that had been sanctioned at some point during the first welfare spell were significantly more likely to leave welfare without a job or to leave welfare with a lower-earnings job than families who

were not sanctioned' (ibid., p. 37). This effect was most pronounced for those sanctioned one to three months prior to exit, claimants being 63 per cent more likely to leave for a lower-earning job. Those sanctioned for two or more consecutive months were significantly more likely to leave without a job or to a lower-paying job than non-sanctioned claimants.<sup>31</sup> No association was identified between 'longer spells of current sanctions and the likelihood of having a higher earnings job' (Wu, 2008, p. 40).

### **Summary of impact findings**

Consolidating findings of UB and welfare evaluations, we can conclude that sanctions for employment-related conditions (full-family sanctions in the case of US welfare systems) have strong favourable impacts on benefit use and exits and generally unfavourable effects on longer-term outcomes. However, beyond this the evidence is far harder to reconcile; for example, while UB programmes tend to demonstrate positive impacts on employment (job entry), this is not the case for welfare studies.

In sum:

- There is compelling and consistent evidence of the short-term effects of sanctions in unemployment benefit (UB) systems – raising unemployment benefit exits and job entry.
- Evidence of sanction effects in the US welfare system is more mixed. While more severe sanctions (in particular, immediate full-family sanctions) significantly reduce welfare caseloads, evidence on employment and earnings is far less conclusive or favourable (two studies indicating a negative impact, the third a positive one).
- Recent evidence from a single study of unemployment benefit sanctions (Arni *et al.*, 2009) suggests earlier UB exits prompted by sanctions result in poorer quality employment (lower earnings and job instability).
- The one study exploring spill-over effects found that sanctions had unfavourable impacts on local crime rates (Machin and Marie, 2004).

- An exploration of earning expectations found no effects from imposed sanctions (Schneider, 2008).
- Studies offer a clear indication of the importance of macro-economic effects and also of implementation or organisational effects.
- Despite this evidence there are still a lot of unknowns, creating a need for more evidence on the duration of effects, difference by claimant subgroup and inflow and take-up effects as well as on a range of exit destinations and longer-term impacts, such as income, post-unemployment work sustainability and earnings.

## 4 Contextual studies of employment-related sanctions

The nature of the impact studies identified means that there are potential effects that are poorly covered by high-quality evidence. In this Chapter we relax the evidential quality requirement for studies in order to gain further insights into the effects of sanctions in theoretically important areas.

### Claimant knowledge and awareness

It is an unspecified assumption for sanctions to operate effectively that claimants understand the behavioural conditions of entitlement and the penalties for breaching them. Additionally, (in theory) they must be aware when they have been sanctioned and know how to go about resolving or ‘curing’ these penalties. However, there is a body of evidence that suggests there are significant gaps in claimant knowledge as regards their responsibilities and the penalties for not meeting them (SSAC, 2006).

British evidence indicates that although most claimants are aware of sanctions and understand the principles behind them,<sup>32</sup> they have little knowledge of the details of the sanctioning system (see Dorsett, 2008; Goodwin, 2008; Joyce and Whiting, 2006; Legard *et al.*, 1998; Peters and Joyce, 2006; Smith, 1998). For some claimants this means a disconnection between awareness of mandation and resulting sanctions (Dorsett, 2008) – often the result of insufficient communication and explanation by personal advisors or service providers (Vincent, 1998). Research conducted with sanctioned claimants shows that many did not know how the penalty could have been avoided,<sup>33</sup> and that knowledge of the specific ‘transgressions’ that led to sanctions was extremely poor (for example, very few claimants were able to name, unprompted, items such as ‘not actively seeking work’ and ‘leaving a job voluntarily

without good reason’ [Peters and Joyce, 2006]). As with the wider system, there are also very low levels of claimant awareness concerning the details of the sanction appeal process.

This lack of awareness sometimes continued even once a sanction had begun (Dorsett, 2008; Goodwin, 2008). Indeed, few claimants in Goodwin’s study knew how much their usual benefit payment should be. Those who already had deductions for social fund loans, previous non-payment of bills or another source of income sometimes went for long periods before becoming aware of the sanction (Dorsett 2008; Goodwin, 2008).

Qualitative interviews with jobcentre staff suggest that, although staff try to ensure rules are comprehensively conveyed to customers, the complexities and level of detail inherent in the system make this extremely difficult (Peters and Joyce, 2006). However, considerable individual and organisational differences were identified in the quantity and quality of information conveyed (verbally) to claimants; this also varied according to perceived claimant need (Joyce *et al.*, 2005).

US evidence tells a similar story, with low levels of understanding of the regime, little knowledge about how sanctions might be avoided and inconsistent relaying of information from staff (SSAC, 2006). Pavetti *et al.* (2003), for example, suggest that information about sanctions is inconsistently delivered – a result of non-attendance at orientation meetings and also variation in the quality of meetings. A study comparing self-reported sanction status with administrative data indicates that approximately a third of claimants are unaware of their sanction status (Lee *et al.*, 2004). Findings also demonstrate a strong association between a lack of knowledge of welfare rules (and therefore the sanctions system) and a greater likelihood of being off the welfare rolls (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

## Administrative capacity and consistency

A further assumption of the theory is that sanctions operate according to eligibility rules that are applied rationally and without bias. However, evidence from the US finds persistent concerns of bias from race (Meyers *et al.*, 2006). Schram *et al.* (2009) used hypothetical vignettes (triangulated with administrative records) to explore whether racial biases and 'discrediting social markers' affected officials' decisions to impose sanctions (p. 398).<sup>34</sup> They found that case managers were more likely to recommend sanctions for black and Hispanic claimants than white claimants when they have evidence of prior sanctions. African Americans, research suggests, are at particularly heightened risk; specifically, a black woman with a prior sanction had a 0.97 predicted probability of being sanctioned compared with 0.75 for her white counterpart. Interestingly, the study also indicated that more experienced case workers were less likely to impose sanctions, but found no differences on the basis of the case workers' race. Explanations offered for such differential sanction rates: 'have included the possibility that racial stereotypes contribute to thinking that blacks are in need of more coercive and disciplinary approaches that will increase their motivation and change their behaviour so that they will be more willing to leave welfare for paid employment' (Schram *et al.*, 2008, p. 20).

Our earlier discussion of unemployment insurance found differences in the likelihood of sanctions, independent of caseload characteristics, between unemployment benefit offices in Switzerland, Germany and Norway, despite the fact that national-level rules were consistent across such offices and should have meant uniform treatment. Similar findings have also been reported in studies conducted in the UK, Australia and the US; for example, the CalWORKs evaluation found county of residence was strongly associated with sanction likelihood (Ong and Houston, 2005; see also Meyers *et al.*, 2006). And Fein and Lee (1999) found that even after controlling for differing caseload compositions sanction rates differed significantly between offices.<sup>35</sup>

In a UK study of the New Deal for Young People, Bonjour *et al.* identified similar differences by locality and also by delivery: those living in areas with a more intensive gateway service<sup>36</sup> with private-sector-led delivery and living in the Employment Service Northern region being significantly more likely to be sanctioned than their counterparts (Bonjour *et al.*, 2001, p. 115). It is likely that differences reflect inconsistencies in policy interpretation and implementation (Marston and McDonald, 2007), local organisational culture and practices (discretion and willingness to sanction) as well as local barriers to compliance (e.g. lack of transport or childcare) (Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Ong and Houston, 2005).

## Selection into sanctions: characteristics of sanctioned claimants

Information issues of claimant understanding and consistency issues of administration come together when considering who is being sanctioned. Reviews of UK (Peters and Joyce, 2006), US (Lee *et al.*, 2004 and Pavetti *et al.*, 2003) and Australian evidence (Eardley *et al.*, 2005), together with a number of studies specifically exploring differential rates of sanctioning by claimant characteristics, often report high-quality evidence, but not with any experimental or econometric controls.<sup>37</sup> However, generally high levels of consensus between the results of different studies (some using self-report and others administrative data) indicate a degree of reliability (Lee *et al.*, 2004).

### Demographic characteristics

A number of demographic characteristics have been consistently associated in the literature with a greater likelihood of being sanctioned. In the US, ethnicity has proved particularly significant and has received considerable attention in sanction studies (Meyers *et al.*, 2006) (see Table 1). In particular, research has identified positive associations between being African American and being sanctioned (Cheng, 2009; Kalil *et al.*, 2002; Ong and Houston, 2005; Pavetti *et al.*, 2003); in one study rates are more than 25 per cent higher than for white claimants<sup>38</sup> (Meyers *et al.*, 2006). Similar patterns have also been identified in Australia,

with a higher incidence of ‘breaches’ amongst the indigenous population (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Marston and McDonald, 2007).

In the UK the relationship between sanctions and ethnicity appears to be mediated by claimant knowledge of the sanction process – with white British survey respondents demonstrating a greater awareness of the system than other ethnic groups (Peters and Joyce, 2006); implying that language may play a role. While Australian research also identifies a link between language and sanction likelihood, US research suggests far more mixed results (Meyers *et al.*, 2006) with one study showing non-native English speakers to be at substantially lower risk of sanctions (Ong and Houston, 2005).

Age, or more specifically youth, is a factor associated with sanction likelihood evident across the literature. In the US sanctioned claimants have been shown to be, on average, two years younger than the non-sanctioned (Born *et al.*, 1999 and Koralek, 2000 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003) with those aged under 24 being at particular risk (Hasenfeld *et al.*, 2002 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, Peters and Joyce (2006) found a disproportionately large number of referrals and enforced sanctions amongst JSA claimants aged 16 to 24. Advisors interviewed as part of this mixed-methods study believed this to be a product of younger claimants’ more ‘relaxed’ attitude to sanctioning, thought to be the result of the financial safety net provided by their families (Peters and Joyce, 2006, p. 17).

Other demographic features identified in the (US) literature are primarily concerned with family type and formation. Belonging to a large family or household (Cherlin *et al.*, 2002; Lewis *et al.*, 2003 in Lee *et al.*, 2004; Mancuso and Lindler 2001), being single (i.e. never married and not living with a partner) (Edelhoch *et al.*, 2000; Kalil *et al.*, 2002; Lewis *et al.*, 2003 in Lee *et al.*, 2004; Westra and Routely, 2000 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003) and being, or having been, a young parent<sup>39</sup> (Ong and Houston, 2005; Pavetti *et al.*, 2003) have all been associated with an increased likelihood of receiving a sanction. All are also characteristics that have traditionally been associated with longer claim durations (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2004).

Gender was identified as a significant factor only in the UK and Australian material (the US claimant population being comprised almost

exclusively of women), with female unemployment benefit claimants being less likely to be sanctioned than their male counterparts (Bonjour *et al.*, 2001; Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Joyce *et al.*, 2006).

### **Human capital deficits (employment experience, education and training)**

Another important area in which sanctioned claimants appear to differ from their non-sanctioned counterparts is their level of employment and educational disadvantage. This is a factor that is explored in many of the US studies in this field, but is less prominent within the (smaller) UK literature.

US evidence suggests sanctioned claimants are more likely to have human capital deficits (characteristics that make them harder to employ) and to be long-term welfare recipients (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).<sup>40</sup> A number of studies highlight a lack of work experience and job skills as well as disproportionately low education levels amongst sanctioned claimants (Bryner and Martin, 2005; Fein and Lee, 1999; Goldberg, 2002; Kalil *et al.*, 2002; Lee *et al.*, 2004; Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Wu *et al.*, 2004); for example, a study by GAO (2000) shows that while between 30 and 45 per cent of all TANF recipients had no General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma this was the case for between 44 to 54 per cent of sanctioned claimants (see Pavetti *et al.*, 2003 and Lee *et al.*, 2004). These differences remained even when researchers controlled for variables such as motivation, attitudes and expectations about work.

UK evidence suggests such differences in education, qualifications and job skills are less prominent among JSA claimants in general (Peters and Joyce, 2006) but identify a difference in the qualification levels of sanctioned and non-sanctioned New Deal customers (68 per cent and 77 per cent respectively reported having qualifications) (p. 18). Similarly, Bonjour *et al.* (2001) found New Deal participants with basic skills needs (literacy or numeracy problems) faced a higher sanction risk.

### **Other barriers to work**

As well as demographic and human capital barriers to employment, some researchers have considered the role more practical and logistic barriers play in selection into sanctions. The US

literature identifies three key practical barriers to work as being associated with higher likelihood of sanctions: problems with transportation (limited or no access to a car and/or not holding a driver's licence<sup>41</sup>) (Cherlin *et al.*, 2002; Fein and Lee, 1999; Goldberg, 2002; Kalil *et al.*, 2002 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003), communication (i.e. not having a home telephone) (Cherlin *et al.*, 2002 in Lee *et al.*, 2004; Oggins and Fleming, 2001) and childcare (which

demonstrates a far less certain association) (see Pavetti *et al.*, 2003 and Meyers *et al.*, 2006).

These practical barriers are less evident in studies conducted outside the US, although Peters and Joyce (2006) highlight the higher proportion of sanctioned claimants who reported experiencing transport difficulties (p. 19). More frequently identified were problems with housing (unstable arrangements and

Table 2. Characteristics identified as more prevalent among sanctioned than non-sanctioned benefit recipients

Study	Location	Characteristics					Barriers to employment		
		African American	Never married	Large family/ household	Young	Young mother	Human capital deficits	Practical	Personal and family challenges
US – TANF									
*Born <i>et al.</i> (1999)	Maryland	ns		X	X	X	X		
Cherlin <i>et al.</i> (2001)	Boston, Chicago and San Antonio			ns			X	X	X
*Edelhoch <i>et al.</i> (2000)	South Carolina	X		X	ns		X		
Fein and Lee (1999)	Delaware	X			X		X	X	
Hasenfeld (2002)	California	ns		X	X		X	X	X
Kalil <i>et al.</i> (2002)	Michigan	X	X				X	X	X
Koralek (2000)	South Carolina	X	X		X		X		
*Mancuso and Lindler (2001)	California			X			X	X	X
*Westra and Routely (2000)	California	X	X				X		
UK									
Bonjour <i>et al.</i> (2001)	UK				X				X (Basic skills) -X (Lower likelihood among disabled claimants)
Goodwin (2008)	UK								X
Peters and Joyce (2006)	UK				X		X (New Deal)		X

\* Studies comparing sanctioned and non-sanctioned leavers  
 ns – Variables included but not statistically significant  
 Source: (adapted from) Pavetti *et al.* (2003): tables 4 and 5

homelessness) and chaotic lifestyles leading to difficulties communicating with the benefits agency and thus to missed appointments (see, for example, Eardley *et al.*, 2005).

### **Personal and family challenges**

'Research is more limited on less easily observed personal and family problems that may contribute to sanction risk by creating barriers to participation' (Meyers *et al.*, 2006, p. 20). However, there is one factor which appears consistently in studies of sanction selection effects conducted in the US and the UK. Health problems and disability (the claimant's own, and those of a dependent) have been identified as a significant factor in a number of US studies comparing sanctioned and non-sanctioned claimants (Cherlin *et al.*, 2001; Meyers *et al.*, 2006). For example, the GAO (2002) found that more than 50 per cent of welfare leavers reporting a health condition had been sanctioned for non-compliance compared with 39 per cent of leavers without health problems. In the UK, a survey conducted with unemployed benefit claimants identified a higher incidence of learning difficulties among those who had been sanctioned (15 per cent compared with 11 per cent of non-sanctioned claimants); this difference was even more pronounced among New Deal participants (22 per cent compared to 14 per cent) (Peters and Joyce, 2006). Similarly, Goodwin (2008) found that those lone parents who had incurred and continued to live with sanctions had higher levels of ill-health (as did their children). Evidence, however, does not always associate disability with a higher sanction risk. For example, Bonjour *et al.* (2001) found that New Deal participants with a registered disability were approximately half as likely to be sanctioned as those with no disability.

A number of other personal barriers have also been associated with higher sanction likelihood, in particular substance misuse (Cherlin *et al.*, 2001; Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Hasenfeld *et al.*, 2002 and Mancuso and Lindler, 2001, in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003), and domestic violence (Lee *et al.*, 2004; Polit *et al.*, 2001). Claimants with multiple barriers of this type were found to be particularly vulnerable to sanctions (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Polit *et al.*, 2001).

## **Outcomes for sanctioned claimants**

We now turn to look at descriptive accounts of sanction effects; those studies not meeting the methodological inclusion criteria of true impact studies. Consideration of more descriptive studies of outcomes experienced by sanctioned families allow us to draw on a range of evidence from the UK, USA and Australia. The US welfare evidence is presented separately, reflecting differences in both sanction systems and predominant research methodologies.

### **Personal outcomes**

Just as the incidence of sanctions varies across the claimant population, benefit recipients are differently affected by the imposition of penalties (Eardley *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, much of the literature highlights the diversity of claimant experience (Dorsett, 2008), and the greater likelihood of some claimants, such as those with dependents (Employment Service, 2000; Molloy and Ritchie, 2000; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999; Vincent, 1998) and/or no other source of income (e.g. savings, family/partner support) (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Molloy and Ritchie, 2000; Vincent, 1998), to 'suffer' as a result of being sanctioned (Employment Service, 1999; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999).

Hardship was commonly reported by sanctioned claimants (Peters and Joyce, 2006); often this resulted in difficulties meeting household expenses, especially housing costs (Dorsett, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2006; Joyce and Whiting, 2006) and utility bills (Employment Service, 2000; Joyce and Whiting, 2006; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999; Vincent, 1998). In the most severe cases respondents had had utilities disconnected and experienced food hardship (Vincent, 1998). Australian research suggests that between 10 and 20 per cent of claimants lose their accommodation or have to move into cheaper housing as a result of sanctions (Eardley *et al.*, 2005).

As well as financial and material difficulties, qualitative research indicates that sanctions can impact on claimants' emotional well-being (Peters and Joyce, 2006). Feelings of anger, humiliation, depression and anxiety experienced on the imposition of a sanction (Dorsett, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2006; Molloy and Ritchie, 2000;

Vincent, 1998) were, in some cases, sustained over a longer period, impacting negatively on claimants' motivation and self-esteem. Moreover, material hardship induced by sanctions created or worsened experiences of stress and anxiety (Goodwin, 2008). While reports of frustration and bitterness were common across claimant groups, the feeling of having been cheated was particularly prevalent among those who had regularly paid National Insurance contributions (Vincent, 1998).

In some cases such emotional impacts led to the worsening of existing health conditions (Dorsett, 2008; Goodwin, 2008; Peters and Joyce, 2006), and even to the development of new health problems (for example, some claimants sought medication for depression following a sanction [Joyce *et al.*, 2006]). An Australian survey indicates that sanctions prompted some claimants (13 per cent) to increase potentially harmful behaviours, such as drinking or drug use (see Eardley *et al.*, 2005).

### **Coping strategies**

Often, the hardship created or threatened by sanctions led claimants to seek means of mitigating such negative outcomes. Family and friends proved regular providers of practical, material and financial support, alleviating the more serious impacts of sanctions (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Joyce *et al.*, 2006; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999; Peters and Joyce, 2006). Those with savings would often use them to meet living expenses, while others would borrow money from both informal and formal sources. While some claimants applied for a crisis loan or hardship fund money (Joyce *et al.*, 2006), low awareness levels of these types of support and fear of debt meant that this was fairly uncommon (Dorsett, 2008); sanctioned claimants were more likely to seek loans from informal sources, usually relatives or friends (Goodwin, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2006; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999; Peters and Joyce, 2006). Claimants recognised that although borrowing money alleviated immediate needs, it also prolonged the effect of the sanction.

Borrowing from or relying on family and friends for support was reported to have negative impacts on their well-being: in some cases those supporting claimants were left struggling financially themselves (Joyce *et al.*, 2006; Peters and Joyce,

2006). This placed additional strain on personal relationships and added to the emotional impact of the sanction (Dorsett, 2008; Peters and Joyce, 2006). A third of respondents involved in an Australian study reported experiencing relationship stress and serious household arguments as a result of the sanction (see Eardley *et al.*, 2005, p. xii).

Some claimants engaged in informal work (e.g. busking) or agency work to see them through the sanction period (O'Connor *et al.*, 1999). It was rare for this work to be declared to jobcentre staff (Joyce *et al.*, 2006). O'Connor *et al.* (1999) also found that some claimants sold possessions to mitigate hardship. Others adopted a strategy of reduced spending; this included cutting back on social activities (Joyce *et al.*, 2006; Peters and Joyce, 2006), treats for children (Joyce and Whiting, 2006) and even household necessities such as food (Dorsett, 2008; Employment Service, 2000; Goodwin, 2008).

A small proportion of respondents felt that the hardship caused by sanctions created a situation where crime became the only response – stealing either food or saleable goods (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Employment Service, 1999; Joyce *et al.*, 2006; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999; Vincent, 1998). In Eardley *et al.*'s study of sanctioned claimants in Australia 'about one in six reported jumping trains or avoiding paying fares as a result' (2005, p. xii).

### **The relationship with advisors**

One potential unfavourable 'side-effect' of sanction referral is the damage it may cause to the relationship between a claimant and their caseworker – eroding any trust built over time. Despite this hypothesis empirical evidence from the UK suggests that, at least under the current system,<sup>42</sup> claimants generally separate the imposition of a sanction from the actions of their advisors (Joyce *et al.*, 2006; Peters and Joyce, 2006). However, in some cases resentment may surface if claimants feel they have been coerced by their personal advisor (Dorsett, 2008).

### **Employment-related and compliance outcomes**

Our theoretical discussion of sanction effects pointed to actual changes in behaviour due to sanctions and posited these as 'intermediate

outcomes'. Such behaviour is rarely detailed in administrative data and requires more qualitative approaches. In some such studies claimants, staff and providers were asked directly whether they felt behaviour (participation, compliance and job search) had been influenced by the (prospect of) sanctions.

Findings from UK studies exploring intermediate outcomes indicate that:

- Sanction warnings could lead to contact being re-established with providers (Dorsett, 2008).
- The threat of sanctions 'was instrumental in encouraging and ultimately persuading customers' to comply (Joyce *et al.*, 2005, p. 45); it meant that some demotivated claimants participated in treatments they may previously have refused (or not volunteered for) (Dorsett, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2005) and 'from which they derived considerable benefit' (Hasluck, 2002, p. 16).
- Some claimants felt that without compulsion they would not have participated in activities – mandation providing necessary stimulus (Eardley *et al.*, 2005; Employment Service, 2000; Joyce *et al.*, 2005; Molloy and Ritchie, 2000). This was true even of some seemingly very resistant customers (Joyce *et al.*, 2005).
- There was some evidence that claimants 'stepped-up' job search efforts in order to avoid a sanction (Employment Service, 1999; Legard and Ritchie, 1999) or following the penalty (Peters and Joyce, 2006; Vincent, 1998).
- A small proportion of lone parent claimants in receipt of Income Support believed that sanctions may have had a positive effect on their job-search behaviours.

But:

- Not all claimants were motivated to comply with conditions as a result of sanctions; there were those who would have attended without sanctions and those who were unwilling to comply regardless of the consequences

(this group comprised those with an alternative income, those avoiding contact with the jobcentre and those whose health ruled out attendance) (Dorsett, 2008).

- For longer-term, more intensive treatments (such as the New Deal options), there were difficulties sustaining compliance among some claimants – in some cases this led to multiple sanctions being accrued (Joyce *et al.*, 2006).
- Where claimants received multiple sanctions and were resolved not to attend, 'there was a clear sense that no form of sanction would work to influence their behaviour, particularly as the coping mechanisms employed enabled the customer to manage financially without their benefit' (Joyce *et al.*, 2006, p. 57).
- While sanctions could promote attendance they had little impact on engagement; treatments (e.g. Work-focused Interviews [WFIs]) were thought to do little for those who only participated simply to avoid a sanction (Dorsett, 2008).
- Most of those referred felt subsequent attendance did little to alter views about work and those who felt pressurised sometimes developed more negative views about work (Dorsett, 2008) and hostility or resistance towards services (Joyce *et al.*, 2005).
- Staff queried the value in teaching or supporting the unwilling and uncommitted – those who may disrupt other more motivated clients (Joyce *et al.*, 2005).
- Some sanctioned claimants had become cautious of entering employment for fear they should find the job unsuitable, and be penalised (Vincent, 1998; Peters and Joyce, 2006).
- Sanctions led some claimants to sign off (Dorsett, 2008; Joyce *et al.*, 2005), or to move onto another benefit (Joyce *et al.*, 2006), for example from an unemployment benefit to an inactive one (Joyce *et al.*, 2005).

### The relationship between hardship and behaviour

A small number of scholars have taken this exploration further and attempted to unpack the relationship between different types of sanction outcome, in particular the effect of hardship on subsequent behaviour. Such research indicates that those claimants experiencing (severe) economic difficulties as a result of a sanction were the most likely to be compliant in future dealings with the benefit system (in this case the New Deal), whereas those ‘cushioned’ by the support of family and friends (usually co-resident parents) could better continue in non-compliance (O’Connor *et al.*, 1999).

However, Bryson *et al.*’s study (2000) shows that, despite higher levels of compliance among sanctioned claimants, those who experienced hardship as a direct result of benefit loss were less likely to be employed by the time of the follow-up survey (see Table 3).

### US welfare studies

We know more of the situation of sanctioned welfare recipients in the US, although the body of evidence is still small when compared with other components of welfare reform. Most of this evidence comes from studies that employ cross-sectional and correlation methods – and are therefore unable to establish a causal relationship. This means that it is not possible to say categorically whether it is the sanction that is responsible for the outcome or the family’s characteristics, which also led the family to be sanctioned (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).

Evidence reveals that sanctioned families face considerable disadvantage on a number of fronts (Bryner and Martin, 2005; Meyers *et al.*, 2006); they are less likely to be employed than other welfare leavers (Pavetti and Bloom, 2001) and have lower earnings (Born *et al.*, 1999).<sup>43</sup> They are also more likely to experience utility hardship (21 per cent of sanctioned claimants had their utilities disconnected compared to 9 per cent of non-sanctioned) and more likely to expect hardship in the future (50 per cent of sanctioned compared with 25 per cent of non-sanctioned) (Kalil *et al.*, 2002 in Lee *et al.*, 2004 and Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). Kalil *et al.*’s (2002) study found that a third of sanctioned claimants were engaged in hardship activities<sup>44</sup> compared with 14 per cent of non-sanctioned (Kalil *et al.*, 2002 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).

The experience of hardship appears particularly pronounced when directly comparing individuals who left welfare involuntarily (i.e. were sanctioned off) with those who chose to leave the rolls (Born *et al.*, 1999; Meyers *et al.*, 2006). For example, Lindhorst *et al.* (2000) show that those leaving involuntarily were more likely to go without meals, to have their utilities cut off and to have unmet medical needs (in Lee *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, those who had been sanctioned for leaving work were more likely to experience financial strain and unstable housing (*ibid.*).

The material hardship sanctions create for claimants leads to difficulties meeting living expenses, and also a number of strategies to ‘manage’ the loss of income and material disadvantage (Meyers *et al.*, 2006; Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). Cherlin *et al.* (2001), for instance, found that sanctioned families were five times more likely

Table 3. Employment rates by sanction status and hardship experience

	No stops/reductions (%)	Benefit stopped/reduced, hardship (%)	Benefit stopped/reduced, no hardship (%)
Paid work	42 (30)	18 (13)	31 (17)
Unemployed	40	67	53
Other	18	15	16
Weighted base	1980	356	132
Unweighted base	1858	343	152

Note: Figures in brackets are full-time employment rates  
Source: Bryson *et al.*, 2000, p. 169

than non-sanctioned to borrow money to pay bills. Edelhoich *et al.* (2000) reported that approximately a quarter received income from someone outside the home and Fraker *et al.* (1997) found that 65 per cent of sanctioned clients received support from their parents (in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). As well as family and friends, sanctioned claimants were also more likely to seek additional support from government assistance programmes, such as food stamps and Medicaid (Meyers *et al.*, 2006). Hardship also led to higher rates of use of emergency services, such as food pantries (25 per cent of sanctioned claimants compared to 19 per cent of non-sanctioned), emergency clothing (25 per cent compared to 15 per cent) and homeless shelters (Cherlin *et al.*, 2001 and Kalil *et al.*, 2002 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).

However, there is evidence that unfavourable outcomes may not persist over time. Edelhoich *et al.* (2000), for example, found that almost 50 per cent of sanctioned individuals were employed two years after their case was closed; this compares with only 20 per cent at the point the case was closed. Similarly, Mancuso and Lindler's (2001) qualitative study showed that sanctioned families' resources and general family stability improved over time (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003). It is also important to note, though, that recidivism is more common amongst sanctioned recipients (Meyers *et al.*, 2006). Born *et al.* (1999) found that twice as many sanctioned claimants (35 per cent) returned within 90 days as non-sanctioned (18 per cent); for a quarter of sanctioned families this return occurred within 30 days (p. iv).

### **Summary of contextual findings**

Exploration of contextual evidence offers pertinent insights to be considered alongside impact findings. Of particular relevance are those elements that undermine the way in which sanctions are designed to operate. Low levels of claimant awareness and bias in their implementation mean that sanctions are not operating equitably and cannot meet their own objectives in terms of preventing or punishing (deliberate) non-compliance. However, also within this body of contextual evidence are qualitative studies that suggest the perception of sanctioned claimants as being wilfully non-compliant underlying punitive

sanctions is predominantly a false one; rather, the breaching of conditions appears to be a product of personal, social and practical circumstances. Such evidence relating to the characteristics of the sanctioned populations and the unfavourable outcomes they often encounter also raises important questions about whether sanctions merely compound existing inequalities and create further barriers to work for some claimants.

## 5 Sanctions and other types of conditionality

Conditionality and sanctions have not been confined to unemployment and social assistance benefits, although this is certainly where they are most visible. Some important developments have taken place in the UK in which other kinds of benefit payment have been made conditional on certain behaviours (Deacon, 2004; Dwyer, 2004; Griggs and Bennett, 2009; Stanley, 2005). These developments, although regularly proposed, have not always been easy to put into effect. Indeed, they have often been met with considerable resistance from both within and beyond Parliament. Perhaps the best example lies in the repeated attempts the government has made to introduce housing benefit sanctions for those guilty of anti-social behaviour. This has been proposed in numerous iterations, often demonstrating a compromise, and most being met with varying degrees of dissent; it now operates as a pilot programme affecting those claimants who have previously been evicted for anti-social behaviour and refuse to take up available support.<sup>45</sup> Despite such set-backs:

*The initial enthusiasm with which the Prime Minister and many of his inner circle embraced ... [such] proposals does, however, illustrate ... the extent to which a principle of conditionality now informs much social security policy.*

(Dwyer, 2004, p. 272)

While the UK has taken steps towards increasing conditionality outside the social security benefit system, the US has gone even further. These include explicit objectives to reduce non-marital births (the family cap), with financial incentives for those states successfully reducing extra-marital births. There are strictly enforced rules regarding paternity establishment, in some states as a precondition of benefit receipt (Stanley, 2005). Otherwise the largest use of conditionality across the world has been in the development of

CCTs in developing countries where entitlement to child-related benefits is conditional on up-take of immunisation, regular health checks and on school enrolment and attendance.

The following chapter brings together some of the main messages from studies exploring the impact of non-work-related sanctions and conditionality, organised on the basis of policy type. Evidence varies a great deal in terms of both quality and coverage, but we have prioritised studies employing more robust methods, including the results of experimental and observational evidence where available. While the following is not intended to provide a comprehensive account of all we know about conditionality and sanctions outside work(-related) programmes, it is able to offer a good indication of the potential of sanctioned-backed conditionality in different policy fields.

### **US studies on immunisation and health**

Parental responsibility requirements refer specifically to mandatory benefit conditions for children's health care. There are two such programmes included in Grogger and Karoly's meta-analysis, the PPI (Maryland), which required families with infants to prove that their children had received preventative health care (this included immunisation), and the PIP (Georgia), which required parents to regularly verify their children's immunisation status. While the first of these programmes showed no significant treatment-control differences, children in PIP's treatment group were significantly more likely to be up to date with their vaccinations (for example, four years after being randomly assigned, 87.5 per cent of treatment children had up-to-date polio vaccines compared with 80.1 per cent of the control). One reason posited for the difference between these two programmes is the larger sanction imposed as part of the PIP programme (equivalent to the non-vaccinated child's grant). It is also possible that the simpler objectives

and narrower requirements contributed to PIP's success (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 222).

### **US evidence on school attendance**

Wisconsin's Learnfare programme, implemented in 1988, can be described as a 'conditional cash penalty' in that it penalises teenage welfare recipients (or their parents) for not meeting school attendance targets (specifically, a maximum of two unexcused absences in a given month) (Dee, 2009). The results of Dee's evaluation (2009) show a positive impact on school enrolment (a 3.7 per cent increase, effect size = 0.08) and attendance (4.5 per cent, effect size = 0.10). Effects were larger among subgroups at risk of dropping out of school. Results suggest that well-designed financial incentives (or sanctions) can be an effective mechanism for improving the school attendance of at-risk students at scale.

The similar Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) programme was also experimentally evaluated. This programme required pregnant and parenting teenagers who had not graduated or attained a General Educational Development (GED) qualification to attend school (or its equivalent). Those who attended were awarded with an additional welfare payment (\$62) while those who failed to attend faced a sanction (\$62) from their monthly grant (typically around \$274). Participants were also assigned caseworkers who provided support and advice, assisting with barriers to participation such as childcare and transport. Evaluators found impacts were largely dependent on whether participants were attending school or a GED programme when they entered LEAP (see Auspos *et al.*, 1999). Those who had been attending school showed favourable educational outcomes (66 per cent of the treatment group completed school, gained a GED or were still at school compared with 57 per cent of the control group [Long *et al.*, 1996]) and employment impacts (four years after enrolment 65 per cent treatment and 60 per cent control were employed [Bos and Fellerath, 1997]). Favourable impacts on earnings noted during the first two years did not extend into the second – with control-group members 'catching up' with their treatment counterparts. Those in the treatment group who had not been enrolled

in school at baseline showed less favourable outcomes when compared with their control group counterparts. These treatment-group members experienced a high sanction rate, and those with multiple sanctions reported resulting hardship for themselves and their families, in some cases lacking essentials such as food and medicines (Bos and Fellerath, 1997 in Auspos *et al.*, 1999).

### **US studies exploring the impact of the family cap**

A small body of US evaluations (experimental and observational) have considered the effect of the 'family cap' (a grant reduction imposed when new babies are born to families receiving welfare) on childbearing. Among these are two experiments, AWWDP and FDP, designed explicitly to test the impact of the family cap (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005, pp. 189–90). The first of these, AWWDP, which took place in Arkansas, found no significant effect on childbearing, use of family planning services or birth control. The second study, which evaluated the New Jersey Family Development Program (FDP), found a statistically significant 3.2 percentage point decline in additional births (a 9.2 per cent drop) as well as a 4 percentage point increase in the use of family planning services, but no corresponding effects on abortion rates. However, methodological problems with both studies, such as small samples (less than 100 claimants in the AWWDP), difficulties with randomisation (FDP) and low awareness of policies among recipients (AWWDP and FDP), suggest caution should be exercised if generalising from these findings (Grogger and Karoly, 2005).

Four observational studies also explored the impact of the family cap on childbearing (Horvath-Rose and Peters, 2002; Kaushal and Kaestner, 2001; Kearney, 2002; Levine, 2002 – all in Grogger and Karoly, 2005). Of these studies only two, Levine (2002) and Horvath-Rose and Peters (2002), identified a statistically significant impact on childbearing. Yet these two results work in different directions, Levine showing a 5.3 per cent increase in births and Horvath-Rose and Peters a 7.6 per cent decline (among unmarried teenagers). Reconciling these results is rendered particularly difficult by the methodological problems experienced by both

the experimental and the observational studies. This leads Klerman (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 197) to conclude that family caps have had no significant effect on childbearing.

### **UK evidence on community sentences**

In 2001 the UK introduced the community sentence sanction policy. Under this scheme, offenders failing to meet the conditions of community punishment orders, community rehabilitation orders and combination orders were subject to social security benefit sanctions. The aim of the programme was to promote compliance and a wider sense of responsibility to society by linking behaviour to the receipt of minimum income benefits (Knight *et al.*, 2003).

The policy was implemented in four pilot areas and evaluated using mixed methods with the aim of assessing its impact on compliance and issues relevant to a national roll-out. By comparing the change in compliance rates among claimants and non-claimants, the evaluation was able to identify a small, but positive, effect on compliance (a 1.8 per cent increase) (Knight *et al.*, 2003). Interviews with offenders, however, suggest that they did not believe the policy to have had a significant effect on their behaviour. Although some were encouraged to pay extra attention to the conditions of community orders, effectiveness was hampered by low awareness levels, and had less influence where offenders faced greater barriers to compliance (e.g. substance misuse). Sanctions did, however, create financial difficulties for all those affected and led some claimants who were already re-offending to increase criminal activity. There was little evidence of an effect on labour market behaviour (*ibid.*).

Interestingly, despite demonstrating small positive impacts, the pilots were terminated in 2009 following an evaluation that 'showed the pilots did not provide sufficient value for money to justify their continuation' (Hansard, 2009).

### **Conditional Cash Transfers**

There are now a number of CCT schemes operating in Latin America (where they originated) and further afield. Two of the most significant are the Bolsa Familia<sup>46</sup> (or 'family stipend'), which has been operating in Brazil since 2003 (ILO, 2009b,

p. 42) and Oportunidades (formally Progresá) the first CCT, launched in Mexico in 1997, now the Mexican Government's principal anti-poverty programme. Although each individual scheme has both its own objectives and set of conditions attached to receipt, all broadly aim to address poverty (the benefit is targeted at low-income households) and opportunity through 'human development' requirements. Thus conditions are often attached to school attendance and health-related behaviours such as immunisation, and (for mothers) pre-natal care. If these conditions are not met then the grant is stopped (approximately 7 per cent of Bolsa Familia families have had their benefits stopped while compliance is investigated).

While evaluations of these schemes do not consider the specific effects of grant loss, wider assessments focusing on the receipt of cash transfers demonstrate generally positive impacts. Evaluations of Oportunidades and Bolsa Familia, for example, show a significant effect on school enrolment and attendance rates (ILO, 2009b, p. 43). Child health has also improved, with evidence that Oportunidades has had an impact on nutrition, child growth and prevented stunting; similar positive impacts were found in an evaluation of the Colombian Familias en Acción programme. Moreover, CCTs also appear to have had a positive effect on adult health.

Favourable impacts can also be identified in terms of their anti-poverty objectives. Average consumption has risen, with evaluations indicating that the bulk of increased spending has been on food and providing for children's health, education and other needs. Furthermore, concerns that the grant would create a work disincentive have not been realised; indeed programmes like Bolsa Familia appear to have had a positive impact on labour market participation rates (ILO, 2009b, p. 44).

However, the long-term benefits and broader outcomes of CCTs have been questioned. The recent World Bank review by Fiszbein and Schady (2009) looked at evidence from a large pool of CCT programmes where children's school attendance is required of parents receiving cash transfers. The clear result from these programmes was that school attendance rates rose as participants complied with the conditional nature of the

programme, but there was no measurable increase in educational attainment. There are a number of reasons asserted to explain this result, although none are conclusive. Overall it seems children from poor families (many of whom resided in rural areas with poor-quality schools) suffer many educational disadvantages – school attendance is just one of them. CCT programmes also had demonstrable positive impacts on income and poverty, but these effects may have been greater had the cash transfer been unconditional. The UK Department for International Development (DIFD) has argued that ‘cash transfers do not need to be made conditional on school attendance to impact on children’s education’ (2005, p. 14, cited in ILO, 2009a, p. 51). Furthermore, suspending or terminating a family’s grant for failing to meet conditions will do little to assist those in the greatest need, particularly children, who cannot be held accountable for their parent’s transgressions.

### **Substance misuse programmes**

Systematic reviews of evidence in this area tend to show the potential benefits of incentives and of treatment monitoring; however, there is little evidence on the relationship between programmes for substance users and benefit sanctions. Part of the CalWORKs evaluation does, however, begin to explore the association. Overall, researchers found sanction rates among claimants referred to substance support services were low (4.7 per cent after the referral) (although they were far higher over the whole four-year evaluation period – 27 per cent). Those claimants dropping out of supportive services were more likely to be sanctioned than ‘completers’ – thus the same factors appeared to contribute to non-compliance across different programmes. Completers had, to a large extent, attained and sustained abstinence, and services appeared to have positive effects on claimants’ attitudes towards work, as well as their ability to undertake it. According to providers, 60 per cent of claimants had a positive change in their capacity to look for, find and retain work – this appeared to be associated to the amount of time the claimant had been receiving services (and very significantly, whether the programme had been completed) (California Institute for Mental Health, 2005).

These findings take on greater significance given the changes set out in the Welfare Reform Act 2009. Schedule 3 details requirements for problem drug and alcohol users to make and follow a rehabilitation plan and in some instances to undergo drug testing (OPSI, 2009). Sanctions of up to 26 weeks can apply to those claimants failing to attend interviews or substance-related assessments, answer questions about drug use or follow the mandatory rehabilitation plan (without good cause). What little evidence can be applied to these proposals raises concern about the lack of incentives and focus on mandation backed by punitive measures.

## 6 Justifications for sanction-backed conditionality

The majority of commentary on benefit sanctions and conditionality has focused on underlying issues of moral philosophy – largely, contractualism, communitarianism and paternalism. Critics have questioned the viability and fairness of such approaches, often from a social rights perspective. Our review comes from a different perspective, a rigorous analysis of the evidence base on the outcomes of sanctions in practice, based on a clear set of theoretical a priori assumptions on the nature and basis of such evidence. To extend our review into the realms of moral philosophy would be difficult and inappropriate, and therefore this section of the review considers only those justifications of sanctions that can be informed by evidence. This means we focus on whether measurable aims of policies couched in terms such as ‘equity, effectiveness and efficiency’ have supporting evidence to underlie them.

### Equity-based justifications?

One justification for sanctions is that the underlying mandatory approach they enforce widens opportunity for claimants. When compared with voluntary programmes (in which sanctions would be a non sequitur), mandation ensures that people cannot select themselves out, and thus those who are furthest from the labour market, facing multiple barriers to work (those who are more likely to opt out [Hasluck and Green, 2007]), are ensured access to programmes. As a quid pro quo, this ensures that the most advantaged jobseekers do not disproportionately capture available services (Deacon, 1997). There are, however, several preconditions that must be in place to ensure that such equality of opportunity is enforced and complemented by sanctions.

The first condition is that the approach does not alter the probability of being on the underlying programme, or, if it does, that this operates equally across the profile of claimants. The effect

of sanctions on inflow or take-up has been under-considered to date, but the combination of reduced take-up and increased exits to being neither ‘in work’ nor on benefit has been observed consistently over several wider studies and commentaries, which clearly suggests a fall in take-up. US welfare reform, including the rise in full-family sanctions, has led to growing numbers of what Rebecca Blank calls the ‘disconnected’ (those not in work or on welfare) (see Blank, 2007). In the UK, exits from unemployment to ‘unknown destinations’ are high both in unemployment and incapacity benefit programmes (Blyth, 2006). Considering the introduction of JSA, Petrongolo observes ‘those who left the unemployment register without finding a job might have in general become detached from the labor market’ (2009, p. 26).

A second condition, which ensures equality of opportunity, requires that programme (and treatment) quality is consistent, in both implementation and delivery. This is known to be problematic, for example, as voluntary programmes become mandatory the number of claimants expands and the relationship between provider and client changes. Mandatory programmes with sanctions also require high levels of information quality (Griggs and Bennett, 2009; SSAC, 2006) and, to date, this has been consistently absent from UK benefit programmes with sanctions (see our discussion in Chapter 4).

A third condition is that sanction risk is equal across the claimant population. Again, the evidence reviewed in Chapter 4 suggests that those for whom there is the greatest concern about equality of opportunity (the lowest skilled and those furthest from the labour market) are disproportionately selected into sanctions.

It is thus wise to conclude that while sanctions may enforce increased coverage of treatment, this should not in itself be seen as equality of opportunity for such treatments. Studies to date have concentrated too narrowly on crude treatment

rates of caseloads and on narrow and short-term definitions of exit. Widening the approach to include the impacts of sanctions on take-up and of exits to reduced (or consistent) opportunity sets would provide a fuller profile of inequality.

Policies that promote sanctions linked to labour market participation also tend to see entry into the labour market as an outcome that increases equality of opportunity. It is certainly the case that changing someone's behaviour from 'not seeking' to 'seeking' work will raise their probability of finding work from zero. However, once this is done, there is a significant group for whom the probabilities of employment are not significantly above zero. This group gets bigger the wider the conditional rules of being 'available for work' are set (for example, the movement of lone parents with older children to JSA). There is also a group for whom the probabilities of work are reasonable, but the employment profile they face when in work is very poor (jobs being low paid and the work conditions substandard) – which means a higher likelihood of cycling between work and unemployment. Sanctions that result in lower earnings in work, in decreased employment persistence and increased churning in employment (such as those seen in Arni *et al.*'s study) are more difficult to argue for in terms of increasing opportunity.

Lowering sanction incidence to encourage better job matching and delayed labour market entry (associated with human capital development and ultimately to better job matches, higher wages and work retention [Ochel, 2004]) requires better consideration and the development of a broader evidence base. The general message is that equality of opportunity could, in theory, be increased by sanctions, but this relies on the absence of selection effects and the ability to equate enforced participation with a higher level of outcome. The evidence to support both these necessary conditions is extremely weak indeed.

We now begin to consider equity in a different form – looking to issues that justify sanctions in terms of **equality of outcomes**. It should first be noted that the evidence base for such justifications is extremely small. Evidence largely concentrates on employment impacts and 'entitlement' effects and thus on short-term impacts. However, it could be argued that the things that really matter for

longer-term outcomes (in terms of self-sufficiency, freedom from poverty, child outcomes, etc.) concern the quality of employment and sustained income gains (the areas with very little robust evidence). Indeed, what evidence there is of longer-term sanction impacts is largely unfavourable – sanctions lowering the likelihood of sustainable employment and incomes over time (Arni *et al.*, 2009). Furthermore, favourable short-term effects may offset longer-term impacts; US welfare reform evidence shows any employment gains as a result of mandatory work requirements that were not accompanied by gains in income actually had a detrimental impact on children's educational outcomes in high school, suggesting the potential to limit opportunity in the next generation (see Grogger and Karoly, 2005, pp. 215–16).

Greater income equality or decreased incidence of poverty as outcomes from sanction-enforced benefit conditionality would certainly arise from higher employment rates if such employment was sustained and provided incomes that were above the poverty line. The problem is that much of the evidence base does not concern itself with the 'losers', either those exiting to destinations other than formal employment or those who are deterred from take-up. Part of the evidential problem is that those not in the system cannot appear in the results; if one of the effects of the programme is to lower enrolment then there are huge difficulties taking this into account. In effect, the evidence base overstates gains without the ability to fully account for losses.

This is accompanied by a general failure to decompose treatment effects. While we know something of 'aggregate' and 'average' gains, some of this evidence, particularly of earnings gains over time, is very difficult to interpret. The recent study by Arni *et al.* (2009) that starts to unpack the effects of sanctions on different outcomes is a significant addition to the literature. It also helps us to understand why so many of the US studies see the control group catching up with the treatment group over time: the short-term gains from treatments are mainly through reduced periods on benefits rather than improved wage levels. Much of why sanctions 'work' is to encourage an earlier return to employment, but at the expense of the quality of the job match. This has clear anticipated outcomes

for longer-term issues of equality of outcome that are borne out in the discussion above.

And what of those who are not seen to be in employment? Blank's US-based work on the 'disconnected' indicates that 75 per cent of this group are living below the poverty line (Blank, 2007). The growth of the 'disconnected' can be considered a by-product of welfare reform such as sanctions and time limits (and thus of entitlement effects) – forcing premature exit and deterring entry; this is the other side of the caseload reduction coin. How far such 'exclusion' can be considered as furthering equality of opportunity is an empirical question of huge importance and requires urgent specification and measurement. How far have profiles of poverty gaps and poverty intensity changed alongside poverty headcounts and how far have the 'disconnected' been part of changing profiles of such poverty measures?

## Efficiency-based justifications

It is argued that sanction-backed conditionality is efficient; that these approaches are best able to use available resources to maximise positive outcomes by ensuring claimants are better informed and realistic about opportunities (managing, in most cases lowering, expectations and reservation wages), that job search is 'optimised' and that moral hazard type risks are minimised.

One suggestion is that sanctions can help conditional approaches solve a variety of 'information problems' at the individual level. For instance, the evaluation of work-focused interviews for lone parents clearly showed that providing information on employment opportunities and the various government initiatives available to assist a move into work improved take-up of the New Deal for Lone Parents and increased employment (Knight *et al.*, 2006). Of course, such potential gains to aggregate efficiency must be put against the underlying problem of system complexity and the poor quality of programme information. And, as an alternative, it may be more efficient to provide and communicate clear information about simple and transparent programmes. But within a complex system there are potential gains to be made through investment in mandatory methods to

ensure that improved information is shared across the widest profile of programme participants.

There are other, more difficult, issues concerning imperfect claimant knowledge – for instance, in the argument for making CCTs conditional on school enrolment and attendance is the perception that parental investment in children's human capital is too low, as parents are unaware of the returns to education (Fiszbein and Schady, 2009). Put more simply, parents (themselves poorly educated) may not sufficiently value investment in the education of their children (Attanasio and Kaufmann, 2009; Jensen, 2006, for instance); therefore making this 'investment' a precondition of benefit efficiently corrects the problem this informational deficit creates. However, given what evaluative evidence tells us about the long-term returns on school attendance it is difficult to establish how far the parents in CCT programmes were actually making poor decisions about their children's education.

It is thus possible to overstate information problems and understate the rational reaction to short-term risks – especially in terms of risk appreciation and risk aversion of low-skilled claimants. Information may be part of the problem but encouraging risk-averse individuals to make behavioural changes that are posited in short-term returns (being 'better off in work' at the job entry point of transition) may not be sufficiently robust in the face of evidence of smaller medium- to long-term gains from employment, income security and job opportunities. If sanctions are only enforcing short-term outcomes, it makes little sense to talk of the longer term – of earnings progression, of sustained employment and better returns to human capital – unless such longer-term returns are transparent and realisable. This point takes us back to the problems discussed under equality of opportunity and outcome above.

A second way of appreciating efficiency is in the micro-economics of job search. Here sanctions will, in theory, reduce employment expectations and reservation wages and thus increase efficiency in job search and a quicker return to employment (as outlined in Chapter 2). However, there are obvious problems in applying this logic to all unemployed.

If sanctions are imposed too early the gains will be minimal since many claimants will be short-term unemployed and thus likely to leave benefits quickly without intervention (moreover experimental evidence shows imposing conditions too early has a negative impact on earnings [Klepinger *et al.*, 2002]). Delaying treatments until an elapsed period of unemployment has occurred has typically been the British approach, the Restart evaluation being hugely influential in supporting more intense monitoring of, and job search advice to, the long-term unemployed (Dolton and O'Neill, 1996). The role of sanctions in such approaches and the trade-offs between early returns to employment versus longer periods to achieve a better job match have not featured in the vast majority of studies in this field. There is evidence that sanction effects (both threat and imposition) can reduce periods on benefit (and thus caseloads) and increase job entry – this is a compelling evidence base. However, the measures are only short-term and very narrow measures of efficiency.

Arni *et al.* (2009) is the only study to question this approach by looking at other measures – finding negative effects of sanctions on earnings and job sustainability. More crucially, these authors also address the underlying question of efficiency in the approach to short-term returns to employment:

*There is a trade-off between the positive effect of finding a job sooner rather than collecting unemployment benefits for a longer period of time, and the negative effect of finding a less well-paid job with a shorter duration. Using our estimation results we are able to quantify this trade-off. We show that over a period of two years following the exit from unemployment, the net effect of benefit sanctions is negative. For sanctioned workers, the loss in earnings is in the order of two months whereas the gain from shorter unemployment duration is about one month.* (Ibid., p. 33)

If these findings can be replicated in other studies then sanctions cannot be seen as efficient in such terms.

A specific argument for efficiency arises from the design of unemployment insurance and the perceived requirement to have sanctions

(disqualifications) for those who leave work voluntarily, are dismissed for misconduct or leave without good reason. Insurance theory suggests that the risk event must not be subject to individual choice. This may have made sense in 1948 when jobs were long-term, unionised and unemployment levels were low and benefits represented a significant proportion of average wages. But all these underlying facts are now false, and we are left in 2010 with a theoretical justification that may well not be efficient.

The facts underlying the reason for each job exit take huge amounts of administrative time to establish and impose a burden on staff that could well be more efficiently placed in job advice and brokering. Unemployment is increasingly a repeated event for that segment of the workforce who are low paid and low-skilled. These are not the people it is sensible to suspend from unemployment benefits for long periods as they have recent job experience and could well be re-employed in better positions to reduce the risk of future job loss. The perceived 'financial incentives' of benefits have also fallen, with current JSA replacement rates of around just 40 per cent (Griggs and Bennett, 2009) (although passported benefits for housing etc. are potentially of more concern).<sup>47</sup> And for those who have long work records and a contribution record, disqualification for those who 'choose' voluntary redundancy is a perverted interpretation of choice for the majority. They have paid into a system that provides them with no coverage. Voluntary redundancy is one of a very limited set of options that are best seen as decisions based on 'when' and not 'if' their job ends, together with the different value of financial packages that will accompany such different versions of redundancy. In the early 1980s, the Conservative Government suspended the operation of the moral hazard rule for voluntary redundancy in the face of large-scale restructuring of the economy. Its operation now, while we are still feeling the effects of the deepest recession since the 1920s, is questionable for the same reasons – scale, consequences, efficiency and effectiveness. There is a clear evidential challenge to prove the efficiency and effectiveness of the continued operation of the moral hazard rules for sanctions of JSA as they currently stand.

There is one key measure of efficiency where sanctions appear attractive. They are a relatively cheap way of reducing caseload and thus of reducing programme expenditure. Combined with the highly valued increase in immediate employment rates for those claiming unemployment benefits, this appreciation of efficiency dominates the evidence base. The evidence is compelling: if policy-makers want short-term savings to programme budgets with a sellable 'outcome' attached then ratcheting up conditionality and applying more sanctions will 'save money' and have measurable outcomes. In much of the literature there is reference to the assumption that 'behaviour-based interventions' are 'more (cost-) effective than traditional service delivery and ... deliver wider social benefits' (Stanley, 2005, p. 38). However, a more considered appraisal of efficiency would have to take several additional issues into account.

First, savings in one programme does not mean that all such savings can be claimed across the whole government profile of expenditure. There will be consequential spending on other programmes – for example, working tax credits. There will also be additional tax revenue to consider – taxes paid by those in work. Second, there is the issue of displaced spending that results in other programmes – more unforeseen or unintended spending outcomes. Some of these may result from spill-over effects or externalities. For example, Machin and Marie's (2004) study of crime rates points to one area where a direct causal relationship to sanction rates has been found and estimates made that 22–28 per cent of overall benefit savings from the introduction of JSA could be netted off due to spending on policing and criminal justice. Similarly, evidence from the US of higher hospital admissions for children of sanctioned claimants points to other areas (in this case acute and primary health services) where displaced spending may occur.

However, in the main policy-makers can calculate savings and gains from increased rates of employment based on fairly simple assumptions using tax benefit models. The difficulty lies in making such estimates dynamic and reflective of the risk of repeated unemployment, and, as more sanctions and conditionality operate on people

with health problems and with young children who are entering part-time work with poor prospects of sustained employment, the more those conditions will be problematic. Raising the employment rate assumption depends on knowing what the combined effect of inflows and outflows are. These are largely unknown and probably over-optimistic given that the policy objective is to achieve a statically specified 80 per cent employment rate irrespective of turnover. (Achieving an 80 per cent rate with high turnover may need a combined inflow and persistent employed assumption of 85 or 90 per cent as being in work or achieving job entry – an unheard of and internationally unseen level.)

There are other longer-term effects that may lead to a general worsening of employment conditions for a significant section of the population. When tight conditionality and high sanction rates operate on a large scale and affect the majority of claimants there is a danger that these will impact the informal economy. Indeed, van den Berg *et al.* (2004) point out that sanctions may well change the relative value of informal versus formal job search. For those exiting the benefit system or choosing not to enter then the attractiveness of the grey economy is increased. Sanctions are seen by some as ways of preventing such activity on benefits, weeding out those who are feckless or who are claiming fraudulently (for instance, see Rayner *et al.*, 2000, p. 7). However, the relationship between the informal economy and benefits is a complex one. In countries with little formal social assistance, low productive informal work is the norm as a way of achieving a subsistence income. The self-employed who work for low wages, often below the minimum wage level, are the UK equivalent of such a workforce. It is rare for such economic activity to provide lifetime employment and even rarer for it to get to a level where it can be formalised and taxed appropriately. If the benefit system is changed to stimulate the provision of such services then there is a considerable likelihood of significant 'general equilibrium' effects at the lower end of the labour market. Such outcomes are the unseen side of US welfare and public benefit reform since the late 1980s.

A final problem comes in establishing the overall position of efficiency to include those who 'disconnect'. Those who are off the programme

rolls and therefore not in receipt of welfare benefits can potentially be considered an unequivocal saving to the public purse. Indeed, if they really disconnect then they will additionally be absent from government survey responses, and may well not vote, which raises interesting questions about how far this group are recognised in policy.

## Effectiveness-based justifications: optimal models for changing behaviour

'The primary purpose of ... welfare conditionality is not to determine entitlement or to establish need, but to change behaviour' (Deacon, 2004, p. 912). Sanctions are designed to encourage compliance with, or participation in, activities deemed to be in the best interests of claimants (and ultimately for society [Bastagli, 2008]). They can discourage certain behaviours or punish those who behave inappropriately (Griggs and Bennett, 2009; Halpern *et al.*, 2004; Lister, 2008) and to help 'determine motivation, shape action and thereby determine character' (Field, 1999). Approaches that promote such 'behavioural engineering' have found growing legitimacy and acceptance within active labour market programmes, and have been the subject of government-sponsored research (see, for example, Halpern *et al.*, 2004).

There is a prerequisite for sanctions intended to alter behaviour, 'the application of sanctions must be efficient, transparent and fair if it is to be linked to changes in the behaviour and attitude of clients' (WorkDirections, 2008, p. 3). Research discussed in Chapter 4 shows clear evidence of consistent and widespread problems with information and claimant awareness and this means that sanctions rarely function as intended, either in terms of threat (claimants being motivated by fear of a potential sanction) or as a punishment for wilful non-compliance (*ibid.*). A considerable proportion of claimants do not fully understand how sanctions are incurred and very few make an active choice not to meet the conditions of receipt (Goodwin, 2008). Many are not aware that they have been sanctioned even after the reduction has been made. Substantial time-lags exist between the infraction (act of non-compliance) and the punishment (the imposition of the sanction), and

can limit claimants' perception of cause and effect (*ibid.*). Such disassociation of breach and sanction can serve only to dilute the message and potentially reduce more favourable impacts.

Additionally, descriptive statistics suggest that only a minority of the sanctions imposed reflect a clear behavioural aspect. The majority of sanctions (55 per cent in the UK) are retrospective moral hazard sanctions (i.e. claimants are deemed to be responsible for their own unemployment, either because they left work voluntarily or because they were sacked for misconduct). There is also a high prevalence of administrative sanctions, imposed for 'infractions' such as failure to provide necessary paperwork (see Chapter 2).

There are also wider questions about the effectiveness of sanctions compared with rewards (sticks versus carrots). The psychological literature (a summary of which is included in Appendix 3) strongly suggests that rewards produce better longer-term behavioural outcomes than negative punishments – this includes higher levels of take-up and improved attitudes to work. Evidence on outcomes suggests that although some claimants are motivated to comply or participate as a result of sanctions, this has a positive effect on motivation and behaviour in only a minority of cases (see Chapter 4).

The evidence of what works when attempting to promote and reinforce desired behaviour, as an alternative to benefit sanctions, is very limited indeed apart from the use of positive financial incentives, which are based on rewarding work of a particular type and duration. A Job Preparation Premium was part of one trial in the Pathways to Work programme, but no separate impact study was conducted; however, qualitative research with receipts indicated modest positive outcomes (Nice *et al.*, 2008). Of course, the move to positive reward-based incentives as an alternative to sanctions alters the polarity in potential selection effects – with the ability of the most job-ready and educated to capture them, a real problem for the design and implementation of such an approach. How could rewards be targeted towards those who are currently at risk of sanctions and what difference would such an approach make? These are questions that future research needs to address.

## 7 Conclusion and recommendations

This review was commissioned to explore the evidence base for benefit sanctions and to critically assess their justifications. The latter is the more difficult task because the mismatch between evidence and policy justifications (particularly those cosseted in moral philosophy) is stark. These justifications are often presented as certainty, but the evidence base is very mixed – with significant evidence gaps around longer-term impacts (on earnings for example) and a comparatively large body of evidence on more narrowly defined short-term entitlement effects such as exits from unemployment. The presence of strong selection effects and administrative inconsistency all contribute to reservations about the broader effectiveness (and therefore true justifiability) of sanction-based systems (Bryner and Martin, 2005).

Thus this report brings into focus the gulf between the rhetoric of welfare reform and the evidence of the effects of sanctions. The gulf is not just one of evidence; it comes about by also trying to cross a divide in approaches that seek to prevent poverty and promote opportunity in the UK with the reality of the effects of sanction-backed conditional benefits. It is easy to see why the evidence of effects in terms of reduced programme caseloads led to such a strongly fought debate in the US. This debate was, however, dominated by those who were opposed to state social assistance for people who are out of work on any scale. Unemployment assistance in the US (state-based schemes in the main) was retracted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, leaving two-thirds of unemployed people with no system to help them. Lone parents in particular were targeted for reduced provision, and the large evidence base from those reforms has dominated our thinking about the problem – without adequate reflection on the quality and coverage of evidence and without a systematic appreciation of what effects to expect or how to measure them.

The UK, on the other hand, has committed itself to reducing and, ultimately, eliminating child

poverty, as well as to evidence-based policy-making. These policy commitments suggest a different approach to policy on sanctions as an element of ‘welfare reform’, one that better balances evidence of their efficacy and effects alongside more rhetorical approaches based on the moral philosophy of rights and responsibilities.

However, to date there is little indication that this more balanced approach is being achieved; indeed, policy-makers continue to justify the extension of sanctions (and sanction-backed conditionality) on moral philosophy grounds while taking an ambivalent attitude to the evidence. This ambivalence can be identified in policy (green and white) papers, with evidence being marginalised by discussion of principles and what can be expected of claimants in return for benefits.

This is true of both major political parties. Indeed Conservative welfare reform proposals are strikingly (if not openly) similar to those of New Labour, as is the language, being heavily contractualist, for example ‘the payment of unemployment benefit by the state is an entitlement which is earned, not owed. In return for proper support and intervention for those who require it, the taxpayer should expect people to follow through on their side of the bargain’ (Conservative Party, 2009, p. 12). The 2009 Conservative policy paper, *Get Britain Working*, also suggests further extensions of conditionality, backed by sanctions, including a mandatory community work scheme for the long-term unemployed (Conservative Party, 2009). The preceding policy green paper, *Work for Welfare*, highlights the Conservatives’ overt intention to employ conditionality and sanctions to lower caseloads ‘we expect to see an initial, one-off reduction in the number of out of work benefit claimants as a result of the introduction of tougher sanctions<sup>48</sup> and conditions’ (Conservative Party, 2008, p. 40).

Recent proposals for reform have openly discussed the need for a new approach to

sanctions (Gregg, 2008). These proposals are problematic in that they are based on the premise that sanction policies will work because all information on them will be perfect so that universal understanding and compliance are finally optimisable. New forms of sanction that penalise time rather than income will be considered. But this does not address current problems with implementation or with the equivocal impacts we have detailed in this review. The evidence suggests sanctions have relatively little to do with changing behaviour in practice, the majority punishing those who left work for ‘unacceptable’ reasons, or who failed to meet administrative requirements. Few act to remedy ‘bad behaviour’. That means that the future emphasis must be on the deterrent effect of sanctions. However, this is precisely the area where we have the least evidence and what does exist is largely inconclusive on current approaches; there is nothing on which to base the proposed future system. Likewise, given what we know regarding current problems with information and communication (discussed in Chapter 4), it is difficult to envisage a system without these (seemingly inherent) difficulties.

But it is wrong to be dismissive of such proposals because they are an ‘alternative’ to the approach advocated by those pushing for further ratcheting up of sanctions. Perhaps this is where our evidence review can make the more important impact, because the arguments for such radically increased conditionality and sanction severity cannot be reconciled with emerging evidence that sanctions do not operate in people’s best interests in the longer term.

The review leads us to make a number of recommendations:

- 1 To replicate the Arni *et al.* (2009) study in the UK – to test the effect of sanctions on earnings and sustainability of work;
- 2 To put in place better, more wide-ranging cost-benefit studies of conditionality and sanctions that look at displacement and externalities;
- 3 To look more closely at the (potential) spill-over effects of conditionality and sanctions on the grey economy and informal work;
- 4 To ensure longitudinal datasets can capture the changes to conditionality that have already been put in place, for example by ensuring that the next wave of the Millennium Birth Cohort Survey has a module of questions to assess the effects of the new benefit conditions on lone parents according to their youngest child’s age.

**Administrative sanctions:** primarily relate to issues of eligibility and to the claim for benefit such as responding to letters, attending interviews, giving information and other behaviour that is primarily to do with the process of the claim and continued entitlement.

**Compliance costs:** the costs (time, money and psychological) that are imposed by social security regulations and statutory authorities, 'costs which would not be incurred in the absence of [benefit] payments' (Bennett *et al.*, 2009, p. 7).

**Entitlement effects:** impacts arising directly from lower entitlement to benefits produced by sanctions as seen from the perspective of the benefit system (i.e. welfare use and spending). For example, there are lower caseloads if fewer people claim, resulting in savings to the benefit budget.

**Imposition effects:** impacts arising directly from the enforcement of benefit sanctions.

**Moral hazard:** arises when a party (individual or group) behaves less cautiously as a direct result of being insured against a particular risk resulting in the other party having to share the negative consequences of this behaviour, for example failing to guard against job loss, because of the existence of the benefit 'safety-net'.

**Propensity score matching (PSM):** corrects for selection biases when using observational data by pairing individuals in the treatment group with those in the control group on the basis of their propensity score. This is essentially a single number that represents a combination of characteristics (Peck, 2007).

**Reservation wage:** the wage level sought by the jobseeker.

**Threat effects:** impacts arising from the threat of sanctions, either from the issuing of a specific sanction warning or from the presence of sanctions in the benefit system (general threat effects).

**Treatment effects:** impacts arising from the changed behaviour or the changed circumstances of claimants caused by sanctions. They may be short-term effects, such as employment rates, or longer-term effects, such as child outcomes and spill-over effects.

# Notes

- 1 See Job Seeker Compliance Data, December Quarter 2008, <http://www.workplace.gov.au/workplace/Publications/ResearchStats/Participation+and+compliance+data/> (accessed November 2009).
- 2 In some cases policy-makers may want to fudge the difference between entitlement effects and treatment effects because it is convenient to do so (e.g. the assumption that all welfare exits are to employment). But it is a crucial distinction.
- 3 The costs (time, money and psychological) that are imposed by social security regulations and statutory authorities, 'costs which would not be incurred in the absence of [benefit] payments' (Bennett *et al.*, 2009, p. 7).
- 4 Another common diversion technique is to offer prospective claimants a financial incentive (i.e. a lump-sum payment) not to pursue their claim. Acceptance of the incentive results in a fixed period of benefit disqualification (Blank and Schmidt, 2001).
- 5 Previously known as food stamps.
- 6 Retired or unable to work as a result of illness or caring responsibilities.
- 7 GB data from DWP Tabulation Tool, Australian data from Job Seeker Compliance Data – December Quarter 2008 – see note 1.
- 8 Research evidence has shown that unemployment benefits impact negatively on the intensity of job search and raise the reservation wage (Burgess and Garrett, 2005).
- 9 An innovative quasi-experimental study by McVicar demonstrates the importance of monitoring search activity: suspension of monitoring led to lower exit rates from registered unemployment, increased claim duration and lower rates of job entry for unemployed men (see McVicar, 2008).
- 10 Or more specifically the exit rate from unemployment benefits (individuals may remain unemployed, but unregistered).
- 11 Card *et al.* (2007) have recently shown the crucial importance of understanding exit destinations and the difference between being observed to exit a programme and entering a desired destination.
- 12 Lalive *et al.* (2002) found sanction warnings to increase the 'job-finding' rate by 25 per cent, with an additional 20 per cent increase as a result of subsequent imposed sanctions.
- 13 'Federal law requires states to impose at least a pro rata (partial) benefit reduction on families that do not satisfy work and child support compliance requirements. The sanction must remain in place until the family complies with the requirement' (Blank and Haskins, 2001, p. 246).
- 14 For example, in the Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN programme a sanction 'entailed dropping the recipient (but not the recipient's children) from the grant' (Freedman *et al.*, 2000, p. ES-9). Part of Delaware's A Better Chance (ABC) sanction policy involves dropping a dependent teen's portion of the grant when they do not meet school attendance requirements, or if out of school, work and training requirements (Fein and Lee, 1999).
- 15 'In states that impose only a partial sanction, this methodology provides a meaningful measure of the prevalence of sanctions. However, for states that impose immediate or gradual full-family sanctions, it does not' (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003, p. 9). The under-recording of full-family sanctions occurred because these were only counted during the first month they were imposed, and not on an ongoing basis – therefore missing their cumulative effect.

- 16 Figures only apply to those claimants who are subject to a work requirement (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).
- 17 Only marginally statistically significant ( $p < .10$ )
- 18 It is important to note that the US term 'single parent' is primarily concerned with marital status and not co-residence as in the UK sense of 'lone parent'. Many US single parents have co-resident and/or involved partners.
- 19 Studies looking at the effect of reform on take-up have demonstrated that around half the overall decline in caseloads occurred as a result of reform 'entry-effects' (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 59).
- 20 Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support.
- 21 'A welfare exit was defined as a welfare recipient not receiving cash benefits for two consecutive months, and participants were defined as working if they had earnings of more than \$300 per quarter (an average of \$100 per month) reported in the UI wage records. Having a lower-earnings job was defined as monthly earnings between \$100 and \$1200, a level close to the 2003 poverty line for an adult with two children (\$14,824 annually). Having a higher earnings job was defined as monthly earnings over \$1200' (Wu, 2008, p. 32).
- 22 In her study Peck (2007) breaks down the household incomes of claimant subgroups into assistance and earnings.
- 23 It is unclear from the presentation of results how much of the impact lies in the administration of sanctions in the states under investigation; we know from other sources that in some states sanctioned claimants are removed from 'active' administrative databases using a particular closure code, while in others they remain on the rolls. Also, 'it is important to note that the prominence of above-average pre-reform caseload declines in the areas where these evaluations took place may have resulted in an overstatement of sanctions effects' (Grogger and Karoly, 2005, p. 132).
- 24 Results from Wu (2008) are not included in the graph due to significant differences in terms of both the classifications of sanction severity and the unit of impact measurement used.
- 25 Moderate sanctions do have a significant association with one type of exit – that is they reduce the likelihood that claimants will leave welfare for a higher earning job (defined as one that pays enough to lift the family above the poverty line), odds ratio = 0.60 (Wu, 2008, p. 38).
- 26 Lee *et al.* (2004) define informal work as employment activities likely to be missing from UI records, for example babysitting, performing odd jobs, housekeeping and selling crafts (p. 379).
- 27 More than \$1200 a month.
- 28 Between \$100 and \$1200 a month.
- 29 Hardship data is self-reported.
- 30 'This analysis included four categories based on the time since the first spell of sanctions ended: 1–3 months, 4–6 months, 7–12 months, and over one year' (Wu, 2008, p. 37).
- 31 This reflects the results of Fein and Lee's (1999) study which found that 'the effect of sanctions on welfare exit increased exponentially with each additional month the sanctions continued' (p. iv).
- 32 Some 18 per cent of participants in Peters and Joyce's 2006 study had little or no understanding of the rules associated with claiming JSA; 32% reported that they had not been told anything about the possibility of sanctions (see also Legard *et al.*, 1998).

- 33 Some 6 per cent of claimants did not know why they had been sanctioned and 18 per cent gave reasons that were not in the list of sanctionable breaches (Peters and Joyce, 2006, p. 3).
- 34 'Respondents were presented with realistic rule-violation vignettes in which key client characteristics were randomly assigned' (Schram *et al.*, 2009, p. 399). Each vignette included a 'claimant name'; this was white, black or Hispanic sounding. Case managers were then asked whether they would impose a sanction.
- 35 'Holding cross-county differences in individual- and family-level characteristics constant, county of residence remained clearly associated with large differences in the likelihood that an adult was sanctioned. In comparison to recipients in San Diego, adults in the other three counties were between 8% and 15% less likely to have been sanctioned' (Ong and Houston, 2005, p. 5).
- 36 Defined as: a large number of interviews per claimant, a short period of time between first and second gateway interviews and a large number of referrals to adjudication (Bonjour *et al.*, 2001).
- 37 The study by Bonjour *et al.* (2001) does include a multivariate analysis of sanctions (using bivariate logistic regression), which controls for 'the impact of other relevant factors' (p. 112).
- 38 Other studies (see Born *et al.*, 1999, for example) suggest that white women are more likely to be sanctioned; this may of course reflect the local context with regional political differences playing a role (Schram *et al.*, 2008). There may also be differences in likelihood over time. Schram *et al.* (2008) found that during the first few months of the benefit spell white clients were more likely to be sanctioned, but that as the spell expanded, black claimants faced a significantly higher likelihood. Additionally the visibility of minority groups in the community may also be significant, with smaller disparities found in areas with a large minority presence.
- 39 Age at childbearing also appears to be a significant factor (although just one study, Born *et al.* [1999] looks specifically at this issue), with 53 per cent of sanctioned claimants having become a mother aged 20 or younger, compared to 45 per cent of non-sanctioned mothers (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).
- 40 'Edelhoich *et al.* (2000) found that sanctioned clients are twice as likely to have received cash assistance for 60 months or longer' (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003).
- 41 The proportion of claimants with access to a car was considerably lower among sanctioned than non-sanctioned claimants (19% compared with 35%) (Cherlin *et al.*, 2001 in Pavetti *et al.*, 2003, p. 14).
- 42 Studies exploring the effect of sanctions on this pivotal relationship conducted shortly after the introduction of the caseworker model indicate an erosion of trust following a sanction referral.
- 43 'Sanctioned adults are less likely (31.1%) than non-sanctioned adults (56.1%) to work in the quarter in which their welfare cases closed and, among those who did work during this period, mean quarterly earnings are significantly lower among those who were sanctioned (\$1,741.57) than among those who were not (\$2,344.41)' (Born *et al.*, 1999, p. iii).
- 44 Hardship activities include: '(1) pawning or selling personal possessions, (2) taking food or items from stores without paying for them, (3) searching in trash cans or begging, (4) engaging in any illegal activity, and (5) selling or trading food stamps' (Pavetti *et al.*, 2003, p. Notes).
- 45 An evaluation of housing benefit sanctions for anti-social behaviour is currently underway by Professor John Flint for the Department of Work and Pensions.
- 46 This is generally considered to be the largest CCT programme. 'In 2008, it covered around 11.35 million families (estimated to number

47 million people), corresponding to about one quarter of Brazil's population' (ILO, 2009b, p. 42).

47 The net replacement rate for a single person on benefit previously earning the average wage in their first month of unemployment. This compares to 69 per cent in the Netherlands (source: the OECD tax benefit calculator).

48 The document contains a proposal to introduce a three-month sanction for the second infraction increasing to up to three years for the third (Conservative Party, 2008, p. 52).

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# Appendix I: The systematic review

A systematic search using a carefully devised search combination was conducted of the following bibliographic databases:

- ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts
- CSA Illumina
- International Bibliography of Social Sciences
- PAIS International
- PolicyFile
- Social Services Abstracts
- Sociological Abstracts
- Web of Knowledge
- Web of Science (includes Social Science Citation Index/Science Citation Index Expanded/Arts & Humanities Citation Index/Conference Proceedings Citation Index-Science)
- Worldwide Political Science Abstracts

Each database was searched individually with the following limits:

Time period – 1986–2009  
Language – English only

Using a modified search technique (necessitated by individual search engines), a systematic search was conducted on the following databases:

- Cochrane
- Campbell

- Google Scholar
- Social Science Research Network e-library
- Social Policy Digest
- Source OECD
- Department for Work and Pensions (this involved ‘hand’ searching DWP electronic publications lists and requesting selected reports from the DWP archives).

The total number of citation hits resulting from the search was 3728. Following an initial ‘filtering’ of results 1157 of these citations (with abstracts) were downloaded into Endnote; 216 duplicates were deleted, leaving 941 citations to check for relevancy against predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The following bounds were set for the scope of studies included in the review:

- Published since 1986;
- Available in English;
- Concerned with sanctions operating as part of conditional benefit systems.

In addition policy evaluations and experiments were only selected for inclusion if they satisfied the following criteria:

- 1 Measure impacts, (cost-) effectiveness or outcomes.
- 2 Include a comprehensive and examinable methodology.

Experimental, quasi-experimental and econometric observational studies were prioritised as true ‘impact’ studies. While other less robust evidence, including complementary qualitative research meeting inclusion criteria, was saved and stored separately. This evidence proved particularly important when considering unintended (negative) outcomes for claimants.

Although the inclusion criteria guaranteed some degree of quality, additional checks were made to ensure the robustness of impact results. Each impact evaluation's methodology was checked for comprehensiveness.

Evaluations were excluded from the review if they:

- a) fell outside the scope of the study;
- b) offered insufficient methodological detail;
- c) incorrectly used statistical techniques;
- d) satisfied all inclusion criteria but were not publicly available by August 2009.

Because our search contained no restrictions on the basis of outcome measure, it was designed to identify evaluations considering any outcome: expected, unexpected, positive or negative.

We excluded 871 articles after reviewing the full text description of the study; researchers were contacted for clarification as needed. Some 70 of the remaining studies were short-listed for inclusion as impact studies; these were reviewed and discussed by two researchers in order to assess their suitability for inclusion.

Formal literature search techniques were supplemented with personal contacts, cross-referencing and hand searching. Hand searches were conducted for relevant government publications produced between 1986 and 1997 (and therefore not easily available online) in the Bodleian and LSE libraries.

Note on limitations: although fully systematic in its approach this review was limited by a number of factors arising from its very tight time restrictions; for example, it was not possible to register the title with Campbell, to have the protocol peer-reviewed or to have two members of staff review all search results. However, thorough searches and a two-researcher revision of the document short-list ensured that the review was not compromised by these restrictions.

# Appendix 2: Impact result tables

Table 4. Impacts of sanctions on unemployment benefits

Study	Country	Programme	Data and method	Types of impact	Levels of impact
Abbring <i>et al.</i> , 2005	Netherlands	UI	Inflow sample of UI admin data	Imposition effects only Unemployment duration Job entry	36%–98% increased job entry for four industrial sample groups
Arni <i>et al.</i> , 2009	Switzerland	UI	Swiss register data – multivariate mixed proportional hazard model	Threat and imposition effects (warnings and enforcement) First and second order Unemployment durations, post-unemployment employment stability, exits from the labour market and earnings	Both sanction warnings and impositions increased the unemployment exit and employment entry rates. Sanction warnings had no impact on post-unemployment, employment stability, but reduced earnings. Imposed sanctions had an unfavourable impact on post-unemployment, employment stability and on earnings. The net impact of sanctions on post-unemployment income was unfavourable – ‘over a period of two years after leaving unemployment workers who got a benefit sanction imposed face a net income loss equivalent to 30 days of full pay’ (p. 1).
Jensen <i>et al.</i> , 2003	Denmark	Uninsured young people UI	Youth Unemployment Programme data	Imposition effects only Entry into work, education and ALMP	There is evidence of a sanction effect after month 9 – a notable increase in the baseline hazard for the treatment group (see p. 312).
Hofmann, 2008	(West) Germany	UI	Inflow sample for financial year 2001–2; 18–55-year-olds Matching approach, with a difference-in-difference robustness check	Imposition effects only Re-employment probability In employment, other employment or out of the labour force	‘For both women and men a sanction during stratum one or two raises the number of months of “regular employment” during the twelve month period after the stratum considered (women: 0.66, 0.85, men: 0.60, 0.80)’ (p. 20). Results show a significant effect on other employment for women sanctioned during stratum two (0.6) and a negative effect for men sanctioned during stratum one significant at a 10%-level (-0.11, -0.15). Men sanctioned in stratum two or three are more likely to be out of the labour force.

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Machin and Marie, 2004	UK	UI and UA (JSA)	Quasi-experimental – induced by the introduction of JSA	Imposition effects only Spill-over, crime rates	‘Benefit sanctions in JSA shifted people off the benefits system and raised crime’ (p. 16). Results indicate that benefit sanctions may have a social cost to society resulting from higher crime.
Müller and Steiner, 2008	Germany	UI and UA	2001–2 unemployment admin data followed for 48 months	Imposition effects only Unemployment duration Exits to employment and education	Re-employment rates rise significantly following the imposition of a sanction. Dropping following the completion of the sanction, but not back to pre-sanction levels. Effects diminish the later sanctions come in the spell of unemployment. If imposed after 15 months or later they have no effect on re-employment probability. Analysis over the longer term suggests that claimants sanctioned within three months of the claim maintained a higher re-employment probability than their control group for as much as 24 months. <i>Conclusion:</i> (Limited use of) sanctions can prove an effective tool in activation programmes if imposed in the early stages of a claimant’s unemployment spell.
Lalive et al., 2002	Switzerland	UI	UI – inflow sample over 6 months – observed for 14 months thereafter. Data includes sanction warnings.	Threat and imposition effects	A sanction warning increases the job finding rate by 25%, with an additional 19.8% increase on the imposition of a sanction. The effect of a sanction warning decreases by 16% after 30 days but effects of imposed sanctions do not significantly drop over time. <i>Conclusion:</i> Increasing the strictness of the sanction policy by one standard deviation will reduce the duration of unemployment by about one week.
Røed and Westlie, 2007	Norway	UI	Merged administrative register data. All new unemployment spells, 1993–2001	Imposition effects Unemployment duration Transition rates into employment, other benefits, ALMPs and education	‘A sanction causes an immediate rise in the job hazard of 80%, a rise in the ALMP hazard of 22%, and a rise in the education hazard as large as 200%’ (p. 35). Only the benefit shift falls – reduced during an imposed sanction by 34%. Effects appear to be short-lived.

Schneider, 2008	Germany	UB	Survey data – winter 2005/6 UB recipients and UA recipients – randomly selected from admin records. Survey response from gross sample – 73%, but effective response was lower – only 39% of gross sample responded with 46% refusals. Effective bias in survey towards better qualified, native Germans (East Germans especially), women and large households. 'Overall an overrepresentation of persons with relatively high social integration and chances of employment' (p. 18).	Imposition effects only Effect of sanctions on reservation wages	<i>Conclusion:</i> 'If benefit sanctions increase exit rates out of benefit receipt they might do it because they stimulate effective job search, and not because they reduce reservation wages. Since reservation wages are at the utter bottom of the wage distribution' (p. 44).
Svarer, 2007	Denmark	UI	Administrative data – insured unemployed sample aged over 25	Threat and imposition effects Exit rate from unemployment	Results show a causal increase of 50% in job-finding rates – this effect increases with severity of sanctions, but decreases over time. There are heterogeneous effects by gender – men showed significant evidence of <i>ex ante</i> effects. On imposition exit rates increased by 98% for women and by 55% for men. More severe sanctions are linked to higher exit rates. Effects are short-lived (no longer significant three months following imposition).
Van den Berg <i>et al.</i> , 2004	Rotterdam, Netherlands	UI	Micro-duration data – database consists of all individuals who started collecting welfare benefits in 1994 in Rotterdam. Observation period ended October 1996.	Imposition effects only Exit destination ('usually employment') Leaving the municipality Getting married Exiting for unknown reasons	Exits increase by 140% after the sanction was imposed. This effect persisted beyond the sanction period. Harsher sanctions did not result in stronger effects. <i>Conclusion:</i> 'The imposition of sanctions substantially increases the individual transition rate from welfare to work' (p. 211).

Table 5. Impacts of sanctions in US welfare studies

Source	Locality	Programme/ target group	Data, method, time period	Types of impact	Levels of Impact
Grogger and Karoly, 2005	US – multiple	All welfare recipients – TANF or predecessor data	All observational – administrative/survey data, econometric	Imposition effects only, all welfare use/caseload decline	–
Council of Economic Advisors, 1997		Annual state-level admin data	1976–96		Sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/ caseload by 9.7% (statistically significant)
Council of Economic Advisors, 1999		Annual state-level admin data	1976–98		Lenient sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/ caseload by 9.7% (statistically significant); eventual full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 18.1% (statistically significant); and immediate full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 39.4% (statistically significant)
Moffitt, 1999		Annual state-level admin data	1977–95		Sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/caseload by 2% (not significant)
Ziliak <i>et al.</i> , 2000		Monthly state-level admin data	1987–96		Sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/ caseload by a negligible amount (not significant)
Rector and Youssef, 1999		State-level admin data (changes)	1997–98		Lenient sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/ caseload by 11.3% (not significant); eventual full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 13.7% (statistically significant); and immediate full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 24.8% (statistically significant)
MaCurdy <i>et al.</i> , 2002		State-level admin data (changes)	1996–99		Eventual full-family sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/ caseload by 9.1% (not significant); and immediate full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 19.6% (statistically significant)
Mead, 2001		State-level admin data (changes)	1994–98		Eventual full-family sanctions for non-compliance reduced welfare use/caseload by 9.9% and immediate full-family sanctions reduced welfare use/caseload by 15.9% (both statistically significant)

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Lee et al., 2004	US – Illinois	TANF recipients – 1998 (current and former)	Observational – longitudinal administrative and survey data 1999–2001 Full set of control variables	Threat and imposition effects Outcomes considered: – welfare exits; – entry to formal work; – informal work; – participation in job training activities; – earnings; – hardship.	<p><i>Exits:</i> There is no evidence that sanctions or threat of sanctions (initiated but lifted prior to grant loss) are associated with lower reliance on welfare.</p> <p><i>Employment:</i> The sanctioned are less likely to work in the formal sector than the non-sanctioned; but are more likely to be involved in informal work or participating in other work activities (such as job training). Sanctions reduce the likelihood of being employed by 44% (statistically significant) (after controlling for confounding variables). Sanction threats have no significant relationship with formal employment outcomes.</p> <p><i>Earnings:</i> Sanctioned claimants have lower earnings than the non-sanctioned.</p> <p>The threat of sanctions had no significant impact on earnings. Sanctioned claimants earned significantly less than the non-sanctioned – on average \$1320 in the last two quarters of the study.</p> <p>'Sanctions are negatively associated with formal employment and earnings and positively associated with informal work [and] job training activities' (p. 394).</p> <p><i>Hardship:</i> Sanctioned claimants are more likely to experience food hardship (three times higher) and overall hardship than non-sanctioned (self-reported).</p> <p>The threat of sanctions is associated with greater risk of rent hardship.</p> <p><i>Conclusion:</i> Although sanctions and threat of sanctions may induce a behavioural change – i.e. more informal work and work-related activities – these occur outside the formal sector. <i>Questions</i> have been raised around the validity of causality.</p>
Peck, 2007	US – multiple	Welfare recipients – participants in the NEWWS programme	Experimental data from the NEWWS evaluation Propensity score matching	Uses PSM to compare treatment impacts for sanction-risk subgroups. Outcomes considered: employment and income (broken down into earnings and assistance) five-year follow-up.	<p><i>Earnings:</i> Those with higher sanction propensities had 'markedly higher earnings in Years 1 through 3 compared with their control group counterparts' (p. 268). Earnings impacts for the high sanction risk group were sustained, for the low risk group effects were positive and significant in year one only.</p> <p><i>Employment:</i> The high propensity treatment group showed significantly higher employment rates than its control over all five years although the gap declines in years four and five. The low propensity group also showed initial employment gains in year one, but these were not sustained – the treatment group had overtaken by year five.</p> <p><i>Income:</i> Net impacts on income were essentially zero whatever the propensity to be sanctioned.</p> <p><i>Conclusion:</i> Overall it appears that those with a higher propensity to be sanctioned are more likely to show sustained favourable impacts on employment and earnings (although the effect on income is negligible). <i>Questions</i> have been raised around the validity of causality</p>

Continued from p. 70

<p>Wu, 2008</p>	<p>US – Wisconsin</p>	<p>TANF recipients – sanctioned and non-sanctioned</p>	<p>Observational – administrative dataset (13,171 participants) 1997–2003 Event history analysis Full set of control variables</p>	<p>Imposition effects only Considered welfare exits: – exits without work to go to; – exits to 'lower paid jobs'; – exits to 'higher paid jobs'.</p>	<p><i>Welfare use/exits:</i> Families with small sanction reductions (&lt;10%) were significantly less likely to leave welfare than non-sanctioned families. Full sanctions or an increase in duration increase the likelihood of leaving welfare. <i>Employment/earnings:</i> Sanctions (current) were associated with increased likelihood of leaving welfare without work (18% higher) and a lower likelihood entering a higher earnings job. The probably of leaving welfare without work within the first year was significantly higher for those with a current sanction (40%) than those without (34%). Previous sanction experience was significantly associated with an increased probability of leaving welfare without a job or with a low-earnings job, suggesting sanctions have lagged effects. The risk of leaving welfare without a job or to a lower-earnings job increased with the severity and duration of the sanctions. The likelihood of leaving to a lower-paying job was nearly 50% higher for those who received full sanctions than the non-sanctioned. Families with large sanctions (51%–90%) were around 23% more likely to exit without a job (than non-sanctioned) and those with full sanctions (&gt;90%) were twice as likely to leave without employment. <i>Questions</i> have been raised around the validity of causality.</p>
<p>Grogger and Karoly, 2005  Paxson and Waldfogel, 2003</p>	<p>US – all states except Maryland and the District of Columbia</p>	<p>Children in the state protection/foster care system</p>	<p>Observational administrative data (difference-in-difference) 1990–8</p>	<p>Imposition effects only Child well-being/maltreatment/out-of-home care</p>	<p><i>Child maltreatment:</i> Statistically significant coefficients indicate that full-family sanctions raise reports of physical abuse, of neglect and substantiated cases of abuse. <i>Limitations</i> re: reliability and generalisability.</p>

## Appendix 3: Evidence from social-psychological literature

Throughout the twentieth century a number of theories have attempted to provide a theoretical framework within which behaviour, motivation and the role of incentives can be properly understood. Within behavioural science incentives fall into the class of *positive reinforcers* where the shape of behaviour is determined by the promise of some positively viewed good such as money (a reward) (Ferster *et al.*, 1975). Positive reinforcement co-exists alongside *negative reinforcement* through which a desired behaviour is affected through the removal of a good. In both instances the goal is the limitation or elimination of undesirable behaviour. Incentives can promote positive reinforcement by rewarding desirable behaviour as well as extinguishing negative alternative behaviours. Negative reinforcement operates by severing the perceived link between behaviour and the outcomes it has been associated with (Gambrill, 1977). However, while negative reinforcement, via punishment, is often viewed as advantageous by policy-makers, its more immediate effects can mask the longer-term benefits of incentives since it can often take longer for positive behaviour to emerge (Bandura, 1977). A review of nine relevant systematic reviews available through the Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials found that incentives can be a powerful tool in prompting the take-up of interventions, but that they have mixed success in persuading participants to remain engaged throughout a programme's treatment cycle (Volmink and Garner, 2000).

Since 2006 the use of incentives (rewards) in promoting long-term employment outcomes has been of increasing interest in the UK. Evaluations of quasi-experimental programmes designed to test incentives on young adults' engagement in activities leading to employment showed some improvements across a range of measures, including 'positive attitudes towards employment'; and take-up of 'personal development activities' (Tanner *et al.*, 2009). While limited numbers

of controlled trials exist which have tested incentives, evidence from systematic reviews indicate a positive role in helping vulnerable groups with impaired or distorted decision-making abilities. This is of interest within a wider context of working with vulnerable groups or those difficult to engage such as young people with mental health difficulties. Work on the use of mentoring as a tool to improve social and educational outcomes suggests that there are advantages to using positive reinforcement as a way of incentivising young people to engage more constructively with their peers (Wood, 2009).

Additional evidence across a wide range of intervention studies in other research areas suggests that incentives can have a meaningful role for those engaged in programmes where these are of a time-limited nature. This is the case with smoking-cessation interventions during pregnancy where a return to postpartum smoking falls outside the trials' scope (Cahill and Perera, 2008; Lumley *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, while some studies find evidence that incentives are more effective as part of a comprehensive package of support (Knapp Werner *et al.*, 2007), this finding is tempered by the possibility of confounding variables as other 'components' of a study design potentially contribute to positive outcomes (Lagarde *et al.*, 2009).

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Department  
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# The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Final evaluation report

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# Summary

Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than procedural targets. To achieve this there has been a move away from nationally mandated processes towards flexibility at the local level, with Jobcentre Plus staff being given the flexibility to provide tailored support which will best move claimants towards and into paid work.

This mixed-method research study considered the implementation and delivery of the Jobcentre Plus Offer, as well as the effect of the Offer on staff and claimants. The evaluation covered a two-year period, following the introduction of the Offer in April 2011.

The research consisted of:

- interviews with all District Managers, at the start of the evaluation, to provide contextual information for the research;
- detailed case studies in six Jobcentre Plus district areas, involving site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants, in both year one and year two of the evaluation;
- a survey of new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants, who were first interviewed in the early stages of their claim (once they had taken part in a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) or New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI)) and, then again, as they off-flowed from the Offer either into work, onto the Work Programme or another destination (or around the 12-month point if they were still on the Offer) to consider claimants' experiences of the Offer and the support they received;
- a 'boost' survey of a number of groups of claimants (those with a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency, who were homeless and lone parents on Income Support with a youngest child aged 3 or 4) to examine their experiences of the Offer in more detail.

This is the final evaluation report. A report on findings from the first year of the evaluation was published in November 2012: (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-jobcentre-plus-offer-findings-from-the-first-year-of-the-evaluation-rr814>).

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# Glossary and abbreviations

<b>Assistant Adviser (AA)</b>	Supports claimants in finding work through job search reviews and taking forward the decisions agreed between the participants and their Personal Adviser.
<b>Advisory Services Manager (ASM)</b>	Jobcentre Plus manager responsible for overseeing the work of all Personal Advisers and Customer Engagement Team Leaders.
<b>Advisor Team Managers (ATMs)</b>	Jobcentre Plus manager with responsibility over the advisory team within individual Jobcentre Plus offices.
<b>AWRT</b>	Access to Work-Related Training
<b>Customer Assessment Tool (CAT)</b>	A profiling tool used during advisory interviews to record the evidence about key attributes (such as skills) found to give customers the best chance of finding work.
<b>CRB</b>	Criminal Records Bureau
<b>CSCS</b>	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
<b>Customer Service Operations Manager (CSOM)</b>	Jobcentre Plus manager responsible for monitoring one or more offices within a Jobcentre Plus District.
<b>Contract Package Areas (CPA)</b>	Geographical territory within which a provider delivers contracted employment provision.
<b>CV</b>	Curriculum Vitae
<b>DAS</b>	Developing our Advisory Services
<b>Disability Employment Advisers (DEA)</b>	Specialist advisers responsible for providing support to customers who may need additional help in finding and retaining work and supporting development due to their disability or health condition.
<b>Disadvantaged claimants</b>	For the purposes of the Jobcentre Plus Offer, main survey claimants were categorised as ‘disadvantaged’ if they had a long-term health problem or disability, if they were carers, ex-offenders or homeless, if they revealed a drug or alcohol dependency, or they were formerly in the armed forces.
<b>DM</b>	District Manager
<b>Decision Making and Appeals (DMA)</b>	Decisions on whether to sanction benefit are made through this process.

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<b>District Provision Tool (DPT)</b>	Menu of local information on providers and the sorts of provision available in the area. The information is tailored by each Jobcentre Plus District in order to meet local needs and is available to all Jobcentre Plus offices to help advisers refer claimants directly to the most appropriate provider.
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>Enhanced Joint Working (EJW)</b>	Scheme introduced in 2009 to areas not operating Integrated Employment and Skills trials to facilitate the number of Jobcentre Plus customers being referred to careers advice and skills provision. EJW is comprised of skills screening; referral and signposting to skills services; and building on existing links to strengthen joint working between employment and skills services.
<b>ESA</b>	Employment and Support Allowance
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>Flexible Support Fund (FSF)</b>	Introduced in April 2011 to support the flexible delivery of the Jobcentre Plus Offer. It is a fund of previously targeted budgets amalgamated into one to support the need of the individual and the local labour market as determined appropriate by Jobcentre Plus.
<b>Freedom and Flexibilities</b>	An approach that encourages innovation and supports the most effective way to design and deliver Jobcentre Plus services that meet local labour markets and help more people into work. An operational framework is in place within which Freedoms and Flexibilities operates, providing guidance to districts in using Freedoms and Flexibilities.
<b>GBW</b>	Get Britain Working (measures)
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>Incapacity Benefit (IB)</b>	Benefit paid to people under State Pension age who cannot work because of an illness or disability. IB was replaced by ESA in October 2008, and since then no new claims for IB have been accepted. People on IB are currently being reassessed to see if they are fit for work or eligible for ESA.
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communications technology
<b>IES</b>	Integrated Employment and Skills

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<b>Income Support (IS)</b>	Benefit paid to people on a low income who are working less than 16 hours a week, in a defined client group, consisting of mainly lone parents, people on parental leave, or carers and certain sick or disabled people. Since October 2008, ESA has replaced IS paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claimants.
<b>Jobsearch Reviews</b>	Jobsearch reviews must take place face to face at least once every two weeks for the duration of JSA claim. They ensure that the conditions of benefit are still being met by the claimant and that the claimant is doing everything expected of them to move into work.
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg)</b>	Document signed by new JSA claimants in their New Jobseeker's Interview which records the steps they have agreed to take to search for work and the types of work they will look for.
<b>Lone Parent Obligations (LPO)</b>	Introduced in November 2008. Since then, based on the age of their youngest child, lone parents have lost entitlement to Income Support solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. From May 2012, the age of the youngest child was lowered to five and over. Lone parents who are no longer eligible for IS are able to claim another benefit such as JSA, or ESA if their ability to work is limited by a health condition.
<b>Long Standing Illness (LSI)</b>	Physical or mental health conditions or illnesses expected to last for 12 months or more.
<b>Low Value Provision (LVP)</b>	Intended to provide opportunities for occupationally relevant training that will help job-ready or close to job-ready customers into work, where no other suitable DWP contracted or non-contracted training is available.
<b>More Frequent Attendance (MFA)</b>	Interviews introduced when the customer's Personal Adviser (PA) feels that either the job seeker is not making sufficient effort to find employment or there are suspicions that the JSA claimant could be committing benefit fraud. MFA requires the customer to be interviewed more frequently than the standard fortnight, and interviews can be called at short notice.
<b>Mandatory Work Activity (MWA)</b>	Scheme launched in May 2011 to support Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who need extra help to develop the disciplines and behaviours associated with employment. This involves a mandatory four week work placement of 30 hours per week with a not-for-profit organisation.
<b>MI</b>	Management Information

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<b>New Jobseeker Interview (NJI)</b>	Interview undertaken by new JSA claimants with an adviser to discuss and agree realistic and achievable job goals and job search activities that will offer the best chance of finding work.
<b>New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI)</b>	Interview undertaken by new ESA claimants to help the adviser determine the claimant's ability to find work and discuss the support they need to move closer to work.
<b>Personal Adviser (PA)</b>	Based in Jobcentre Plus offices and offer advice and support to job seekers. They are the primary point of contact for job seekers and assess the individual customer's needs and requirements.
<b>Performance Management Framework (PMF)</b>	Framework launched in April 2011 in Jobcentre Plus to assess performance by outcome. This replaces the previous targets structure used by Jobcentre Plus and complements the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus Offer.
<b>Performance Team Leader (PTL)</b>	Responsible for monitoring performance across a team within individual Jobcentre Plus offices and ensuring levels meet DWP's targets.
<b>Sanctions</b>	A sanction involves a reduction or loss of benefit for failing to fulfil the responsibilities expected of a claimant. There are three levels of sanction: higher level, intermediate level and lower level; and the period of a sanction can range from four to 156 weeks.
<b>SDA</b>	Severe Disablement Allowance
<b>Work Capability Assessment (WCA)</b>	Questionnaire and health assessment introduced in October 2008 to assist in assessing entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance.
<b>Work Focused Interview (WFI)</b>	Regular interviews with advisers undertaken by Income Support claimants and ESA claimants in the Work-Related Activity Group.
<b>Work Programme (WP)</b>	Welfare-to-work programme for the long-term unemployed launched in June 2011 and delivered by a range of public, private and voluntary sector organisations contracted by DWP.
<b>Work Programme Referral Interview (WPRI)</b>	Interview conducted at Jobcentre Plus offices with the intention of assessing the potential for transferring the claimant to the Work Programme.

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<b>Work Related Activity (WRA)</b>	Targeted at ESA claimants in the WRAG. WRA can be a single or several defined activities that enable the claimant to move into work, remain in work or move closer to the labour market. It involves work preparation activities that give the claimant the best possible prospects of moving into work when they are able.
<b>Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)</b>	Category of ESA claimants who have been assessed as having limited capability for work and require support to prepare for work in the future.
<b>Work Together</b>	A nationwide initiative to encourage all unemployed people to consider volunteering as a way of improving their employment prospects while they are looking for work.

# Executive summary

## Introduction

Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than procedural targets. To achieve this there was a move away from nationally mandated processes towards flexibility at the local level, with Jobcentre Plus staff given the flexibility to provide tailored support which will best move claimants towards paid work.

The Jobcentre Plus Offer has been evaluated over a two-year period to find out how it was implemented and delivered, as well as the effect it has had on staff and claimants. The evaluation involved two main strands. The first was a longitudinal survey of new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants (in the 12-month Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)), initially interviewed shortly after starting the Offer (following a New Jobseeker's Interview (NJI) or a New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI)) and then again as they off-flowed into employment, the Work Programme or another destination. In addition to this, separate cross-sectional surveys were conducted with claimants in a number of 'disadvantaged' groups (those with a criminal record, drug and/or alcohol problems and the homeless) and lone parents on Income Support (IS) with a youngest child aged three or four, to examine their experiences in detail.

The second strand involved case studies in six Jobcentre Plus districts with ethnographic site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants. These case studies aimed to assess how far flexibility had been devolved; how delivery was working on the ground; and how support was flowing for claimants, including how specific elements of the offer were working and being used – core interventions, advisers' flexibility, flexible menu of support.

## Organisational perspective

As the Offer embedded over time, ongoing changes and developments to working practices highlighted that flexibility had been embraced across the case study offices. Variations in how the Offer was being delivered within and between districts were identified in the first year, and these continued to evolve over the second year. In particular, it was clear that senior managers were making the most of the increased flexibility to experiment with different ways of structuring support that provided the best outcomes. This resulted in different delivery models, comprising a range of approaches that were either more or less structured for frontline staff. Over time, there appeared to be a slight shift in favour of more structured approaches within offices, underpinned by a stronger emphasis on monitoring claimant progress across the journey and focusing support at key off-flow milestones.

Alongside the increased variation in delivery of the Offer, it was clear that districts became increasingly focused on understanding and disseminating best practice. Managers cited a number of mechanisms for learning from the numerous pilots and initiatives taking place across the case study districts, although in practice this did not always filter down to frontline staff. There were also ongoing concerns about how well advisers were adapting to new ways of working, and how they were coping with the sense of continual change and evolution of working practices. In particular, staff sought greater evidence to understand how and why practices could be made to work within local settings.

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There were limited changes to the way offices delivered core interventions across the two years of the evaluation of the Offer. Any developments, such as changes to handling new claims or timings of core interventions, were predominantly associated with making the best use of staff time and resources to maximise off-flows.

One of the key areas of change highlighted by staff was the effect of the Offer on flexible adviser support. Offices had utilised multiple delivery models, which suggests that this is an area where managers have been able to tailor provision in order to meet off-flow targets. This has resulted in approaches that were either more or less structured, and involved greater or lesser degrees of adviser discretion. Whilst flexibility around format and duration of meetings continued to increase across offices and districts, decisions around claimant prioritisation were increasingly driven by the widespread use of cohort management tools to determine the nature and intensity of adviser contact. Variations in how flexibility had been devolved were additionally influenced by the skills and experience of advisers and resources available to advisers (for example, diary management).

The flexible menu of support provided a wide range of programmes to support more personalised provision. Staff identified the main benefit of the new menu as being the reduction in restrictions around when claimants are eligible for different types of support. Over the course of the evaluation, the flexible menu of support became more strongly embedded in advisers' awareness and improvements were noted in relation to the delivery and operation of key support options. However, there remained a number of significant gaps in provision, particularly for claimants with complex and/or multiple needs (for example – English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), basic numeracy/literacy, tailored 50+ support and information and communications technology (ICT) skills).

In addition to the individual elements of the Offer, it was clear that the work of Jobcentre Plus offices was influenced by a number of wider national initiatives, including the new sanctions regime, the digital agenda, the Youth Contract and expansion of the Freedom and Flexibilities (see Section 2.3 for more details). In addition, offices were beginning to look to the impact of future changes to welfare provision (principally through the introduction of Universal Credit) and the return of the first cohort of claimants who had completed the Work Programme. Reactions to these initiatives tended to involve further development and evolution of day-to-day working practices, and in many cases the introduction of greater structure at either district or office level in terms of how advisers handled affected claimants.

Overall, the Offer was viewed by staff as a positive shift towards greater flexibility and tailoring of support for claimants. It was assumed that the Offer had had a positive effect on off-flows, by allowing greater managerial freedom to make decisions about how best to structure support within a local context. However, there remained concerns that the extent to which flexibility had been devolved was constrained by a greater push at district level in implementing measures and directives to meet targets and expectations (for example, off-flows and referrals to key support provision). There was also an ongoing concern that the Offer placed an emphasis on mainstream JSA claimants to the detriment of more vulnerable groups, such as ESA claimants and people with more complex needs.

## The destinations of claimants who experienced the Offer

JSA claimants were far more likely than ESA claimants in the 12-month WRAG group to off-flow from benefit over the course of the 12 months. Nearly three-quarters of ESA claimants were still in receipt of their benefit after 12 months compared to just a quarter of JSA recipients. Off-flows were particularly low for JSA claimants who were nervous about the prospect of paid work, who were 'disadvantaged', had a physical or mental health condition or lacked qualifications. Off-flow rates amongst ESA claimants did not vary by whether or not they were looking for work or by their confidence levels and nervousness about work at the start of the claim.

Only two in five JSA claimants who were still on the same claim after 12 months (and might be expected to have moved onto the Work Programme) had actually started on the Work Programme. ESA claimants in the 12-month WRAG group were not mandated to the Work Programme, and only a quarter of those still on the same claim a year after their NJWFI had moved onto the Work Programme.

Three-fifths of all JSA claimants stopped claiming their benefit in order to start a job. This was more common for claimants aged 25 to 49, who had higher qualifications and had received limited support through the Offer. JSA claimants who had moved into work received less support throughout their claim: this reflects the fact that they probably required less assistance, and suggests that support is being directed to those who need it most. For ESA claimants with a 12-month or greater prognosis the focus of the Offer is to provide help to move closer to the labour market (rather than, necessarily, into employment), but five per cent did in fact off-flow into work. Those who moved into work were more likely to be people who were looking for work at the start of their claim, had been employed within the past five years, and had positive attitudes to work and job searching at the start of their claim.

One in seven of the claimants who off-flowed into work said that they found their job 'through Jobcentre Plus'. People who said this were more likely to have had an adviser who tried to find suitable jobs for them and offered suggestions for where to look for job vacancies, and they were more likely than other claimants to have received work experience support from the flexible menu.

Around a fifth of JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were looking for work closed their claim at some point in the 12 months after starting on the Offer, but did not start a new job directly after off-flowing. A quarter of ESA claimants who were not in search of work did the same. Over a third of JSA claimants and one in twenty ESA claimants who did this subsequently made a new benefit claim (without finding a job in the interim) or entered into training or education. Closing the claim in order to look after family or children was equally likely amongst claimants receiving the two benefits.

## Attitudinal change

When they started on the Offer most JSA claimants were highly motivated and wanted to be in work. The picture was more mixed for ESA claimants: a majority felt they would be happier in work, but just over half said that the thought of being in paid work made them nervous. Maintaining the motivation of JSA claimants and reducing anxiety among ESA claimants were therefore the main challenges for Jobcentre Plus in terms of attitudes.

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For ESA claimants who remained on their benefit for 12 months there was evidence that between their initial interviews, at the start of their claim, and their second interview 12 months later, there was a decrease in anxiety levels. Even more encouragingly, ESA claimants who were looking for work showed dramatic increases in confidence for all aspects of their job search activities.

For JSA claimants who remained on their benefit for 12 months the picture was more mixed. As the claimant journey progressed there were negative shifts in attitudes, with more claimants feeling they were being put under too much pressure to find work and fewer feeling confident that they would find a job that suits them. However, it could be argued that a negative shift on this last point is only to be expected, given that these are people who had not managed to find work after 12 months. As with ESA claimants, there was a net positive shift in attitudes with regards to anxiety about paid work, and this was particularly marked for the youngest claimants in the 18 to 24 age category.

## **Adviser support**

Outside of regular review meetings, JSA claimants saw advisers more frequently than ESA claimants. The majority of claimants felt that the time they spent with advisers was about right, with fewer than one in ten claiming that some of that time was unnecessary, and around twice as many believing that the time spent with advisers was insufficient for their needs. Notably, amongst ESA claimants looking for work, there was a shift in perceptions as their claim progressed, with more reflecting that they did not have enough time with their adviser later in their claim.

Around three-quarters of ESA claimants and three-fifths of JSA claimants saw the same adviser every time. The dominant view amongst both types of claimant was that it did not matter which adviser they saw, though many added the proviso that the adviser they met with should know a bit about their circumstances. This requirement seemed to become more important at later stages of the claimant journey.

Between six and seven in ten claimants agreed that advisers they had come into contact with during their claim understood their circumstances. The proportions reduced over time, suggesting that claimants felt there was less understanding from advisers the longer their claim continued. Claimants' views were partly contingent on whether they saw the same adviser throughout their claim, and varied in line with their perceptions of the time and support they received from their advisers.

Nine in ten JSA claimants were offered some sort of job search advice from their adviser, though views on some of the support received – for example, CV writing courses and recommendations for specific vacancies – indicate that the support was not always felt to be appropriate or useful. ESA claimants who were looking for work were much less likely to receive suggestions for where to look for job vacancies or advice regarding CVs, applications and interviews.

## **Flexible menu of back-to-work support**

For JSA claimants the most common support options discussed related to skills assessment and training or work experience. ESA claimants tended not to be directed towards this kind of support and instead were more likely to have discussed possibilities around volunteering.

Two-fifths of JSA claimants discussed the opportunity to develop some work experience, and a third of those who discussed these opportunities went on to attend a placement. Even when this did not result in a job, claimants tended to benefit from positive attitudinal shifts, feeling more confident they could do well in interviews and less nervous about the prospect of paid work. A year into their claim, they were also less likely to feel 'under too much pressure to find work'.

A quarter of JSA claimants discussed skills support with an adviser and two-thirds of these claimants went on to take up some support, most commonly a course in a local college or private provider. Educational attainment made no difference to whether or not claimants attended a skills assessment or course, which is perhaps surprising, given that many of the courses on offer relate to the development of basic skills. This may indicate insufficient use of discretion on the part of advisers when referring claimants, or perhaps that claimants were being referred to courses that they did not need.

Fewer than one in ten discussed self-employment support, with discussions mostly focused on older JSA claimants and those with a degree. Of those who were offered self-employment support, a quarter went on to take up some form of support.

A third of JSA claimants and half of ESA claimants discussed the possibility of volunteering, but only a small proportion of ESA claimants went on to take up a voluntary position. The large gap between the proportion being signposted and taking up a voluntary position may partly stem from advisers' reluctance to 'push' ESA claimants or follow up on their progress after initial signposting, and could potentially be a beneficial area of support to expand.

Half of ESA claimants and a quarter of JSA claimants with a disability or health condition discussed health support options with their adviser. The discussions did not always cover the potential suitability of particular types of jobs for claimants. This may indicate a lack of confidence or relevant knowledge on the part of advisers when interacting and advising claimants with health needs.

Half of JSA claimants and one in ten ESA claimants were signposted to a work club; a fifth of JSA claimants with children were offered some type of childcare support; and a quarter of JSA claimants and around half as many ESA claimants were offered financial assistance.

The levels of take up indicated above reflect both awareness and barriers towards take up by particular groups. Younger JSA claimants had a good awareness of the provision available to them through Jobcentre Plus, possibly stemming from recent policy changes such as the introduction of the Youth Contract which has increased provision of support to the under-25s. By contrast, older JSA claimants, as well as ESA claimants, more generally had limited knowledge of support options. In the case of ESA claimants this may be because of their limited contact with Jobcentre Plus.

At the same time there were factors preventing the take-up of some of the support on offer, with some claimants – particularly those with multiple and complex needs – feeling that their needs had not been correctly identified and that the support they were offered was not appropriate for their needs. Specific categories of claimant also felt that there was no support available that would suit their needs and circumstances, for example, the fact that they had a criminal record, health conditions or ESOL needs.

Most claimants gave a positive assessment of the support on offer by Jobcentre Plus, in terms of satisfaction with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find

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employment, being offered 'the right amount of support', and being offered advice and support which matched their personal needs and circumstances. The proportions giving a positive assessment was higher amongst those who were offered options from the flexible menu of back-to-work support, suggesting that support options are generally being deployed for the right people at the right time. However, ESA claimants who were looking for work, disadvantaged JSA claimants, and JSA claimants with a disability (particularly those with a mental health condition) were less likely to feel that the support on offer was tailored to their requirements. A future area of development for the Offer may therefore lie in addressing the particular needs of these claimants.

## **Claimants on JSA or ESA who had a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency, or who were homeless**

Claimants in these three groups expressed attitudes indicating that they want to work. Their motivation was as high as that of claimants who were not in one of these three groups, but there were also high levels of anxiety about the prospect of being in paid work. This was true of ESA claimants in general, but anxiety was especially common amongst ESA claimants with a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency.

Ex-offenders and homeless claimants shared similar reservations about succeeding in their job search and finding a suitable job as JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record or were not homeless. Claimants with a criminal record had particular concerns around the currency of their skills and whether employers would want to offer them interviews. Meanwhile, claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less confident than JSA claimants without a dependency about most elements of their job search.

Substantial minorities of claimants in all three groups felt that the advice and support they received from Jobcentre Plus had increased their confidence in finding a job they could do and their motivation to find work, and improved their perceived job prospects. Positive views were as common amongst claimants with a criminal record as those without; the same was true of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency and those without.

Advisers discussed a range of topics with claimants in the three groups, including issues to do with the specific challenges they were facing; discussions on specific job search-related issues were also very common. Notably, the range of topics covered by advisers in discussions with ESA claimants with a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency were more limited than in discussions with other ESA claimants.

Three-fifths of claimants with a criminal record or with a drug or alcohol dependency, and a half of homeless claimants felt that they had the right amount of contact with advisers. Satisfaction was not as high as amongst other claimants. While the majority of claimants with a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency felt that advisers understood their particular circumstances, there was variation between the views of JSA and ESA claimants, with the latter less likely to feel their circumstances were understood. Meanwhile, homeless claimants were less likely than claimants in the other two groups to indicate that advisers appreciated their circumstances; this may be linked to the fact that few had actually discussed their housing circumstances with advisers.

JSA claimants in the three groups were offered a similar range of options from the flexible menu of back-to-work support as other JSA claimants. By contrast, ESA claimants who had a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely than other ESA claimants to receive most types of support.

When it came to assessing the support on offer by Jobcentre Plus, JSA claimants with a criminal record or dependency gave similar ratings of the support they were offered as other JSA claimants. Around three in five in each group gave a positive assessment of the amount of support they were offered; the tailoring of the support to their personal needs and circumstances; and their satisfaction with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping claimants find employment. A positive assessment was less common amongst ESA claimants, and especially so amongst ESA claimants who had a criminal record, while ESA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely than those without a dependency to perceive the support they were offered as personalised. The less positive views held by ESA claimants in the three groups may tie in with the high levels of anxiety amongst these claimants about the prospect of being in paid work; the limited range of topics discussed by such claimants in their discussions with advisers; the tendency of ESA claimants in the three groups to view advisers as less understanding; and the differences in terms of what they were offered from the flexible menu of support compared to other ESA claimants (and of JSA and ESA claimants who were in each of the three groups).

## **Lone parents on Income Support whose youngest child was aged between three and four**

Lone parents on IS with a youngest child aged three or four expressed a strong commitment towards work, although only around one in three were currently looking for work. These lone parents have distinctive constraints to working, notably in relation to caring commitments and childcare, but also other barriers such as low qualifications and lack of recent work experience.

Only three-quarters of respondents had attended meetings with an adviser in the previous 12 months. Where respondents had attended meetings, they discussed a range of topics, including work options and caring responsibilities. There was also some discussion of job search activities: over half said they received advice about looking for work online.

While the majority (74 per cent) said that the amount of time spent with advisers overall was about right, one in six said that they did not spend enough time with advisers. Views regarding the amount of time spent with advisers were less positive among lone parents who were looking for work, who were more likely than those who were not looking for work to say they did not spend enough time with advisers.

Three-quarters agreed that Jobcentre Plus advisers understood their particular circumstances and that they were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus. However, respondents who were looking for work were again less positive than those not looking for work.

One in four lone parents on IS were offered information or help with childcare, while around one in six were advised about volunteering. Otherwise, very few lone parents were offered support options (such as skills assessment, training or work experience).

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Overall, most lone parents on IS were satisfied with the support they received, and the majority felt that the support was appropriate to their needs and circumstances. Lone parents who were looking for work were less likely than those not looking for work to say that the support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances or that they were satisfied with the service that Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment. This suggests that current support may be more tailored to preparing lone parents for an eventual move into work (when they move onto JSA as a result of Lone Parent Obligations) rather than identifying and actively supporting those who want to move into work earlier.

The other consistent pattern was that lone parents on IS who had more frequent adviser meetings, and those who saw the same adviser all the time, were more positive towards the support they received than other lone parents.

Comparisons with lone parents receiving JSA indicate that those on IS tended to be more positive about the support they were receiving, but acknowledged that it was less likely to increase their chances of finding suitable work.

## **Conditionality and sanctions**

Nine per cent of JSA claimants said they were not given an adequate explanation of the conditions associated with JSA, while 13 per cent said they were never told by an adviser that their benefit would be affected if they did not agree to certain conditions. Around one in three ESA claimants said they were never told by an adviser about the repercussions of failing to agree to the conditions.

Seven in ten JSA claimants and six in ten ESA claimants who were aware their benefit could be reduced or stopped if they did not comply with certain conditions felt this information made them more likely to follow the rules, but lower proportions said it made them more likely to look for work or take steps that would move them closer to work. The effect of this knowledge on JSA claimants aged 50 or above and those who had been in work within three months of starting their claim was minimal, suggesting these groups were likely to follow the rules anyway.

Around one in five JSA claimants said that their benefit had been stopped at some point in their claim, while six per cent said that it had been reduced. The figures for ESA claimants were very similar (21 per cent and eight per cent respectively). Among lone parents with a youngest child aged 3 or 4 who were claiming IS, nine per cent said that their benefit had been stopped at some point, and 10 per cent said it had been reduced.

The most common reason given by JSA claimants for benefits being stopped or reduced was missing a signing-on appointment, while by far the most common reason given by ESA claimants was that they were no longer entitled to ESA (though this would not be considered a sanction).

Among claimants whose benefit had been stopped or reduced, 23 per cent of JSA claimants said they were told about hardship payments, and 13 per cent applied for one. The proportions of ESA claimants were lower (13 per cent and six per cent respectively).

# 1 Introduction

Launched in April 2011, the new Jobcentre Plus Offer was designed to change the way that Jobcentre Plus operates by placing an increased focus on outcomes rather than processes. To this end, Jobcentre Plus staff were allowed greater flexibility in the support that they provide to claimants which could be tailored to suit individual needs rather than following a nationally determined structure.

## 1.1 Evaluation aims and objectives

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned TNS BMRB to evaluate how the Offer had been implemented and delivered, and the perceived impact it was having on staff and claimants. In particular, the evaluation aimed to understand how:

- the programme was implemented;
- delivery was working on the ground;
- far flexibility had been devolved – whether there was real flexibility and whether advisers had the resources locally to provide support;
- advisers were managing the new system – whether they were using flexibility effectively, whether they felt they had the right skills, how they made key decisions and how it helped advisers to support claimants;
- support was flowing for claimants, including how specific elements of the Offer were working and being used – core interventions, flexible adviser support, flexible menu of support;
- claimants experienced the Jobcentre Plus Offer and how this differed by claimant type and why;
- the Jobcentre Plus Offer had impacted different claimant types in terms of both claimant experience and outcomes.

It is important to note that any evaluation findings relating to the impact of the Offer are based on respondent perceptions. The evaluation did not include a formal impact assessment, so is unable to quantify the impact of the Offer on off-flows from benefit and movement into work.

## 1.2 Approach

The evaluation approach comprised a longitudinal and multimode research design.

There were three main elements:

- **Developmental stage** – This involved consolidation of previous research and scoping interviews with all District Managers (DMs) across the UK. Interviews with DMs were carried out by telephone between December 2011 and January 2012, lasting approximately 15 minutes. The aim was to obtain a broad understanding of the national picture and to ascertain the varied characteristics of the districts in order to select six districts for case studies in the second stage of the research.

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- **Case studies** – Ethnographic site visits and depth interviews with staff and claimants were carried out across six case study districts. The case studies strand comprised of two waves, with the first conducted in early-mid 2012 and the second taking place in February to March 2013. This aimed to provide in-depth understanding of the Jobcentre Plus Offer end-to-end at district level. In each of the districts, two offices were selected to take part in the research. The case study approach included three elements:
  - **Ethnographic site visits** – Adviser interviews were observed, comprising interviews with claimants at different ‘touch points’ along the claimant journey, as well as across a range of benefit streams (Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support (IS)). Following observations, claimants were asked to take part in a short follow-up interview to discuss their views on the adviser interview and other aspects of the Jobcentre Plus Offer where relevant. In addition, informal discussions with advisers took place throughout the site visits regarding their perspectives of observed interviews, and their experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer more broadly. In Wave 2, telephone depth interviews were also carried out with DMs for each of the six districts.
  - **Staff interviews** – Jobcentre Plus staff at all grades were interviewed using a range of qualitative techniques including; group discussions, mini groups, paired depths, depth interviews. This varied in composition according to staff grade and how the districts were organised. A more detailed breakdown of the approach is provided in the appendices.
  - **Claimant interviews** – Qualitative interviews were undertaken across the two waves of research, following the case study fieldwork. In the first wave, telephone interviews with 169 claimants were carried out across the six districts, between April-June 2012. Participants were purposively sampled to include: a range of benefit streams (JSA 18-24, 25-49, 50+; ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) three-, six- or 12-month prognosis, ESA voluntary, and IS voluntary); different touch points along the customer journey; disadvantaged claimants<sup>1</sup>; sanctioned claimants; early entry JSA stock<sup>2</sup>; and a mix of demographic characteristics. The second wave of claimant research was conducted in March to April 2013 and involved a similar approach with 95 telephone interviews with claimants. The sample included claimants towards the end of their ‘Offer journey’<sup>3</sup>: JSA 18-24 (at nine-month off-flow); JSA 25-49 and 50+ (at 12-month off-flow); and, ESA WRAG 12-month prognosis; disadvantaged claimants; sanctioned claimants; JSA and ESA WRAG lone parents; JSA from ESA as a result of a Fit for Work Assessment; and a mix of demographic characteristics. The changes to the sample in the second wave were also intended to help explore issues with particular claimant groups of interest following the first year findings and any changes in policy since the wave one interviews were carried out.

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<sup>1</sup> Disadvantaged claimants were defined as: those with a drug or alcohol dependency, ex-offenders, and homeless claimants.

<sup>2</sup> Claimants who have been on JSA for 22 out of the last 24 months or have been moved onto JSA from Incapacity Benefit and are referred to the Work Programme after three months.

<sup>3</sup> ESA claimants in the three-, six- and 12-month WRAG groups, ESA voluntary, and IS voluntary claimants were not included in the sample for Wave 2 in order to focus primarily on claimant groups who had greatest exposure to the main elements of the Offer. The focus was therefore on JSA claimants aged 18-24, JSA claimants aged 25-49, JSA claimants aged 50 or above, and ESA claimants with a 12-month prognosis.

Please note, the report outlines how findings differ across the range of benefit streams, staff grades and other variables discussed above. Where there is no reference to this, this is because no variations were noted. To ensure the anonymity of the staff and claimants observed and interviewed, the case study districts and offices are not included in this report. Staff quotes are attributed to staff grade only; and claimants' quotes are attributed using both benefit stream and gender. Furthermore, vignettes included throughout chapters 2 and 3 are anonymised; and, where this relates to claimants, we have changed people's names and any potentially identifying features.

- **Claimant surveys** – There were two separate surveys conducted as part of the evaluation.
  - **Longitudinal survey** – Claimants were first interviewed as they started on the Jobcentre Plus Offer and then again at the end of their experience as they off-flowed into employment, the Work Programme or another destination. Those who did not off-flow were interviewed after a year on the Offer. The first telephone interviews took place between mid-May and late June of 2012 and comprised 1,749 interviews with JSA claimants and 1,285 interviews with ESA claimants. Over the course of 25 minutes, information was collected about the claimants' early experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer, including the initial meeting they attended with an adviser and the support options they had been offered and which they had taken up so far. The second telephone interviews ran from September 2012 until June 2013. In total 1,069 JSA claimants and 676 ESA claimants were included as part of the Wave 2 survey findings – these totals comprise claimants who had off-flowed before the first survey interview as well as those interviewed in the second survey interview.
  - **Boost survey** – JSA and ESA claimants with a criminal record, with a drug or alcohol dependency and those who are homeless would not appear in sufficient numbers in the main longitudinal survey to allow for robust analysis. An additional cross-sectional survey was undertaken to boost sample numbers for these three groups of claimants. In total, the survey yielded 228 interviews with ex-offenders, 182 interviews with claimants who had a drug or alcohol dependency, and 68 interviews with homeless claimants. In addition, interviews were conducted with 341 lone parents claiming IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four. Although participation in the Offer is voluntary for lone parents in this group, they would be expected to experience increased adviser contact and exposure to the Jobcentre Plus Offer as they approached the end of their eligibility for IS.

This is the second (and final) report from the evaluation. It brings together findings from the longitudinal and boost survey of claimants and the case study research with Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants. This report builds on interim findings from the first year of the evaluation, including a specific focus on how the Offer had been embedded over time and to what extent issues highlighted in the first year had been addressed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Coulter, A., Day, N., Howat, H., Romanou, E and Coleman, N. (2012). *The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation*, Chapter 3, DWP Research Report No. 814.

## 1.3 Notes on the report

- Significance testing has been carried out at the five per cent confidence level. All comparative data described in the report text are statistically significant unless otherwise stated.
- The figures presented in this report have been weighted to take account of the sample design and non-response. Details of the weighting applied are provided in Appendix A. All bases given in the tables or charts are, however, unweighted.
- A \* symbol in a table signifies a value between 0 and 0.49, while a – symbol signifies a zero.
- Some tables display data based on a very small number of respondents. Where the base size is 50 or below, the percentages in tables are displayed in italics and the findings are discussed in the text in terms of (unweighted) numbers of respondents rather than percentages. Such data must be treated with caution.
- Throughout the report, percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number (figures are rounded up from .5, and rounded down below this). Percentages in the tables and charts do not always add to 100 per cent due to rounding. In cases where a number of responses have been grouped together ('netted'), the proportion of respondents who gave a 'netted' response may not always equal the sum of the individual responses, again due to rounding.

## 2 Jobcentre Plus staff and management

This chapter explores how the Offer was being delivered from an organisational perspective and aims to pull out differences in delivery between, and within, Jobcentre Plus districts. The findings are based on case study research over two years across 12 Jobcentre Plus offices (comprising two offices in each of six case study districts). This chapter builds on the findings from the first year of the evaluation<sup>5</sup>, further exploring how the Offer had embedded over time, as well as identifying any changes to delivery. This will then provide context as to how the Offer has been experienced by claimants, which is the focus of subsequent chapters.

### 2.1 How the Offer has been embedded

Two important issues were highlighted in the first year of the evaluation – first, that the Offer had resulted in a range of delivery models emerging across the case study districts and offices; and second, that there were fairly limited and unstructured approaches to share understanding and learning from these new models. A key concern of the second year of the evaluation was therefore to understand how these issues had developed over time, as the Offer became more embedded within the case study districts and offices.

#### 2.1.1 Variations in delivery of the Offer

As noted in the first year, variations were observed in how the Offer was being delivered both within and between districts, and even within individual offices. These included differing approaches to how offices were structured, how claimant flows were managed and handled by advisers, as well as decisions regarding resource allocation related to local conditions. At the very least, these differences highlighted that the principle of greater flexibility had been embraced at district and office level.

During the second year of evaluation, it was clear that further flexibility and more localised approaches had been employed across the districts. These were demonstrated by ongoing tweaks and refinements to both office structures and working practices; for example, changes to team structures and case-loading approaches to handle claimant flows (explored in more detail in Section 2.2).

It was also apparent that differences remained in the extent to which flexibility had been devolved beyond senior managers; specifically in light of differing levels of adviser autonomy and discretion. For example, while in some offices advisers were given freedom to make decisions about how to support the claimants they worked with, other offices had much more structured approaches (explored in greater depth in Section 2.2).

As before, variations in the extent to which flexibility had been devolved highlighted differing views at management level of the best way to meet local priorities. In particular, senior managers talked about three factors which they felt were driving approaches to working practices:

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

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- the need to achieve off-flow targets;
- local area characteristics (for example, local labour market conditions and claimant on-flows);
- staff resources (both in terms of staff numbers and skills) and the impact of new initiatives (for example, the Youth Contract, changes to the sanctions regime, and the digital agenda – these are explored in greater detail in Section 2.3).

The interplay between these priorities and how flexibility has been devolved are further explored in Section 2.2.

### 2.1.2 Sharing best practice

The second issue raised in the first year of the evaluation was whether Jobcentre Plus districts and offices were sufficiently learning from each other and sharing best practice, particularly in light of increasing variations in how the Offer was being delivered. In the second year of the evaluation, this was also something that managers seemed to be more focused on. Across the districts, regular forums and channels were increasingly used to review and disseminate best practice. District level forums enabled office managers to discuss models of delivery and innovative ways of working. For example, one district had introduced a business development forum which allowed new support and employment provision to be filtered down to all the offices in the district. However, these district-led forums were mainly aimed at senior and middle managers, and there were some frustrations at adviser level around not receiving information about how the Offer was working in other offices.

*'You know for me, there must be offices that are doing well so why don't we know what they are doing well? How is it working and why and what has changed to make it work?'*

(Adviser)

At office level, delivery and adviser approaches were shared through general team meetings, the use of development forums, case conferencing, one-to-one meetings between advisers and Performance Team Leaders (PTLs) or Adviser Team Managers (ATMs), as well as opportunities for advisers to shadow staff with recognised best practice skills.

Despite this focus on reviewing and sharing best practice, from a manager's perspective it was felt that there remained issues around the variability of adviser skill levels in adapting to greater flexibility and changing working practices. In many offices, ATMs provided one-to-one support in working with advisers. However, it was acknowledged that there were limits to the time and effort that could be spent on addressing these gaps, and some advisers were simply seen as lacking the skills for adapting to new ways of working.

Overall, it was clear that as the Offer has embedded over time, the case study offices have continued to embrace new ways of working. Managers were able to adapt office structures and working practices to best meet the priorities, whether these were driven by the internal needs of specific Jobcentre Plus offices and their local context, or external district or national level initiatives. This had resulted in growing variations between offices, and alongside this, an increased focus on ways of reviewing and sharing best practice. These variations in delivery are explored in greater depth in the following section.

## 2.2 How the Offer is delivered

As noted above, the move away from the previous process-driven regime has led to variations in how offices were delivering the Offer. Variations were observed both between and within districts, and had increased over time as the Offer bedded in. This section explores these variations in greater detail, initially in relation to how offices were structured to manage claimant flows, and subsequently in relation to each of the key strands of the Offer – core interventions, flexible adviser support, and the flexible menu of support.

### 2.2.1 Managing claimant flows

Key variations in how individual offices managed claimant flows were identified in the first year of the evaluation; specifically relating to differing approaches towards team structures and the use of case-loading. Variations in these areas were once again observed during the second year of the evaluation, with a number of developments and refinements, which are outlined below.

**Team structure** was an area that had seen most development over the two years of the evaluation, with changes to how frontline staff were organised being observed in many of the case study offices. Typically, offices were split into teams of advisers focusing on specific groups of claimants; for example, focusing on certain benefit types (Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) 18-24, JSA 25+), stages in the JSA claimant journey (weeks 0-4, 5-13, 14-25, 26+), or simply by alphabet (JSA claimants with surnames beginning A-K, and L-Z). This is not to say that offices had not previously organised their staff in these ways, but rather that there seemed to be a process of continually reviewing and changing how teams were structured across these distinctions.

When questioned about why these changes were made, managers referenced a number of factors:

- **Maximising off-flows** – Primarily, managers cited the need to organise staff resources in a way that maximised claimant off-flows and made best use of staff skills and experience. This perhaps explains the state of flux in many offices, with managers repeatedly experimenting with different team structures in order to identify what worked best. For example, there were shifts both towards and away from the use of case-loading (see below), and the introduction of the 'plumber and mate' approach which requires Assistant Advisers and Personal Advisers to work closely together in triaging and sharing caseloads (see case study – Office 1).

*'Well we've got the Plumber and Mate [approach] ... it is closer working together with the adviser, assistant adviser ... you would have one of them being the plumber's mate so they wouldn't actually do anything in depth with the customer, they would pass it onto the plumber.'*

(CSOM)

### Cast study: Office 1

#### What are they doing?

- Re-organisation of JSA advisers into teams split by customer journey stages – New Claims; 0-13 weeks and two 13+ weeks teams for 18-24 and 25+.
- Introduction of the national ‘plumber and mate’ approach, with Personal Advisers and Assistant Advisers located together (except for new claims team).
- ‘Cohort management’ system introduced to allow advisers to monitor support at key off-flow points.
- All advisers are allocated case-loading time in their diaries to manage their own time with claimants.
- The appointment of a Provision and Quality Manager who works with providers and employers and actively monitors support provision and provides feedback to advisers.

#### Why are they doing this?

- District-led policy to remove use of split New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) and move to a core focus on earlier support and diagnostics at 0-13 weeks.
- Restructured teams to enable better communications regarding Jobsearch Review meetings and case-loading meetings to better understand claimants needs and progress.
- Cohort Management system and advisers managing their own diaries were introduced to encourage greater responsibility of advisers, whilst ensuring their activities are monitored.
- Appointment of new role to monitor support provision driven at district level to provide greater feedback and drive off-flow performance.

- **Greater freedom to change working practices** – Increased ability to restructure offices was cited not only in reference to the Offer, but also in relation to the greater flexibility offered by the Freedom and Flexibilities initiative (see Section 2.3 for more details).
- **New initiatives and policies aimed at certain claimants** – In particular, the introduction of the Youth Contract, which specified more frequent contact and active management of JSA 18-24 claimants. Despite this initiative being introduced with additional resources to aid delivery, several office managers described the change as a reason for reorganising their adviser teams to make better use of existing resources. Furthermore, changes to Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) and Income Support (IS) eligibility (linked to the age of youngest child) had prompted offices to integrate specialist IS advisers into mainstream JSA adviser teams. A benefit of this was greater shared learning amongst advisers, although there were concerns that this might dilute the specialist knowledge of lone parent advisers. Indeed, one office had retained the use of lone parent advisers for both JSA and IS claimants as they felt this provided a more tailored approach.

*'The advisers know that there's somebody on the team not far from them that they can go to [get] help if they have an issue that arises during the interview and somebody they can ask for help from. I mean on our team the lone parent adviser has been doing a lot of coaching with the other advisers and just skilling them up and dealing with lone parents in general.'*

(ATM)

As noted above, across the evaluation period there were shifts both towards and away from the **use of case-loading**. In the first year, considerable differences were observed between offices – with some offices case-loading claimants to individual advisers throughout their claim, whilst others limited case-loading to certain stages of the claim or not at all. These variations continued into the second year of the evaluation, with further changes being driven by a combination of local and national pressures. For example, one office had replaced individual case-loading with adviser teams focusing on different stages of the journey so the office could allocate better skilled advisers to support harder to help claimants who were still claiming benefits after a prolonged period.

Another office cited the introduction of the Youth Contract as a driving force for removing case-loading from all but JSA 18-24 claimants and replacing it with a 'taxi-rank' system (see case study – Office 2). This involved claimants being allocated to a team and then seeing any adviser within that wider team on the day of their 'signing-on' appointment if they were assessed as needing additional support. It was felt that this approach allowed the office to manage their resource effectively so that adviser support was only offered when appropriate and resources could be used more flexibly. However, staff acknowledged that this approach had the potential to create queues or bottle necks to claimants receiving support.

*'The big change was the way that we actually deal with the customers and how we control our interviews with the customers and contact with the customers. So on the 18-24 team... they are still very structured towards a diary system where advisers have diaries and, as part of the Youth Contract remit, they have to try to put in weekly contact, whether that's face-to-face or over the phone ... Now for the 25+ customers we are not tied to that type of regime, what we do have is we have, for want of a better word, is taxi ranking ... So they come in every fortnight to sign and that is obviously a given and that's our chance to actually then see them face-to-face, whether with an adviser or a signing clerk. If there are things that we need to then, support the customers with, or we want to check that the customer is doing actually what they should be doing around looking for work, then we will then call them in on their off-cycles if you like, so not their signing days.'*

(ATM)

### Case study: Office 2

#### What are they doing?

- Office restructured from teams dealing with all JSA claimants (split by alphabet) through one-to-one adviser case-loading, and replacing this with two approaches for JSA claimants: JSA 18-24 (single point of contact and diary system) and JSA 25+ (taxi-rank) teams.
- A Skills Adviser is now in charge of provider liaison and keeping advisers up-to-date with feedback about support options, such as statistics demonstrating their effectiveness.
- The office has a suite of Information Adviser Devices (IADs) which claimants can use for online jobsearch, including Universal Jobmatch.
- Continued use of the split NJI to free up adviser time for diagnostic meetings.
- Ongoing use of case conferences and staff presentations to share best practice.
- Reduction in staff visits to and presentation from providers due to limited time available for staff to be released from seeing claimants.

#### What is underpinning change?

- Extension of Lean initiative to Freedom and Flexibilities, which has continued the culture of reviewing practices and piloting changes to working practices.
- Taxi-rank system was introduced after it was successfully rolled out via another Jobcentre Plus office in the region with increases in off-flow for key cohorts.
- The introduction of Youth Contract has led to the implementation of a dedicated team focused on JSA 18-24 claimants.
- High awareness of support options due to ongoing communications.
- Increased use of a digital approach as result of the digital agenda.
- No longer use a 'RAG' system for categorising claimant work readiness but rather a combination of adviser decision making and cohort management system.

As noted during the first year of the evaluation, variations in how offices were managing their claimant flows were broadly influenced by three factors – prior experience of initiatives (such as Freedom and Flexibilities) that promote flexibility; local area characteristics (relating to local labour market conditions, as well as local Jobcentre Plus staff and capabilities); and, the extent to which off-flow targets had been devolved within offices (see The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation – Chapter 3).

Further developments in these areas were observed in the second year of the evaluation:

- **Experience of initiatives that promote flexibility:** In the first year of the Offer there were a number of initiatives operating concurrently which had a complementary focus on promoting flexibility; for example, the Lean continuous improvement techniques and Local Autonomy pilot. This meant that some offices had a head start in embracing flexibility and were therefore primed to take advantage of the increased freedoms within the Offer. By the second year of the evaluation, this had largely evened out through the national roll out of Freedom and Flexibilities (see Section 2.3 for more detailed discussion).

Despite this, there was still variation in the extent to which flexibility had been devolved within districts, particularly whether this reached adviser level within offices. One office cited the Freedom and Flexibilities initiative as the driving force behind allowing individual adviser teams to develop their own approaches to managing claimant caseloads. The range of approaches included a move to email and phone contact, open diaries for all appointments (apart from new claims and rapid re-claims), and developing specialisms within their teams for focusing on JSA customers across different age groups – 18-24, 25-49 and 50+ (see case study: Office 3).

*'Freedom and Flex is all about working more efficiently and that's what we have tried to do all the way along is look at the best ways of working. Part of the performance exercise that we just did for all the [advisers] we included questions on what they thought about how we are currently working and their suggestions for improvements and that's what we have taken on board when we've tried to give them a bit more freedom and restructure and change things.'*

(ATM)

However, this degree of adviser discretion was not the norm, and many offices adopted a more structured approach led by office managers and ATMs (see below).

- **Local area characteristics:** Managers continued to make decisions about how best to structure services based on the local labour market. It was important for offices to be able to respond to the changing size and nature of the local claimant base so that they could focus resources where this would produce the best outcomes. Decisions around restructuring teams were often discussed in relation to meeting the needs of the local claimant base. For example, one office had re-allocated ESA staff resources to JSA claimant teams in response to an increase footfall in JSA 25+ claimants.
- **The extent to which off-flow targets had been devolved within the district:** Off-flow targets continued to influence delivery of the Offer across the two years of the evaluation, and approaches to meeting these targets specifically interacted with adviser flexibility. In particular, a key factor was how senior management viewed the best approach to achieving off-flows and whether that was largely by managed flexibility or adviser discretion. The former approach involved stronger monitoring and more structured working practices designed to achieve off-flow targets which in turn led to reduced adviser discretion over how to handle their caseloads. The second approach focused on allowing advisers to use their skills and experience to determine how best to support claimants, in the belief that this will result in better results. Over the course of the evaluation, there was a notable shift towards more structured approaches within offices, which seemed to be largely driven by decisions at district level. Several districts implemented a cohort monitoring tool which allowed managers to track the claimant journey in line with key off-flow points across office, team and adviser caseloads (see case study – Office 4). One District Manager discussed how they had introduced the tool because it was believed that increased flexibility had diluted the focus of offices on achieving off-flow targets.

*'By having too much freedom, they've lost a tracking process of knowing when their customers are at which stage and what they were eligible for. So, that is now a core of [name of District] performance management, and they have to do it.'*

(District Manager)

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Overall, it was clear that while greater flexibility had been implemented across the case study districts, this was predominantly at senior management level, with more variable degrees of discretion and autonomy for frontline staff. Furthermore, while there was still an emphasis on process, this appeared to be more aligned with meeting district and local office needs (claimant base and office resources) and more focused on outcomes, rather than driven by a national focus on inputs.

### Cast study: Office 4

#### What are they doing?

- JSA adviser teams re-organised from benefit type (JSA 18-24, JSA 25+) to stages of customer journey (1-12/13-25/26+ weeks).
- A continued structured approach towards support provision and conditionality for each stage of the customer journey:
  - Stage 1 (wks 1-12): Support limited to CV writing and basic skills training (where relevant);
  - Stage 2 (wks 13-25): Access to wider provision and increased attendance at Jobcentre Plus;
  - Stage 3 (wks 26+): Mandatory Work Activity (MWA) and daily contact with claimants.
- Introduction at stage 3 of a skills assessment group exercise for 18-24 to support job search.
- Cohort approach to prioritising customers, whereby advisers focus on claimants approaching specific off-flow targets (weeks 13, 26, and 52 of the claim).
- Increased flexibility to adviser diary management, with flexibility in booking different lengths of interviews.
- Case conferencing and ATM oversight used to manage adviser interactions.

#### What is underpinning this?

- Large size of customer base driving need for journey split and more structured approaches to adviser support
- Staged approach allows effective off-flow monitoring and strategic use of adviser resources at key critical points of the journey
- Focus on effective office systems and practices through experience of the Lean Offices pilot

### 2.2.2 How the Offer is delivered – Core interventions

Over the course of the evaluation, there was limited change as a result of the Offer on the following core interventions:

- New Jobseeker Interviews for JSA claimants;
- Jobsearch Review Meetings for JSA Claimants;
- Work Focused Interviews for ESA and IS claimants.

This is to be largely expected, as the Offer was not intended to modify the delivery of existing core interventions. However, a few changes were observed and these are outlined below.

### **New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) for JSA claimants**

As observed in the first year of the evaluation, the main change identified in the core interventions was the introduction of the split NJI. These were introduced in many offices to separate the conditionality and diagnostic elements so that they could be undertaken at different times, whilst still meeting the requirement to complete the conditionality element within a specified period. The diagnostic element could then be completed up to four weeks later, allowing more flexible use of frontline staff.

In the first year, all but one case study district had implemented split NJIs. The main change in the second year was that one district had reverted back to combining the two elements into a single NJI. This change was driven by the decision to undertake early diagnosis, which in turn was hoped to increase early off-flows. This reflects staff concerns raised in the first year that delaying the diagnostic element had potential implications for claimants not getting the support they needed early on, and therefore also on advisers' ability to meet their week 13 off-flow targets. There were also ongoing concerns about the quality of JSAs produced via split NJIs; specifically, that this resulted in duplication of work at the diagnostic stage because advisers did not trust that the Jobseeker's Agreements (JSAs) accurately reflected all the details and needs of their claimants.

*'We would all prefer I am sure that they all attended the New Jobseeker's Interview with the adviser they were going to see forever because a lot of the diagnostic interview is taken up with re-doing what happened the week before in the New Claims Interview.'*

(ATM)

In the first year of the Offer there was a general expectation that split NJIs would benefit off-flow targets, by allowing offices to refocus staff resources on diagnostic interviews later on in a claimants' journey and therefore not waste support on people who would naturally off-flow early in their claim. Over time this was recognised as being less beneficial, being offset by delays to identifying support that could be provided early on in a claim that might help to improve off-flows. In spite of this, there were still felt to be advantages with the split approach – specifically, that this allowed time to put the claimant at ease with the process, by separating the discussion about the details of their claim from focusing on how to get them back into work.

*'I think for the customer it's a better service, and I think if we can separate the issues, so by the time they come to the diagnostic, the benefit is on its way, or it is virtually done and dusted and it will be coming to them. So they've got rid of those worries then and we can just talk about actually how are we going to get you back into work?'*

(ATM)

### **Jobsearch Review Meetings for JSA claimants**

There was little change to this process directly as a result of the Offer (discussed in detail in *The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation*, Chapter 3). Where there had been developments, these related to altering the length of meetings in response to

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staff resourcing issues and the introduction of Universal Jobmatch<sup>6</sup>. For example, one office had reduced the length due to limited Assistant Adviser availability and increased pressure of rising claimant registers. This altered the interviews so that they were focused on basic conditionality checks of the JSAg with no time to discuss job search activities or job leads in detail. Similar changes were observed across a number of offices, signalling a move towards a more 'sign and go' process in which the focus was on conditionality rather than back-to-work support. Conversely, another office had increased the length of the Jobsearch Review meeting to allow more time for discussion of Universal Jobmatch, which was seen to take more time to go through with claimants.

*'Well we do ten minutes FJR [Jobsearch review] interviews whereas others maybe do shorter. What we felt is the ten minutes gave the Assistant Advisers a bit more time, a bit more of a quality intervention and I think especially with Universal Jobmatch it's essential, you know, what can you do in four minutes?'*

(ATM)

### Work Focused Interviews for ESA and IS claimants

There was ongoing uncertainty amongst staff about how to support ESA claimants. In the first year of the evaluation, it was clear that ESA advisers were taking a 'light touch' approach, involving fairly infrequent contact and minimal support (discussed in detail in *The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation*, Chapter 3). After the first year, changes were applied to the ESA customer journey meaning that claimants with a prognosis of 12 months or under were immediately referred to the Work Programme. This further limited the involvement of Jobcentre Plus advisers, who were now largely focused on providing support for those with a longer term prognosis; in theory those who were furthest from returning to work.

There had been limited change to these meetings over time, with the focus still on discussing achievable steps back into work. Since year one, some offices were looking at developing more structured journeys for ESA claimants to provide greater clarification and guidance to advisers on the type of support that they may offer.

*'The [ESA] group themselves work slightly separately to the JSA group, they may lose some of the [support] elements that other people are entitled to or could take up as part of the Offer and we've got to a stage where we are now revisiting our ESA journey and looking at what training is involved.'*

(ATM)

For IS claimants, the operation of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) was largely unchanged under the Offer. Changes cited by staff were limited to increased frequency of meetings for lone parents as they approached the end of their eligibility for claiming IS. Generally, staff felt it was difficult to implement increased flexibilities and support under the Offer because claimants were not required to have contact beyond the standard requirements for WFIs.

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<sup>6</sup> Universal Jobmatch is the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) online job posting and matching service for both employers/recruiters and job seekers introduced in November 2012. The service works by matching job seekers to jobs based on their skills and CV. Matching skills to jobs also allows job seekers, who might be unable to find jobs in their chosen profession, see what alternatives might be available in their local area.

### 2.2.3 How the Offer is delivered – Flexible adviser support

A key feature of the Offer is to allow greater flexibility around how adviser support is provided to claimants. For example, there is now greater freedom to vary adviser support, particularly in relation to frequency, duration and channel of contact with claimants. Decisions about how and when to provide adviser support, and indeed refer claimants to further support options, are intended to be determined through diagnosing claimants' individual needs.

Findings from the first year of the evaluation highlighted a number of issues affecting how flexible adviser support was applied in practice – specifically, these focused on the extent to which advisers were able to use their discretion to manage their caseloads, or whether offices adopted more structured approaches to diagnosing claimant needs and prioritising support for certain claimants. Over the course of the evaluation, these issues continued to drive approaches to flexible adviser support.

#### Diagnosing claimant needs

Claimant diagnosis takes place at the initial assessment of needs during NJI/New Joiner's Work Focused Interviews (NJWFIs) and through ongoing assessment during adviser interviews. Initially, it was expected that advisers would make use of the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT)<sup>7</sup> to identify claimant support needs. However, findings from the first year of the evaluation suggested that offices made only limited use of this tool, preferring instead to use more localised approaches.

*'I think that the [CAT] you know, had negative feedback from the advisers because they felt it was cumbersome in terms of using it within the interview and I think that what we've found is that there's been various different kinds of localised aide memoirs that people have pulled together, you know, a kind of checklist of things you want to make sure you've covered within your diagnostic interview or within a first follow up after that.'*

(CSOM)

A common approach observed in the first year was the 'RAG' categorisation, where claimants were identified as being either Red, Amber or Green, denoting the level of support needed based on adviser assessment of the complexity of their needs. Despite the use of such tools, staff suggested that many advisers were basing these decisions on their intuition, experience and knowledge, building on the rapport and relationship between claimant and adviser.

*'A lot of them just use their own skills and see what they think when they're speaking to the customer and looking at their experience and qualifications.'*

(ATM)

It was clear that by the second year of the evaluation, these less formalised approaches towards diagnosing claimant needs were becoming increasingly typical. Staff described even less explicit use of the CAT and other diagnosis tools; for example, in one office, advisers were given permission to 'drop' the CAT if they had achieved a personal adviser accreditation.

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<sup>7</sup> The CAT is a profiling tool used during advisory interviews to record the evidence about key attributes (such as skills) found to give customers the best chance of finding work.

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*'When we first looked at it, it was made mandatory that they use the CAT tool. I think most of them have kept it, but as they've earned their flexibility and they've got their certificate of accreditation, they can make the decisions of whether they drop it or not.'*

(CSOM)

*'Very limited [use of the CAT]. I mean, the advisers don't like it, and the majority of advisers have been advisers for quite a long period of time. And they know when they're interviewing a customer where their strengths or where their weaknesses are .... A lot of them feel that the system is not going to tell them a lot about the customer; it's about their face-to-face contact. I mean, sometimes it could just be that a customer comes in five minutes late for their interview all the time, and that triggers for them that it could maybe be an issue and when they discuss it, it may be because they've got childcare or caring responsibilities. No tool in the field can really diagnose a person's needs for employability as opposed to their actual contact by phone or by face-to-face with them.'*

(ATM)

However, senior staff raised concerns that an informal approach was reliant on advisers' variable skills and confidence in asking pertinent diagnostic questions of claimants. In particular, there were queries about whether advisers had the adequate skills and training to diagnose claimants' more complex or sensitive needs.

Perhaps in light of these concerns, a number of districts had developed more innovative approaches to diagnosing claimants' needs – for example, introducing group diagnostic sessions for JSA 18-24 (see Case study – Office 5), and two offices explicitly discussed the use of the Looking for Work questionnaire (a Jobcentre Plus diagnosis questionnaire). A further two offices had implemented structured skills and diagnosis pilots. One of these had introduced a skills assessment pilot at 6-8 weeks of the claimant journey, funded via the Skills Funding Agency (SFA). This involved a skills provider spending a day and a half with claimants to diagnose their needs and provide referrals to specific skills training and pre-gateway training which covered Universal Jobmatch job search (see Case study – Office 6).

*'As an adviser it is great for you because you know whether they've got any IT problems, ESOL, basic skills, anything else, whether they are going to be put on any training.'*

(Adviser)

Although this provided a very structured process of diagnosis for all claimants, it was seen as an expensive resource and advisers expressed concerns about the appropriateness of all referrals; in particular, whether this process might delay help for those who needed referral immediately, such as people with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) needs. A second office was taking part in a pilot where claimants had their job readiness diagnosed via an assessment tool which gave advisers more specific information to discuss relevant support options.

### Case study: Office 5

#### What are they doing?

- Limited change to delivery model and team structure – ongoing team approach to case-loading with individual PAs teamed up with two Assistant Advisers to share information and provide continuity for claimants.
- Running group diagnostic sessions for JSA 18-24 claimants and group sessions to discuss Work Programme referrals with claimants.
- Early IT training sessions for claimants to aid jobsearch.
- Increased flexibility encouraged at office level to give more adviser autonomy in setting the format and length of adviser meetings.

#### Why are they doing this?

- Group sessions were implemented to drive efficiency and speed up the new claims process.
- Open to explore new practices resulting from participation in the Local Autonomy Pilot and now Freedom and Flexibilities.

ESA advisers described a range of challenges to their ability to identify and support claimants' needs. One challenge was that claimants were often dealing with uncertainty around the results of their Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which meant that adviser meetings often focused on providing reassurance about the process rather than spending time discussing how best to support them. ESA advisers and senior managers also discussed the lack of support and training for staff to identify and support claimants with complex needs, especially related to mental health. Further guidance had been made available in year two of the Offer by Head Office, regarding advisers' support and diagnosis for claimants in the WRAG Group. However, advisers discussed limited awareness of this. Challenges were also raised around how to understand the support needs of former Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants, who tended to be particularly vulnerable claimants and less focused on looking for work. In particular, advisers felt this group commonly suffered from undiagnosed mental health issues, which made them more difficult to support.

*'It's been really difficult for everybody. I mean, the advisers are dealing with customers they never had to deal with before. A lot of the time we don't really feel that customers are on the appropriate benefit, and there seems to be a bit of conflict between what we see as being employable and what our Work Capability Assessment says as being employable, and the volume of customers with mental health problems is astronomical and, to be honest, we're not really geared to deal with these customers.'*

(ATM)

### Claimant prioritisation

Since the introduction of the Offer, increased flexibility around frequency, duration and channel of contact with claimants appeared to result in different approaches to prioritising adviser support for certain claimants. In particular, over the course of the evaluation there was increasingly widespread use of the 'cohort' management approach to determine the nature and intensity of adviser contact. Managers largely discussed this approach as a way

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to keep track of where claimants were in relation to key off-flow targets and how this data might be used to help focus adviser time in order to improve off-flows. For example, advisers would be told to focus their time and resources on claimants who were approaching key off-flow markers.

*'What we do is we use coloured slips to identify whether the customer needs some follow-up support. Whether a customer needs a diagnostic interview or whether the customer's in one of our key cohorts and they need some intensive support.'*

(CSOM)

Advisers discussed practical barriers to this new approach, including increased administration time and applying more structured approaches to adviser support that undermined adviser discretion about how best to support claimants.

The Offer had increased advisers' ability to vary the **channel of contact** through the additional use of telephone calls and home visits, and this move towards greater tailoring of format appeared to have increased over time. By the second year of the evaluation there was greater use of remote contact, not only by telephone, but also email and text. This variety of contact was driven not only by advisers wanting to introduce greater personalisation and innovation within the modes of communication they used, but also reflected the need to efficiently manage limited resource available for face-face appointments.

*'I think as the years develop, approaches have changed, there is a lot more telephone contact, there is even email contact. Universal Jobmatch gives us a further option there to send job details specifically targeted at individuals. I think my staff have become a bit more adept at understanding what support each person needs – we flexed the way that people sign on, we have got offices who run without appointments and so they can target individuals on any particular day, our signing clerks are now advisers and are working much more closely together, we have done a lot more case conferencing and there's just a far bigger focus on these kind of elements, so yes I would say that the method of contact now varies quite substantially, but I think all that has strengthened the focus and the quality of that contact greatly in the last year.'*

(CSOM)

There were additional developments around **duration of contact** with claimants. Advisers had been encouraged to move away from standard appointment slots of 40 minutes, however, ongoing use of structured diary systems in some offices made advisers reliant on prebooked appointment slots. Some offices had moved further towards flexible diary management and booking slots of varied durations and format; for example, by email and telephone contact – which had the benefit of allowing more cost-effective use of staff time.

*'I think the biggest way we changed the way we work is our levels of flexibilities. Whereas everything used to be notified appointment in 2 weeks' time and was very regimented, I think the difference now is that ... more of our Jobseeker support is conducted by phone or through digital channels, through Universal Jobmatch, by email ... Simply because of lack of resources we are pulling a lot of our emphasis away from face-to-face conversations.'*

(Adviser)

## Cast study: Office 6

### What are they doing?

- Ongoing use of team structure split by benefit type across JSA 18-24 and 25+ but IS advisers are now integrated within mainstream JSA 25+ teams.
- A new Skills Conditionality pilot (SFA funded) providing 1.5 days of customer diagnosis.
- Implementation of a district-led cohort management system.
- Introduction of IADs with two advisers (part-time) allocated to supervise.
- The appointment of cultural customer autonomy managers who act as relationship managers with employers and providers.

### Why are they doing this?

- Changes to team structure since policy change to IS and age of the youngest child entitlement.
- District introduced cohort monitoring system to help increase off-flow performance.

Overall, by the second year of the evaluation it was apparent that offices had embraced the flexibility now permitted in deciding how adviser support was applied. However, this was not to say that managers were comfortable with allowing advisers to make these decisions themselves. Indeed, in practice there was variation in the extent to which advisers were able to use their discretion to manage their own caseloads and make decisions about prioritising and diagnosing claimants. The first year of the evaluation highlighted that these variations were underpinned by three factors – how far flexibility had been devolved, the experience and skills of individual advisers, and the resources available to them.

As previously discussed there was variation in **how far flexibility had been devolved**. This ranged from the use of structured approaches to managing adviser caseloads in some offices, to allowing advisers to make decisions about how best to support claimants, and using case conferencing and reviews to monitor activity and identify best practice. The increased use of cohort management systems suggests that offices are now using structured flexibility with the intention to best manage caseloads to meet off-flow targets.

*‘Since you were last here there has been the tracking tool implemented to make it easier for an adviser to concentrate on individuals who fall into a certain cohort, you know, to manage the caseloads better. Rather than being diary-led it’s either claimant-led and tracker-led.’*

(Adviser)

*‘We were hoping that if we delivered our journey, our customers would naturally flow off, but to actually hit our targets we have got to be more focused on making sure we follow that customer through and make sure we know when they ought to be gone.’*

(CSOM)

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**Advisers' experience and skills** continued to influence the extent to which they were able to incorporate flexibility within their role; particularly their ability to adapt from previous process-driven approaches to more tailored support. Two main factors underpinning variations in ability and skills were identified, including: the length of time in role and the extent to which process-driven practices were engrained; and, whether advisers had experience of working under less structured support, such as the process for IS and former IB and the New Deal initiatives which were seen to have similar principles of greater flexibility.

**The resources available to advisers** were also an additional factor, whereby the perceived impact of training and support could be constrained by limitations around full diaries and size of caseloads. Throughout the two years of implementation, offices discussed how diary slots had continued to be booked in advance which created problems in arranging appointments flexibly. Generally, managers spoke of limited ongoing training focused on adviser flexibility although some offices had implemented this through internal training and communications. One office had regular structured training which included the use of behavioural insight techniques, confidence building, brokering skills and support training around key skills such as CV writing.

### **2.2.4 How the Offer is delivered – flexible menu of back-to-work support**

The flexible menu of support was seen by staff as offering a wide range of programmes that could support greater personalised provision. The main change appreciated by advisers was the introduction of fewer restrictions on what stage in a claimant's journey different types of support were available. However, the first year of the evaluation identified that there were a number of challenges in how advisers were able to refer claimants and how the support was provided. These included the following:

- Limited adviser knowledge of and confidence in the provision available.
- Complicated and slow processes for accessing funding for non-contracted provision.
- Challenges in purchasing services from other organisations.
- Lack of awareness and availability of local provision, including long waiting lists.
- Limited feedback about what types of support were successful in order to confidently refer claimants.
- Concerns about the lack of appropriate provision related to health and local lone parent services.

By the second year of the evaluation, there was a sense that the flexible menu of support had improved, both in terms of becoming more embedded in advisers' awareness, and in the operation and delivery of provision. Typically, advisers felt they had sufficient tools to work with the majority of their claimants. However, they identified a few remaining challenges; specifically around support available for claimants with complex needs, limited access to non-contracted provision, and the need for more intensive options for training and further education, particularly for younger claimants (explored in more detail below).

### **The process of referral to support**

As observed in the first year of the evaluation, offices used a number of different approaches to raise staff awareness of support options. These included the use of the District Provision

Tool (DPT) and eBoards<sup>8</sup>, provider presentations, weekly newsletters and ad hoc desk drops (as discussed in the first year evaluation report). Some advisers also discussed having a good knowledge of what was available through working closely with providers over the years. However, managers expressed concerns that these relationships could lead to complacency, with advisers not exploring other support options which could be more suitable for their claimants' needs.

Over the course of the evaluation, managers felt that adviser knowledge and awareness of the range of support options had improved. This was explained not only in relation to the efforts outlined above, but also a stronger focus on staff training and sharing of information within and across offices, and as a result of increased efforts to co-ordinate provision. For example, there appeared to have been increased investment across the case study districts to undertake engagement work with providers and employers, and to proactively monitor support and feed this back to advisers.

*'We now have a Provision Liaison Adviser and she's been a useful link between all the providers and was able to streamline exactly what was on LMS [Labour Market System] at that time, because a lot of the courses their actual content had been changed but you know we had not updated our record so some of the things we thought we were sending customers on wasn't actually what they were receiving, so that's been a very valuable process.'*

(ATM)

Advisers themselves described having greater confidence in using the full range of support. In part this related to perceived improvements with the accuracy of information provided via the DPT, although there was still fairly variable use of this tool, with some advisers describing greater reliance on their own knowledge and experience.

Improvements to the referral process were also reported by staff, including more streamlined approaches making use of online and phone referrals, and increased tracking of claimant attendance.

The following section outlines staff views about the **implementation and delivery of specific elements of the flexible menu of support**. It is important to note that the aim of the evaluation was not to provide a comprehensive assessment of individual support measures. Rather, this section focuses on those elements which were seen to have interacted with and developed over the course of the Offer.

**Get Britain Working measures (GBW):** There was a sense that GBW had introduced additional (rather than merely rebranded) provision, particularly with the implementation of sector-based work academies and Work Together. Another benefit from GBW was that in general these measures could be accessed more readily than other provision, with fewer time restrictions.

There were several factors impacting on the use of GBW as a whole. In particular, staff perceptions of the variable quality of providers and provision meant they were not always convinced that the support would meet the needs of their claimants. One district discussed pressure to increase referrals to GBW measures due to what they perceived to be district-

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<sup>8</sup> eBoards were observed in several offices; essentially, these are local intranets providing advisers with information about the latest job opportunities, upcoming events, and new support options.

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level targets to show improved use and engagement, particularly the use of work experience and sector-based work academies.

Over the second year of the evaluation, a number of developments were noted in relation to some of the measures which fall under the GBW banner.

- **Work experience:** It was felt that there had been improvements in diversifying the range of employers offering placements. This had resulted in greater adviser confidence in the matching and relevance of placements for their claimants. Staff also discussed improved feedback and contact with providers, facilitated by greater employment engagement activity by specific employer engagement staff. It was felt that improvements to work experience were reflective of an increased focus on young people – driven by the implementation of the Youth Contract and other youth-focused support (offered within the devolved nations, such as the Careers Wales and Skills Development Scotland). In spite of these developments, there were varied perceptions of the effectiveness of work experience. Some offices highlighted success stories of work experience placements (including sector-based work academies) improving job skills and employability, whereas others questioned whether claimants' experiences of the support had a direct impact on improving off-flow levels. A separate evaluation of the impact of work experience is currently being undertaken by DWP which provides specific analysis on impact<sup>9</sup>.

*'I know that our referral numbers for sector-based work academies and work experience are really high. We know we fill our places all the time but that doesn't translate into off-flow, so is the Offer actually the right thing for those customers because it is not leading them to off-flow?'*

(ATM)

- **New Enterprise Allowance (NEA)/Enterprise Clubs:** In the first year of the evaluation, NEA and Enterprise Clubs were both felt to have suffered from slow take up. Staff suggested that this was due to these measures not being available until six months into a claim. Take up was reported to have increased over the second year of the evaluation, and this was directly linked to changes that made both options available from day one of a claim. Some offices had also given NEA providers increased access and visibility within the Jobcentre Plus office; for example, through regular information stands and providing a room once a week for appointments with claimants.
- **Sector-based work academies:** Take up of this option was also fairly slow during the first year of the evaluation, which was explained by staff as being due to difficulties securing and establishing relationships with employers, in turn leading to long waiting lists and in some cases training being arranged with no work placement and no guaranteed job interview. Over the course of the evaluation, availability of placements increased as improvements in districts' engagement with employers were made. Initial concerns about a lack of diversity of placements on offer were largely dealt with over time, and advisers became increasingly confident that there was a sufficient range of opportunities available. However, this was strongly linked to availability in the local labour market, and some offices continued to voice concerns about limited placements. Overall, sector-based work academies were valued by staff because of the potential high rates of off-flows linked to the guarantee of an employer interview.

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<sup>9</sup> DWP is currently undertaking an impact assessment of work experience. Early findings were published in April 2012. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/222943/early\\_impacts\\_of\\_work\\_experience.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/222943/early_impacts_of_work_experience.pdf)

*'With sector-based work academy there's a job at the end of it. I know if I send eight people, probably eight people to six people are going to get a job out of it. So I know now that probably success-wise I'll get more out of sector-based work academy.'*

(ATM)

In addition to the GBW measures, the evaluation explored staff views about a number of other support options:

**Flexible Support Fund (FSF):** FSF was seen as the most effective support for claimants who needed help to overcome a single barrier; for example, clothing for interviews, transport costs, vocational certification. Therefore, it was typically used as a final push into employment. Although FSF gave greater flexibility to advisers to use a budget to spend on claimants, in the first year of the evaluation managers discussed its widespread underuse. This underuse was explained in a number of ways: a perceived lack of flexibility about what the funds could be spent on; advisers lacking confidence in making decisions about spending money; and perceptions of a slow and complex central procurement process. Over the course of the evaluation, there were notable changes to advisers' confidence in using FSF and in their greater awareness of the range of ways it could be used to respond to claimants' needs. There was also a shift in how managers discussed its use – with offices taking a more strategic approach, particularly in the use of low value procurement (LVP) to source additional provision to meet specific needs of the local area and claimant base. For example, one district had used the funding to procure ESOL provision, whilst another district had used funding for claimant access to a specialist health consultation support helpline, introduced specifically for former IB claimants.

*'One of the pieces of provision we have put in place through our Flexible Support Fund is a telephone support system from an NHS aligned organisation and they do telephone consultations with people we refer to them, and their job is not to cure people or to diagnose their illness or anything like that, but they are there to provide coping mechanisms and they have had very good feedback about the quality of that intervention and the help it is providing.'*

(District Manager)

However, the central procurement process for LVP was still viewed as being long and onerous, often with a lack of locally-based approved providers once the funding went out to tender.

*'LVP is still a bit cumbersome but better. They are working on that, at making it quicker for the decisions.'*

(CSOM)

In the Scottish case study district there had been less of a reliance on FSF because of the availability of Individual Learning Accounts (via Skills Development Scotland), which claimants could be granted for training such as health and safety, and food hygiene.

**Support Contract:** The Support Contract was often offered according to adviser discretion rather than as a mandatory form of support. There were two main factors impacting on its use: first, the inflexibility of the modular format, which meant it was hard to book places for claimants when required; and second, the perceived variation in quality of the provision. These challenges continued to be cited across both years of the evaluation, with continued issues concerning availability of spaces, timing of training and quality of providers. There was also discussion of the loss of specialist provision in some districts including specific support for 50+ claimants.

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**Work Programme:** Views of the Work Programme were only lightly touched upon during staff interviews and were discussed solely in relation to the referral process. Work Programme referrals are mandatory at the end of the claimant's journey with Jobcentre Plus and were discussed with claimants prior to this. During the first year of the evaluation it was clear that one of the main factors impacting on Work Programme referrals was advisers' lack of understanding about what it involved, compounded by limited contact between Jobcentre Plus staff and Work Programme providers. Over the course of the evaluation, relationships appeared to improve. In part, this was facilitated by regular meetings, bi-monthly case conferencing (covering discussions about the needs of specific claimants who had been referred) and provider presentations to Jobcentre Plus advisers. There had also been a shift towards more widespread use of warm handovers, where advisers made an initial call to the provider and handed the phone to the claimant to discuss their referral.

Although the flexible menu of support was generally viewed as providing a good range of support options, there were still a number of **significant gaps perceived in support available for specific types of claimants**, particularly relating to provision around ESOL, basic numeracy/literacy, tailored 50+ support and information and communications technology (ICT) skills.

*'It's the basic things that we need, people who struggle with switching a computer on or how to construct a basic letter.'*

(Adviser)

*'I think a lot of advisers feel that the 50+ age group are disadvantaged ... Why should it just be the 18-24 focus? I know we are looking to the future, but it can be absolutely devastating for somebody in midlife to find themselves unemployed and they need to retrain and move into a different work area of work.'*

(ATM)

*'We have a huge number of people here with English as a second language and we still haven't got any ESOL. It's a massive battle, if I am honest, with colleges to try and get the ESOL in.'*

(Adviser)

Staff also discussed a lack of health-related support, which was often raised in relation to limited places available to take part in Work Choice. A number of districts specifically discussed the reduction in options since the closure of Remploy sites for disabled people. In some districts there had been moves to tackle this by providing additional support for ESA claimants; for example, setting up a local structured programme of work experience. Beyond ESA claimants, staff discussed the need for more widespread access to provision for mental health conditions and related issues, including problems with self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

Also, despite improvements in feedback and relationships with support providers, there were ongoing concerns about the lack of information on the impact of support measures. Managers wanted stronger evidence and monitoring of the effectiveness of support to further help them plan their approaches in offering a flexible menu of support.

## 2.3 Wider changes influencing delivery of the Offer

Since the implementation of the Offer in April 2011, there have been a number of wider changes which have appeared to impact on the delivery of the Offer. These included the implementation of national initiatives affecting working practices within Jobcentre Plus – such as the new sanctions regime, the digital agenda, the Youth Contract, and expansion of Freedom and Flexibilities. In addition, offices were strongly focused on upcoming changes to welfare provision through the introduction of Universal Credit (and other welfare reforms), and the impact of claimants returning from the Work Programme. This next section considers how these developments have interacted with the Offer.

### 2.3.1 Freedom and Flexibilities

Freedom and Flexibilities developed from the Delegated Flexibilities and Local Autonomy pilots. It represents a move away from the Standard Operating Model and was expected to provide greater responsibility at local level for offices to decide how best to support claimants.

In general, staff found it difficult to separate the impact of Freedom and Flexibilities from the Offer, particularly for districts who had been part of a Local Autonomy pilot. The expansion of the autonomy pilots had, in the most part, led to increased office discretion and flexibility to make changes in relation to local conditions. This included, for example, implementing internal Youth Contract sessions and new practices around formats of contact and diary management. Similar to the Offer, the extent to which flexibility had been devolved was variable and dependent on decisions made at district and Customer Service Operations Manager (CSOM) level. The case study offices included examples where changes to working practices had been made at a frontline level, and contrasted with other offices who felt that the opportunities of Freedom and Flexibilities had not been opened up to them because of decisions at district level. This was acknowledged by one District Manager who claimed that a more structured process was required for larger offices because of the size and complexity of their claimant bases.

*‘There’s a lot of offices that have been allowed to have some sort of pilots to deliver monthly signing and there seems to be a lot of innovation going on and we are allowed to go look and see but are not allowed to touch. And this is where you get slightly frustrated where you think well actually we could benefit from that.’*

(CSOM)

### 2.3.2 New sanctions regime

The new sanctions regime was introduced in October 2012, introducing fixed period sanctions with the intention of aligning it more to the sanction regime planned for Universal Credit from 2013. Advisers typically had a good awareness of the changes and associated the implementation of the new regime with a wider cultural shift towards tougher conditionality and stronger challenging of claimants to ensure that they were meeting the conditions of their JSAg. Advisers discussed recent moves to increase the number and type of ‘actively seeking work’ actions within the JSAg, moving away from the traditional approach which looked for compliance within the minimum standards of three steps a week to more tailored conditions based on reasonable expectations to find work.

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*'We've also gone into a little bit more of a challenge agenda ... making sure they are meeting the requirements of benefit, they are looking at work, and getting them to take more activities to look for work which will be supporting the off-flow agenda.'*

(ATM)

Advisers generally supported the move to tougher conditionality but perceived that the level of sanctioning was not always appropriate for certain claimants. There was a sense that this could adversely affect claimants in areas with limited job market opportunities and restricted accessibility to the internet. For example, claimants living in rural locations were seen as having greater barriers to conducting online job search and using Universal Jobmatch, yet would still be expected to meet certain requirements. Furthermore, some staff felt that vulnerable claimants, such as those suffering from mental health problems, were more likely to face difficulties meeting conditionality and were more likely to be affected by the tougher sanctions. In this context a general need for greater discretion around the conditions for sanctioning was highlighted.

*'[Former IB claimants] are hugely difficult for us to deal with in the JSA journey. They can become suddenly vulnerable and we've got this increased pressure for stricter benefit regime and it's very easy for them to get caught up in a sanction for 26 week ... It's the easiest thing in the world for people with mental illness to not look for work for a couple of weeks.'*

(ATM)

It was too early to understand the full impact of the introduction of the new sanctions regime on the delivery of the Offer, however, there was an initial perception in some offices that it was influencing claimants to sign off the register, especially JSA 18-24 claimants.

### 2.3.3 Digital agenda

Across the districts, staff discussed a greater focus on a digital approach to working practices within Jobcentre Plus. Offices had seen a shift towards increased use of ICT for both the contact and support offered to claimants. This had been encouraged by national initiatives such as Universal Jobmatch and innovation at both district and office level. The research team observed physical changes within offices over the course of the evaluation, with the introduction of IADs. Advisers also discussed greater use of email contact and social media alerts through Twitter. One office outlined future plans to implement free wireless connection to enable claimants to job search using their own devices whilst in the Jobcentre Plus office. However, there were some concerns that increased digitalisation could divert resources from face-to-face contact and meetings with claimants.

Universal Jobmatch was a key example of the increased focus on digital methods. The principle of Universal Jobmatch was broadly supported by advisers, although there were acknowledged issues around its implementation, particularly in situations where staff and claimants had limited ICT skills. Training and ongoing support was not always viewed as sufficient. For advisers, this had been delivered via online e-training which caused problems for people who were not already ICT competent. More broadly, the use of online and remote training for wider and national changes was seen as less effective in engaging staff and developing new skills, in contrast to more personalised approaches provided within offices. Overall, the roll out of Universal Jobmatch training was seen to be fairly typical of other national programmes – being communicated too close to the time of its introduction, with too little time between managers being informed and the need to communicate with staff before implementation.

Advisers felt that there had also been little support to prepare claimants for the change. Some offices had introduced additional training through assisted sessions using IADs. One district decided to provide additional support for claimants through the development of a digital journey, including a FSF-funded 'IT skills for work' training, which included an introduction to the use of IADs, CV writing and Universal Jobmatch.

### 2.3.4 Youth Contract

The Youth Contract was launched in April 2012 and provides additional Jobcentre Plus support for unemployed young people aged 18 to 24. Young people can have more contact with Jobcentre Plus; specifically, contact on a weekly basis from day one of claiming JSA, and access to a named adviser who deals with the claimant throughout their claim and refers them to support services. Its introduction was intended to provide a greater focus on support for young people through the provision of greater resource allocation and the move in some offices to dedicated teams.

Staff discussed how the introduction of the Youth Contract had led to increased use of a range of contact formats, including email, text and phone calls. There was also a perception that this had led to increased off-flows for this claimant group.

*'I think [JSA 18-24 claimants] get a lot more attention from the advisers. We are seeing them more regularly, we are using things like work experience, apprenticeships .... They have more contact with their advisers via email as well as telephone interviews.'*

(ATM)

However, there were concerns that the initiative had introduced a more structured and procedural approach which was time-consuming and rigid; for example, requiring weekly contact. There was also apprehension regarding the amount of focus on this claimant group and unease that this may have diverted resources away from other JSA claimant teams and increased pressure on adviser caseloads. A full evaluation of the Youth Contract is currently being undertaken which provides comprehensive analysis of its implementation and delivery<sup>10</sup>.

### 2.3.5 Universal Credit

Offices were beginning to anticipate the impact of future changes to welfare provision, one of which was the introduction of Universal Credit<sup>11</sup>. Universal Credit involves the move to simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single integrated payment. Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs will be integrated in the new benefit and will remove the need to claim different means-tested benefits from different agencies.

There was a general feeling of uncertainty about the potential impact of Universal Credit on the support needs of claimants and the implications for advisers' roles. Some offices had particular concerns regarding how Universal Credit would work for claimants with multiple and complex needs who were currently supported via a number of agencies.

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<sup>10</sup> A full synthesis evaluation report is due for publication in 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Universal Credit was introduced on 29 April 2013 in selected areas of Greater Manchester and Cheshire. It is being gradually rolled out to the rest of the UK from October 2013 and will be completed by 2017.

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*'I think when we go to Universal Credit and look at the localised support services we need to get greater case conferencing between the agencies on the minority of customers who have the biggest issues .... They don't have one issue; they have several, so we need to get better at that kind of more complex area. I think we are pretty good now at the single issue customer and being able to find a way through that, but it is those with the more complex needs that we need to get smarter at.'*

(District Manager)

Offices had undertaken some preparation in advance; for example, working with local authorities to identify affected claimants and providing training on the changes for frontline Jobcentre Plus staff. However, this was at a very early stage of development.

### 2.3.6 Work Programme returners

Offices were also thinking about the imminent return (in June 2013) of the first cohort of claimants who had completed two years on the Work Programme. There was apprehension around how Jobcentre Plus could best support claimants who were likely to be the hardest to help (i.e. those with complex and/or multiple needs). At the time of the interviews (February to March 2013) Jobcentre Plus were expecting guidance from DWP on this area. Some offices had started to put plans in place for how they would support these claimants, including scoping local provision. One approach described by staff was working with providers to identify who was returning and what support they were likely to need. Again, this was at a very early stage of development.

## 2.4 Perceived impact of the Offer

In general, the Offer was viewed as being part of a positive shift for both staff and claimants. From a manager's perspective, it was felt that the Offer had moved working practices in the right direction towards increased tailoring for claimants.

*'The actual JCP [Jobcentre Plus] Offer is brilliant. It allows us to do what we need to do; we just want more of it.'*

(District Manager)

*'When I joined the Department, we were in the staged approach to dealing with customers .... whereas now, I don't think you could find two customers in our office who have the same journey. Everybody is really dealt with differently, and it's provided a more tailored approach, and I think that's why now the customers are starting to see jobcentre advisers as support.'*

(ATM)

The Offer had, in conjunction with wider changes, provided greater managerial flexibility within districts and local offices. However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, there remained variations in the extent to which decisions and approaches were determined at national, district and office level.

Managers felt that there had been a shift towards greater flexibility in the way advisers support claimants, which had been further supported by the increased options available through the flexible menu of support. This was associated with increased job satisfaction for

frontline staff; which was supported by reported improvements in staff surveys and ATM's observing greater adviser confidence. However, as noted previously, this did not necessarily correlate with increased adviser discretion, which could be constrained by district and office delivery models.

There also remained challenges around availability of bespoke and personalised support for specific groups of claimants and those with complex needs. It was felt that there was still limited flexibility in implementing new provision at a local level because of central procurement procedures and the need for district approval for the budget and bidding process.

*'I think as far as it goes we are quite a long way further along [providing personalised support] than we were 12 months ago. But customers are individuals and they do have a very wide range of issues and problems and addressing those is not always straightforward and not always something we can do.'*

(ATM)

Generally, the Offer was thought to have had a positive effect on off-flows. This was related to greater managerial flexibility to make decisions about how best to drive off-flow through a combination of diagnosis of claimant needs and flexible approaches to tailoring support.

*'I think the key successes are that we've been able to keep the pace and embed change within an organisation that is constantly dealing with change and we've also been able to, I think, improve our services to our claimants and that is evident through our success and improvements with looking at [off-flow] rates of people returning into employment.'*

(CSOM)

However, some offices felt the level of flexibility had been constrained by a greater push at district level in implementing measures and directives to meet targets. These had included district-wide initiatives (and in some cases, cohort management approaches) and district-level expectations about referrals to key support provision.

At an adviser level, there were mixed views on what they thought the impact of the Offer had been, which were linked to whether they felt they had greater autonomy in practice, appropriate levels of resources, and how easily they had found it to adapt to a new culture of change and new initiatives which affected the way they worked. There was a general sense that advisers now had more scope to use their skills and judgement and that there was greater trust in their professionalism by managers within Jobcentre Plus. However, as discussed previously, there were still issues around advisers adapting to this new style of working.

There was a feeling that offices and districts were now better at sharing best practice both across and within districts, and that staff were receiving increased employer and provider feedback and engagement. However, staff at all levels described a sense of constant change through both national initiatives and offices/districts rolling out new ways of working. There was an indication that this continual innovation was leading to confusion and uncertainty, particularly for frontline staff. Managers called for the introduction of robust piloting of new approaches and greater evidence to understand how new initiatives and policy could work in different local settings.

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*'I think I would really like to see policy and operations much more closely entwined. We have seen evidence recently where if we can understand how the policy will work, we can see if it will actually work on the ground.'*

(District Manager)

*'We never do anything long enough to know exactly what the impact of something is .... We never get to the stage in the Department of knowing whether it is the customer journey, whether it is us positively impacting on what's happening or actually would that person would have gone off anyway, if we hadn't have had that interaction.'*

(CSOM)

Finally, staff typically felt that the Offer had had a positive impact on claimants. There was now greater clarity of expectations on claimants and a more proactive approach to engagement, which staff felt had been received well by claimants. As a result of increased case-loading and more flexible access to support, it was felt that claimants would acknowledge a more personalised approach and would feel more 'listened too' rather than just being processed through the system. There was also anecdotal evidence of improvements to customer satisfaction via informal feedback and evidence from Jobcentre Plus satisfaction surveys. Despite this, there was an overall sense that the Offer (and particularly the flexible menu of support) was currently geared more towards JSA, particularly 18-24 year olds, with less emphasis on ESA claimants and people with more complex needs.

## 2.5 Summary

As the Offer embedded over time, ongoing changes and developments to working practices highlighted that flexibility had been embraced across the case study offices. Variations in how the Offer was being delivered within and between districts were identified in the first year, and these continued to evolve over the second year. In particular, it was clear that senior managers were making the most of the increased flexibility to experiment with different ways of structuring support that provide the best outcomes. This resulted in different delivery models, comprising a range of approaches that were either more or less structured for frontline staff. Over time, there appeared to be a slight shift in favour of more structured approaches within offices, underpinned by a stronger emphasis on monitoring claimant progress across the journey and focusing support at key off-flow milestones.

Alongside the increased variation in delivery of the Offer, it was clear that districts had become increasingly focused on understanding and disseminating best practice. Managers cited a number of mechanisms for learning from the numerous pilots and initiatives taking place across the case study districts, although in practice this did not always filter down to frontline staff. There were also ongoing concerns about how well advisers were adapting to new ways of working, and in particular how they were coping with the sense of continual change and evolution of working practices. In particular, staff sought greater evidence to understand how and why practices could be made to work within local settings.

There were limited changes to the way offices delivered core interventions across the two years of the evaluation of the Offer. Any developments, such as changes to handling new claims or timings of core interventions, were predominantly associated with making the best use of staff time and resources to maximise off-flows.

One of the key areas of change highlighted by staff was the effect of the Offer on flexible adviser support. The multiple delivery models outlined in this chapter suggest that this is a key area where managers have been able to tailor provision in order to meet off-flow targets. As noted above, this resulted in approaches that were more or less structured, and involved greater or lesser degrees of adviser discretion. Whilst flexibility around format and duration of meetings continued to increase across offices and districts, decisions around claimant prioritisation were increasingly driven by the widespread use of cohort management tools to determine the nature and intensity of adviser contact. Variations in how flexibility had devolved were additionally influenced by the skills and experience of advisers and resources available to advisers (for example, diary management).

The flexible menu of support provided a wide range of programmes to support more personalised provision. Staff identified the main benefit of the new menu as being the reduction in restrictions around when claimants were eligible for different types of support. Over the course of the evaluation, the flexible menu of support became more strongly embedded in advisers' awareness and improvements were noted in relation to the delivery and operation of key support options. However, there remained a number of significant gaps in provision, particularly for claimants with complex and/or multiple needs (for example, ESOL basic numeracy/literacy, tailored 50+ support and ICT skills) and limited access to non-contracted provision.

In addition to the individual elements of the Offer, it was clear that the work of Jobcentre Plus offices was influenced by a number of wider national initiatives, including the new sanctions regime, the digital agenda, the Youth Contract and expansion of Freedom and Flexibilities. In addition, offices were beginning to look to the impact of future changes to welfare provision and the return of the first cohort of claimants who had completed the Work Programme. Reactions to these initiatives tended to involve further development and evolution of day-to-day working practices, and in many cases the introduction of greater structure at either district or office level in terms of how advisers handle affected claimants.

Overall, the Offer was viewed by staff as a positive shift towards greater flexibility and tailoring of support for claimants. It was assumed that the Offer had had a positive effect on off-flows, by allowing greater managerial freedom to make decisions about how best to structure support within a local context. However, there remained concerns that the extent to which flexibility had been devolved was constrained by a greater push at district levels in implementing measures and directives to meet a range of targets or expectations (for example, off-flows and referrals to key support provision). There were also ongoing concerns that the Offer placed an emphasis on mainstream JSA claimants to the detriment of more vulnerable groups, such as ESA claimants and people with more complex needs.

## 3 The claimant experience of the Offer

This chapter presents Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants' perspective of the Offer, as well as their destinations and attitudes following their experience of the Offer. The findings are largely derived from a longitudinal national survey of new claimants, and supplemented by the inclusion of findings from qualitative research with claimants at various stages of their journey through the Offer.

The chapter begins by looking at claimants who were still on the same benefit 12 months after making their claim as well as the circumstances of those who off-flowed into employment or other destinations after a period of participating in the Offer. It explores the attitudes around work that claimants had when they made their claim and measures any attitudinal change after time spent on the Offer. The chapter then moves on to describe the various elements of support that claimants were presented with to assist them in moving closer to work, claimants' take-up of support measures throughout their claim, and their retrospective views of the assistance they received.

### 3.1 Proportions remaining on their claim or off-flowing

The survey collected details of the employment or benefit status of claimants at both the initial and second interviews. Where claimants had off-flowed from benefit the survey looked at whether this was into work or another destination. We know that the majority of new JSA claimants move off JSA quickly, most within three months of making their claim<sup>12</sup>. However, less is known about the destinations that JSA claimants move to, the rate that ESA claimants leave ESA or their destination when they do<sup>13</sup>.

Table 3.1 divides claimants who took part in the Jobcentre Plus Offer survey into those who were still claiming the same benefit and those who were not. The table shows that three-quarters of JSA claimants (76 per cent) who initiated their claim in March 2012 off-flowed into work or another destination at some point in the subsequent year, but only slightly over a quarter of ESA claimants in the 12-month prognosis Work Related Activity Category Group (WRAG) (28 per cent) off-flowed in the year following their New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI).

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<sup>12</sup> Labour market data is available on NOMIS: <http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/>. The following Parliamentary Answer gives estimates for JSA off-flow rates from mid-2010 until early 2012: <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-03-14b.97621.h>

<sup>13</sup> A recent survey of destinations of benefit leavers was carried out for DWP 'Destinations of Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Employment and Support Allowance Leavers 2011', Adams L et al, DWP Research Report No 791, 2012. This found a slightly lower proportion of JSA leavers off-flowing into work and a higher proportion of ESA claimants moving into work than the destinations found through the Jobcentre Plus Offer survey. The two surveys were carried out through different methodologies, and at different time periods, which may help to explain any variation.

**Table 3.1 Destinations**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
<b>Still on same claim</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>
On Work Programme	10	29	17
Not on Work Programme	14	44	56
<b>Off-flowed</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
Into work	59	10	4
Not into work	17	18	24

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,069); all ESA claimants looking for work (104); all ESA claimants not looking for work (575)*

The most common destination for JSA claimants who completed their claim was into employment (59 per cent), whereas ESA claimants were more likely to off-flow elsewhere, such as into training.

### 3.1.1 Claimants still on the same claim

At the time of the final survey interviews, approximately a year after claimants attended their New Jobseeker’s Interview (NJI) or NJWFI, around a quarter of JSA claimants (24 per cent) and over seven in ten ESA claimants (72 per cent) were still in receipt of the same benefit they originally claimed over 12 months earlier. Of those, only a minority were on the Work Programme: this was true of 10 per cent of all JSA claimants, equating to 40 per cent of those who might have been expected to be referred by that stage of their claim. It also applied to 17 per cent of ESA claimants who were not actively searching for work at the start of their claim, and 29 per cent of ESA claimants who were looking for work.

### Analysis of JSA claimants

Amongst JSA claimants, several demographic characteristics were associated with a greater likelihood of remaining on benefit for longer (Table 3.2). JSA claimants with a mental or physical health condition were more likely (38 per cent and 37 per cent, respectively) than those without one of those conditions (23 per cent each) to still be in receipt of the same benefit. Moreover, disadvantaged claimants<sup>14</sup> had a higher tendency to remain on the same claim (35 per cent) than other claimants (20 per cent).

However, the claimants most likely to remain on the same claim were those who agreed in the first interview that *‘the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous’* (50 per cent, compared with 27 per cent who disagreed). Remaining on the same claim was also very common amongst claimants who lacked any formal qualifications (40 per cent, compared with 23 per cent of claimants with some qualifications), with the likelihood of continuing to claim falling as educational level increased.

<sup>14</sup> JSA claimants are categorised as ‘disadvantaged’ if they have a long-term health problem or disability, if they are carers, ex-offenders or homeless, if they revealed a drug or alcohol dependency, or if they were formerly in the armed forces.

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JSA claimants who were still in receipt of JSA a year after initiating their claim would normally be expected to move onto the Work Programme. In fact, as shown in Table 3.3, only 41 per cent of JSA claimants who were still on the same claim (the equivalent of 10 per cent of all JSA claimants) were on the Work Programme at the time of the second interview, while a further 18 per cent of those continuing to claim had been referred and were waiting to start. It was relatively common for those who lacked qualifications to start on the Work Programme: amongst JSA claimants who had not off-flowed into work, far more unqualified than qualified claimants reported having moved on to the Work Programme (56 per cent compared with 39 per cent).

Almost three in five (57 per cent) Work Programme starters said that they had volunteered to access the Work Programme. Volunteers tended to have positive views of the support they had received from the jobcentre: they were more likely than non-volunteers to say that the amount of support they received felt 'about right' (63 per cent compared to 45 per cent); that the support they received matched their needs and circumstances (64 per cent compared to 35 per cent); and that their adviser was understanding (63 per cent compared to 41 per cent). Volunteering does not, therefore, seem to be driven by dissatisfaction with the Jobcentre Plus Offer, and in fact only eight per cent of volunteers said that the reason they volunteered was that they were not getting the support they needed from Jobcentre Plus advisers. The top reason mentioned for choosing to access the Work Programme was the belief that it would improve claimants' chances of getting a job (mentioned by 59 per cent of volunteers).

Of those still claiming the same benefit a year after making their JSA claim, one in seven (14 per cent) said they had not been referred to the Work Programme by an adviser. This small number of claimants (n=18) were asked why they decided not to start on the Work Programme, and the most common answer was that the opportunity had not been offered to them or they did not know about it.

**Table 3.2 JSA claimants still on same claim**

	All JSA				Disadvantage				Health condition				Qualifications											
	Age		50 or above		Yes		No		Any		Mental		Physical		None		Basic		GCSE grades A-C		A levels and post-16		Degree	
	%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	
<b>All</b>	24	27	22	26	35	20	22	22	34	38	37	40	31	27	18	17								
On Work Programme	10	10	9	11	12	9	9	12	14	15	23	15	9	7	6									
Not on Work Programme	14	17	12	16	24	11	13	22	24	22	18	16	18	11	11									

*Base: All JSA claimants (1069); 18-24 (311); 25-49 (383); 50+ (367); disadvantaged (296); not disadvantaged (773); no health condition (905); any health condition (188); mental health condition (76); physical health condition (129); no formal qualifications (83); basic qualifications (157); GCSE grades A-C or equivalent (303); A levels or other post-16 qualifications (300); degree (181)*

**Table 3.3 JSA claimants still on same claim who had and had not started on Work Programme**

	All JSA still on same claim				Disadvantage				Health condition				Qualifications											
	Age		50 or above		Yes		No		Any		Mental		Physical		None		Basic		GCSE grades A-C		A levels and post-16		Degree	
	%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	
<b>All</b>	41	39	42	40	33	46	42	36	37	41	56	49	35	40	36									
On Work Programme	60	61	58	60	67	55	58	64	63	59	44	51	65	61	65									

*Base: JSA claimants still on same claim: All (205); 18-24 (69); 25-49 (62); 50+ (75); disadvantaged (85); not disadvantaged (121); no health condition (152); Any health condition (52); mental health condition (23); physical health condition (39); no formal qualifications (24); basic qualifications (42); GCSE grades A-C or equivalent (66); A levels or other post-16 qualifications (42); degree (23)*

Note: small base sizes.

### Analysis of ESA claimants

Unlike JSA claimants, most ESA claimants (72 per cent) were still claiming the same benefit a year after their NJWFI, regardless of whether or not they were looking for work at the start of their claim.<sup>15</sup> The main difference between those looking and not looking for work was in their likelihood of being on the Work Programme by the time of the second interview, with those looking for work more likely to be referred and make a start (29 per cent) than those who were not looking for work (17 per cent).

One in five ESA claimants (19 per cent) reported being on the Work Programme at their second interview (Table 3.4). This is the equivalent of around a quarter (26 per cent) of ESA claimants who were still on the same claim, with a further four per cent referred and due to start shortly. It should be noted that ESA claimants with a 12-month or greater prognosis could volunteer to enter the Work Programme at any point following their Work Capability Assessment (WCA), but those who made a claim in early 2012 were not mandated to the Programme. It is therefore unsurprising that the majority (54 per cent) were still claiming their benefit without having yet having moved onto the Work Programme.

As shown in Table 3.5, those who had moved onto the Work Programme were more likely to lack formal qualifications (37 per cent of claimants who were still on the same claim, compared with 23 per cent with higher qualifications), have been unemployed for under five years (34 per cent of claimants who were still on the same claim, compared with 23 per cent who had been unemployed for longer or never worked), or be on a new claim (36 per cent of claimants who were still on the same claim, compared with 24 per cent of those transferred from Incapacity Benefit (IB)). Claimants' attitudes towards work at the start of their claim (including confidence of finding a job) were not significantly linked to their likelihood of moving to the Work Programme.

Three in ten ESA claimants on the Work Programme (30 per cent) had made the move after volunteering. Volunteering was more common than average amongst ESA claimants who had positive attitudes to work at the start of their claim. This is shown by the relative frequency of volunteering amongst: claimants who felt confident they *'would find a job that suits me'* (12 per cent of all ESA claimants volunteered, compared with five per cent who disagreed with this statement); claimants who felt they would be *'a happier person if I was in paid work'* (nine per cent volunteered, compared two per cent who disagreed with this statement); and claimants who lacked anxiety over the prospect of being in paid work (10 per cent of those who disagreed with *'the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous'* volunteered, compared with five per cent who agreed with this statement). When claimants who volunteered were asked to give their reasons for doing so, the most common reason, given by 22 of the 42 ESA claimants who volunteered, was the belief that *'the Work Programme would improve my chances of getting a job'*.

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<sup>15</sup> The analysis in this report looks at ESA claimants who were looking for work at the start of their claim, as this was their original intention and when support started to be offered to them through the Jobcentre Plus Offer. The second wave of the survey did ask ESA claimants again about whether they were looking for work. Fifty-six per cent of those who were looking for work at the start of their claim were still looking for work at the second interview, a year after attending their original NJWFI or after off-flowing from ESA. Most of those who were not looking for work at the start of their claim were still not looking at the second interview (87 per cent).

**Table 3.4 ESA claimants still on same claim**

	All ESA		Age		Length unemployed		ESA migration		Health condition		Qualifications	
			50 or above		5 years or more/ never worked		New		Mental		None Basic Higher	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>All</b>	72	81	61	68	74	66	73	76	71	77	73	70
On Work Programme	19	21	15	23	17	24	18	20	18	28	16	17
Not on Work Programme	54	59	46	45	58	43	56	57	54	49	57	54

Base: All ESA claimants (676); under 50 (314); 50 or above (361); unemployed under 5 years (212); unemployed 5 years or more or never worked (450); new claim (157); ex-IB (519); mental health condition (493); physical health condition (577); no formal qualifications (129); basic qualifications (155); higher than basic qualification (349)

**Table 3.5 ESA claimants still on same claim who had and had not started on Work Programme**

	All ESA		Age		Length unemployed		ESA migration		Health condition		Qualifications	
			50 or above		5 years or more/ never worked		New		Mental		None Basic Higher	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
On Work Programme	26	26	25	34	23	36	24	26	25	37	22	24
Not on Work Programme	74	74	75	66	78	65	76	74	76	63	78	76

Base: ESA claimants still on same claim: All (449)/under 50 (239); 50 or above (210); unemployed under 5 years (128); unemployed 5 years or more or never worked (316); new claim (93); ex-IB (357); mental health condition (352); physical health condition (383); no formal qualifications (93); basic qualifications (101); higher than basic qualification (227)

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**Table 3.6 Reasons why ESA claimants did not start the Work Programme**

	<b>ESA %</b>
Health reasons/disability	43
Was never mentioned or discussed	18
Was not offered to me	13
Unable to work	4
Unaware of Work Programme	3
Other reasons	14
Don't know	8
<i>Base: All ESA claimants did not start or were not referred on the Work Programme</i>	<i>273</i>

Over half of all ESA claimants (54 per cent) were still in receipt of the same benefit a year after attending an NJWFI, but without having started on the Work Programme. A quarter of those who did not start or were not referred to the Work Programme (24 per cent) had, in fact, discussed the Work Programme with an adviser at some point.

Claimants who did not start or were not referred to the Work Programme were asked to give their reasons for not starting (Table 3.6). The most common reasons had to do with their health or a disability (43 per cent), though other frequently cited reasons were that the Work Programme was not mentioned or discussed (18 per cent) or that the option was not offered to them (13 per cent).

Looking more broadly at all those who were still claiming the same benefit a year after attending an NJWFI (regardless of whether they were on the Work Programme or not), it is worth noting that the likelihood of remaining on benefits did not vary by claimants' attitudes at the start of their claim. For example, claimants' confidence of being able to find a suitable job and their belief that they would be happier in paid work made no difference to whether they were still claiming. The likelihood did, however, vary by claimants' views of the support and treatment they received. ESA claimants who believed the amount of support they received was not right for their needs, or felt they had not been understood by their advisers, were less likely to remain on the same claim (61 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively) than claimants who gave positive views on these measures (77 per cent and 75 per cent, respectively). This does not necessarily mean that claimants with negative experiences prefer to close their claim, but may simply reflect the fact that claimants with longer claims have more opportunity to seek support and develop a relationship with their advisers, and hence to develop positive views of the Offer.

### 3.1.2 Claimants off-flowing into work

JSA claimants were much more likely than ESA claimants to stop claiming their benefit in order to start a job (59 per cent compared to five per cent). This is not unexpected for ESA claimants with a 12-month or greater prognosis: these claimants were judged to have a limited capability of moving into work, and the focus of the Offer is to help such claimants move closer to the labour market rather than necessarily find a job.

#### Analysis of JSA claimants

There was a great deal of variation in the likelihood of off-flowing into work depending on JSA claimants' characteristics (Table 3.7). While almost two-thirds of JSA claimants aged between 25 and 49 (64 per cent) moved to work, proportions were lower amongst 18-24 year-olds (57 per cent), and lower still for claimants aged 50 or above (48 per cent). Proportions off-flowing into work were much higher amongst claimants with higher qualifications, falling from 71 per cent amongst those with degrees to just 44 per cent amongst claimants who lacked qualifications. Claimants who were disadvantaged, or had a mental health condition or a physical health condition were less likely to off-flow into employment (45 per cent, 43 per cent, and 42 per cent, respectively, compared with 59 per cent of JSA claimants overall).

The claimants least likely to move into work were those who were either out of work for a year or more before making their claim or who had never worked (35 per cent, compared with 67 per cent who had been in work more recently) and claimants who felt nervous at the start of their claim at the thought of being in paid work (23 per cent, compared with 52 per cent of other claimants).

The relationship between the support received through the Offer and claimants' final employment or benefit status is not straightforward to interpret. On the face of it, moving off benefits and into work was more common than average amongst JSA claimants who did not receive any support from the flexible menu, saw their adviser infrequently, or reported that some of the time spent with advisers felt unnecessary. However it should be borne in mind that claimants who off-flowed into work may have had fewer barriers to begin with, and be better equipped than most other claimants for finding jobs and succeeding in interviews, and their perspectives of the Offer may be coloured by the belief that they did not need support.

88 Table 3.7 JSA claimants who off-flowed into work

All JSA	Age	Length unemployment				Disadvantage			Health condition			Qualifications						
		Under 3 months	3-6 months	6-12 months	1 year or more/never worked	Yes	No	None	Any	Mental	Physical	None	Basic	GCSE grades A-C	A levels and post-16 Degree			
%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%			
59	57	64	48	73	65	54	35	45	65	61	48	43	42	44	49	56	65	71

Off-flowed into work

Base: All JSA claimants (1,069); 18-24 (311); 25-49 (383); 50+ (367); unemployed under 3 months (442); unemployed 3-6 months (256); unemployed 6-12 months (129); unemployed 1 year or more or never worked (239); disadvantaged (296); not disadvantaged (773); no health condition (905); any health condition (188); mental health condition (76); physical health condition (129); no formal qualifications (83); basic qualifications (157); GCSE grades A-C or equivalent (303); A levels or other post-16 qualifications (300); degree (181)

Table 3.8 ESA claimants who off-flowed into work

All JSA	Age	Length unemployment			ESA migration			Health condition			Qualifications		
		Under 5 years	5 or above	5 years or more/never worked	New	Ex-IB	None	Mental	Physical	None	Basic	Higher	
%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
5	6	5	10	3	15	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	7

Off-flowed into work

Base: All ESA claimants (676); under 50 (314); 50 or above (361); unemployed under 5 years (212); unemployed 5 years or more or never worked (450); new claim (157); ex-IB (519); mental health condition (493); physical health condition (577); no formal qualifications (129); basic qualifications (155); higher than basic qualification (349)

### Analysis of ESA claimants

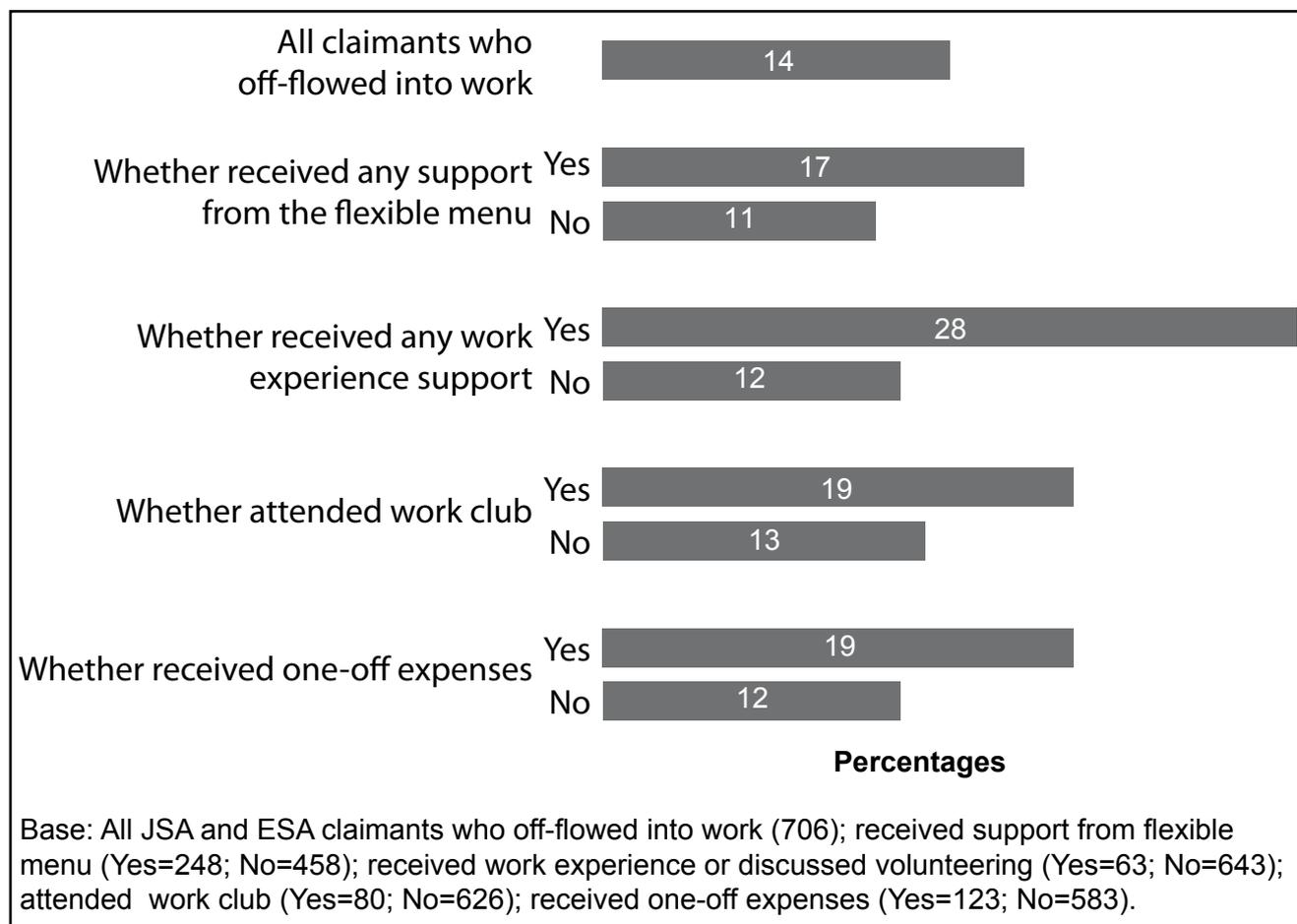
As might be expected, it was more common for ESA claimants to find employment if they stated around the time of their NJWFI that they were already looking for work (10 per cent) than if they were not looking for work at that time (four per cent). Table 3.8 illustrates that the ESA claimants who were most likely to move into work were those who had not been transferred from IB (15 per cent, compared with three per cent of claimants who were transferred). An employment outcome was also common for claimants who had been in employment in the past five years (10 per cent, compared with three per cent who had been unemployed for longer or never worked), and those who had a positive outlook regarding work: this applied to 10 per cent of claimants who felt confident at the start of their claim that they would find a suitable job and seven per cent who thought they would be happier in paid work (compared with three per cent who did not believe one or the other).

### The employment of claimants who off-flowed into work

One in seven (14 per cent) of the JSA and ESA claimants who off-flowed into work said that they found their job *‘through Jobcentre Plus’*. Claimants who took part in the survey may have interpreted this question either narrowly to mean that they found the vacancy through Universal Jobmatch or a recommendation made by an adviser, or broadly to mean that the support they received through the Offer helped them move into work.

Both interpretations seem to be supported by the data. Claimants were much more likely to say that the job was found through the jobcentre if an adviser had tried to identify jobs that might be suitable for them (16 per cent, compared with just one per cent whose adviser had not done this). The same was true if they had received suggestions about where to look for job vacancies: 15 per cent who had received such suggestions said they found their job through the jobcentre, compared with four per cent of claimants who had not received suggestions. However, it was claimants who received some type of work experience support who were the most likely to attribute their employment to the jobcentre (28 per cent), suggesting that many jobs were found either through being able to report the experience of attending a placement on a CV or in an interview, or more directly through association with a placement provider or host organisation. The receipt of other support measures also increased the likelihood of finding employment through the jobcentre (Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Claimants who found their job through Jobcentre Plus



### In Work Advisory Support

Jobcentre Plus offers some types of support to claimants who close their benefit claim in order to take up a job. In Work Advisory Support (IWAS) is not available to all claimants, but is offered and promoted to lone parents to help them with their transition into work and career progression once in work. However, some advisers may also offer to stay in contact with other claimants as they move back into work.

One in seven (14 per cent) of the claimants who off-flowed into work were offered the opportunity to stay in touch with the jobcentre, with 74 per cent of those who were offered the opportunity actually taking it up (the equivalent of 10 per cent of those who off-flowed into work).

The most common types of support received by claimants during their time in work were help with financial arrangements or other benefits (14 per cent) and assistance with closing their claim (seven per cent). Almost two-fifths (39 per cent) of the claimants who stayed in contact said they received no help at all.

Around three-fifths (59 per cent) of those who stayed in contact felt that the advice they received from the jobcentre while they were in their job was useful; however, three in ten (30 per cent) did not find it useful and a further one in ten (10 per cent) said they received no advice at all. Former claimants who received advice were evenly split between those who believed the advice helped them stay in work and those who did not (49 per cent each of those who received advice).

In the second interview, claimants who had off-flowed into various destinations but had not received the offer of further contact from the jobcentre were asked whether they would have liked to remain in touch with Jobcentre Plus after finding a job. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) said that they would. These claimants, together with claimants who remained in contact but had not been offered any help or advice, were given the chance to list what types of support they would have liked to receive after finding a job. The answers included: financial support (33 per cent), help to find another job with better pay (20 per cent), advice about further entitlements (20 per cent), support with training that might help them find a better job (18 per cent), and help to find another job with more hours (16 per cent). The small number of people (n=14) who mentioned a need for training specified a range of options, such as training for formal qualifications or training in vocational and IT skills.

### Perceptions and prospects of current job

Claimants who were in work at the time of either the first or second interview were asked about various attributes of their job (Table 3.9). It should be noted that the claimants who were in work at the time of the interviews did not correspond precisely with those who off-flowed into work.<sup>16</sup> The vast majority of survey respondents who were in work at the time they were interviewed were former JSA claimants (n=621), and the analysis which follows focuses on them.

The majority of JSA claimants who were in work when they were interviewed felt that their job mostly fitted with their family commitments, and for the most part matched their skills and abilities (73 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively). Around three-fifths believed the work benefited their mental well-being, and had a future in terms of security and opportunities to learn new skills. Only a half or fewer felt that the job offered them opportunities for progression or benefited their physical health.

**Table 3.9 Attributes of current job**

Whether believes employment ...	JSA %
Fits in with your family commitments	73
Is suited to your skills and abilities	71
Has benefited your mental well-being	59
Meets the criteria you were looking for when talking to advisers at Jobcentre Plus	58
Is secure	57
Offers you opportunities to learn new skills	57
Offers you opportunities for progression if you want it (moving up salary, increasing hours or responsibilities)	49
Has benefited your physical health	45
<i>Base: All JSA claimants who were in work at the time of the first or second interview</i>	621

Note: only proportions who answered 'mostly' are shown.

<sup>16</sup> Although follow-up survey interviews were conducted as soon as possible after the closure of claims, in some cases the claimants in question had already had time to leave the job they off-flowed into and either start a new claim or move to another destination.

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The fact that only three in five JSA claimants (58 per cent) were in jobs which met the criteria they were looking for when talking to their Jobcentre Plus advisers suggests that claimants were, in fact, willing to be flexible about the types of jobs they took up. In cases where the amount of time spent with advisers felt ‘about right’, the ‘fit’ between the job and the criteria specified to advisers tended to be better: 63 per cent in this situation said the job they were in met the criteria they were looking for, compared with only 47 per cent of claimants who had spent insufficient time with advisers. Similarly, those who felt they had received the right amount of support from Jobcentre Plus were more likely to be in a job which matched their criteria (67 per cent) compared with those who felt they had not received the right amount of support (49 per cent). This suggests that claimants who received adequate support during their time on the Offer, and possibly had more time to think about or discuss what might suit their circumstances, were more likely to find satisfying jobs.

JSA claimants who were in work at the time of the second interview were asked additional questions regarding their views about job progression. In response to a question regarding the speed at which they wished to progress within their job, three in five replied that they would like to ‘*get on and improve [their] pay and terms as quickly as possible*’ (Table 3.10). Notably, claimants who were of this view were no more likely than those who were happy to ‘*stay as you are for now*’ to be in jobs that offered opportunities for progression (51 per cent compared to 53 per cent). It may be that the need to find any type of paid job overrides any ambitions or expectations claimants may have about future progression.

**Table 3.10 Attitude towards job progression**

Which is closest to your view?	JSA %
Want to get on and improve your pay and terms as quickly as possible	59
Want to stay as you are for now	40
Don't know	
<i>Base: All JSA claimants who were in work at the time of the second interview</i>	<i>261</i>

The most common step taken by claimants who were in work at the time of the second interview to change their work situation or earnings was to seek an increase in working hours (Table 3.11). Two-fifths mentioned this (39 per cent), almost double the proportion who said they searched for a better job with another employer (22 per cent) or sought a pay rise (17 per cent). Around one in ten tried to improve their conditions by attempting to move to another job whether within the same organisation or for the same employer (11 per cent) or by negotiating better benefits (nine per cent). Only three per cent tried to reduce their hours in order to change their circumstances.

**Table 3.11 Steps taken to change work situation or earnings**

	<b>JSA</b>
<b>Whether has taken steps to...</b>	<b>%</b>
Increase the hours you work	39
Get a better job with a different employer	22
Get a pay rise	17
Change to a different sort of work with the same employer	11
Negotiate better benefits (e.g. pension or hours)	9
Reduce the hours you work	3
<i>Base: All JSA claimants who were in work at the time of the second interview</i>	<i>261</i>

### 3.1.3 Claimants off-flowing into other destinations

Around one in five JSA claimants (17 per cent) closed their claim at some point in the 12 months following their application but did not start a new job directly after off-flowing. A similar proportion of ESA claimants who were looking for work (18 per cent) did the same within a year of attending their NJWFI, but the proportion was higher (24 per cent) amongst ESA claimants who were not looking for work. Many claimants did not report what their destination was after off-flowing. The immediate destinations of claimants are shown in Table 3.12.

**Table 3.12 Off-flow destinations for claimants who did not off-flow to work**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
New claim (for JSA, ESA or IS)	36	4
Caring for children or adults	15	13
Training or education	11	1
Something else <sup>1</sup>	38	78
<i>Base: All JSA claimants who off-flowed to another destination (250); all ESA claimants who off-flowed to another destination (436)</i>		

<sup>1</sup> These claimants reported that they were not in education or training, nor caring for children or adults, but did not report what they were doing.

JSA claimants were much more likely than ESA claimants to either make a new benefit claim (36 per cent compared to four per cent) or enter training or education (11 per cent compared to one per cent) soon after closing their original claim. Closing the claim in order to look after family or children was equally likely amongst claimants receiving the two benefits (15 per cent for JSA and 13 per cent for ESA).

Almost all JSA claimants who started a new claim after off-flowing (97 per cent) initiated a claim for JSA, with the remainder making a claim for Income Support (IS) (three per cent). Since they did not report taking up work in the interim, it is not known whether they made the new claim after a short interval or immediately after closing their existing claim, but these cases were likely to be rapid reclaims.

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None of the ESA claimants who started a new claim after off-flowing reported which benefit they began to receive. It is worth noting that almost a quarter (23 per cent) of ESA claimants who off-flowed into another destination said that they had been through another WCA since their first interview. It is possible that some of these claimants were found fit to work and that this prompted the closure of their claim and move to other destinations.

### **3.2 Claimant attitudes**

As illustrated in the previous section, a proportion of new JSA and ESA claimants did not move in to work after their time on the Offer. In these cases it is important to look at what effect Jobcentre Plus may have had in improving soft outcomes, such as increasing motivation to work; reducing levels of anxiety about the prospect of working; and improving claimants' confidence in their job search capabilities. Finally, it is important that people who do have high motivation to find work maintain that attitude even after being unsuccessful in their pursuit of a job.

This section provides an overview of claimant attitudes towards employment and job search at the start of their claim before moving on to look at how these changed for claimants over the course of their time on the Offer.

#### **3.2.1 Initial attitudes**

The first survey interview was conducted shortly after claimants had started on the Offer and had completed either their NJI or their NJWFI. Claimants were asked a series of attitude statements which explored both their confidence in their ability to find a job and their attitudes to working in general.

Towards the start of their claim most new JSA claimants were motivated to find work. Nearly all respondents agreed that they would be happier if they were in work (95 per cent), and more than four out of five agreed that having almost any type of paid work is better than not working (83 per cent). Since motivation was high for these claimants at the start of their claim, the main challenge for Jobcentre Plus and advisers was in maintaining motivation as claims extended.

New ESA claimants were less positive than JSA claimants, but nevertheless nearly two-thirds said that they would be happier in work (63 per cent). While this was encouraging, there was a relatively high proportion of ESA claimants who expressed anxiety about moving in to work. Just over half of all ESA claimants (53 per cent) said that the thought of being in paid work made them nervous and even among those looking for work over two-fifths of claimants said this (43 per cent). This anxiety is a potential demotivating factor for claimants and is something that the Offer would be expected to be able to assuage both through adviser support and practical measures from the flexible menu of back-to-work support, such as work experience, volunteering and Work Choice.

In addition to asking about attitudes to work, JSA claimants and ESA claimants looking for work were asked how confident they felt about different aspects of their job search. The two areas claimants were least likely to be confident in were that employers would want to offer them a job interview and that their skills were up to date. This was particularly true of JSA claimants aged 50 or over and the ESA claimant group as a whole. Again, both of these aspects are areas where the Jobcentre Plus Offer could make a positive impact in building confidence and reducing anxiety.

### 3.2.2 Changes in attitude

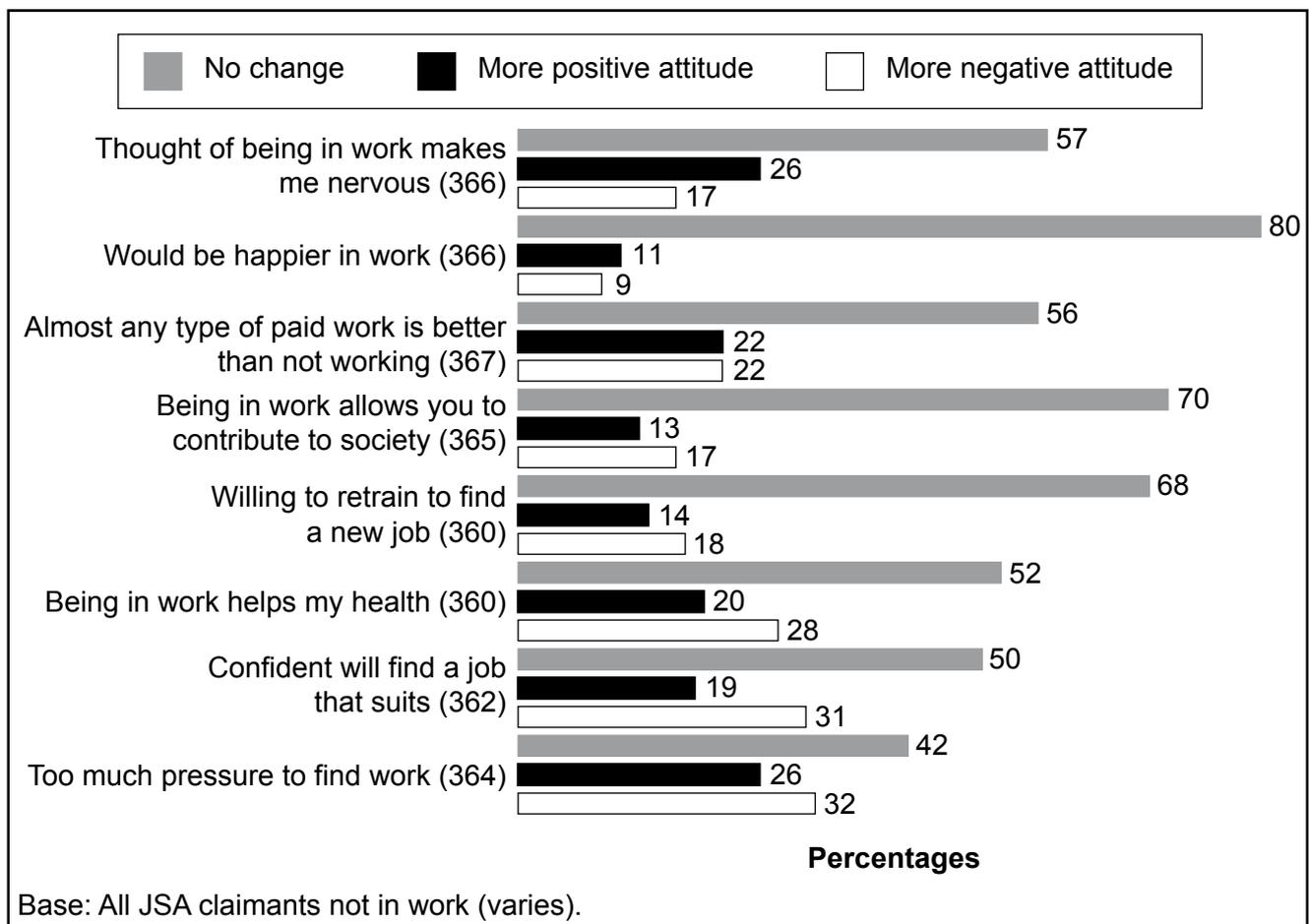
In order to assess whether there had been any change, the same set of attitude statements that were asked in the first survey interview were repeated in the second survey interview. Analysis was then conducted looking at where claimants based themselves on an attitudinal scale at the start of their time on the Offer compared with where they placed themselves at the time of their second interview.<sup>17</sup>

This section presents findings on attitudinal change for those claimants who had not managed to find work during their time on the Offer.

#### Analysis of JSA claimants

For JSA claimants who had not found work over the previous 12 months, the overall shift in attitudes towards employment was negative for most factors, albeit with a few notable exceptions. Figure 3.2 below shows the extent to which JSA claimants who did not move into work felt more positive or negative between the start of their time on the Offer and the point of their second interview (which took place either 12 months after the start of their claim or soon after moving on to the Work Programme).

**Figure 3.2 Change in attitudes towards employment amongst JSA claimants who did not find work**



<sup>17</sup> Analysis of attitudes based on two separate observations is preferable to the alternative approach of asking respondents to make a judgment on how much their attitudes or confidence had changed over the past 12 months.

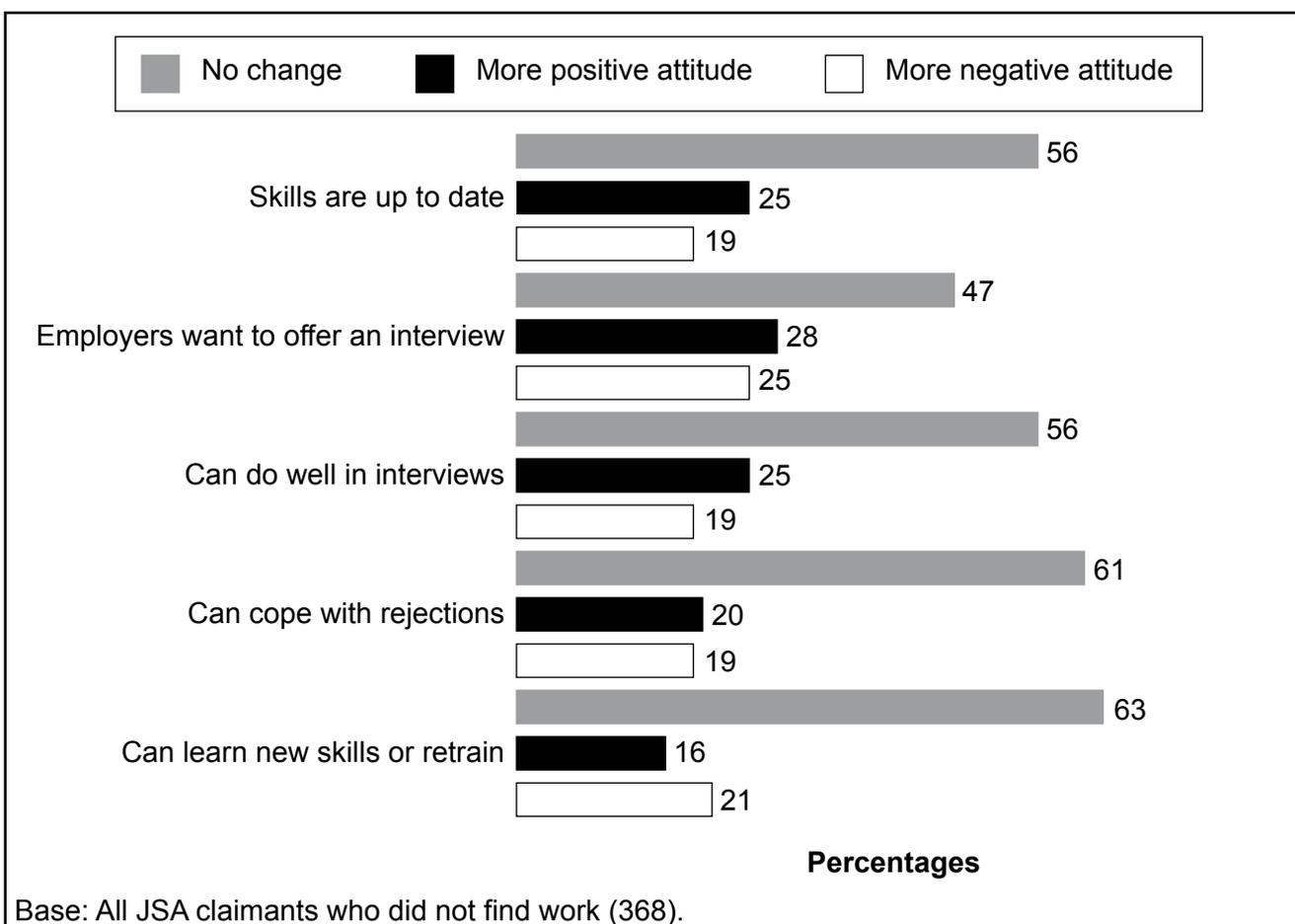
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There was a notable increase in the proportion who felt ‘too much pressure to find work’ (six percentage point increase in negative attitude) but the most significant net negative shift was around being confident of finding a suitable job (-12 percentage points). To some extent this is to be expected as these were claimants who had been looking for work for a prolonged period of time without success. This situation seemed to be exacerbated by age, with claimants aged 50 plus having a net negative shift of -22 percentage points compared to just -5 percentage points for 18 to 24-year olds. However, there was no significant variation for the length of time since the claimant had last worked: claimants who had not worked for two years or more had similar confidence levels at the start of their claim as those with more recent work experience, and the extent of the negative shift in confidence was also similar for the two groups.

There was only one aspect where there was a significant net positive shift which was ‘the thought of being in work makes me nervous’ (nine percentage point increase in positive attitude). The lessening in anxiety was particularly marked for the 18 to 24 age group and those aged 50 plus, where the net positive shifts were +15 percentage points and +14 percentage points respectively. As much as anything this reflects the fact that more of the new claimants in these age groups were likely to agree at the initial interview that the thought of being in paid work made them nervous.

Looking in more detail at confidence, Figure 3.3 below shows how much more positive or negative claimants felt about different aspects of job search.

**Figure 3.3 Change in confidence for job search amongst JSA claimants who did not find work**



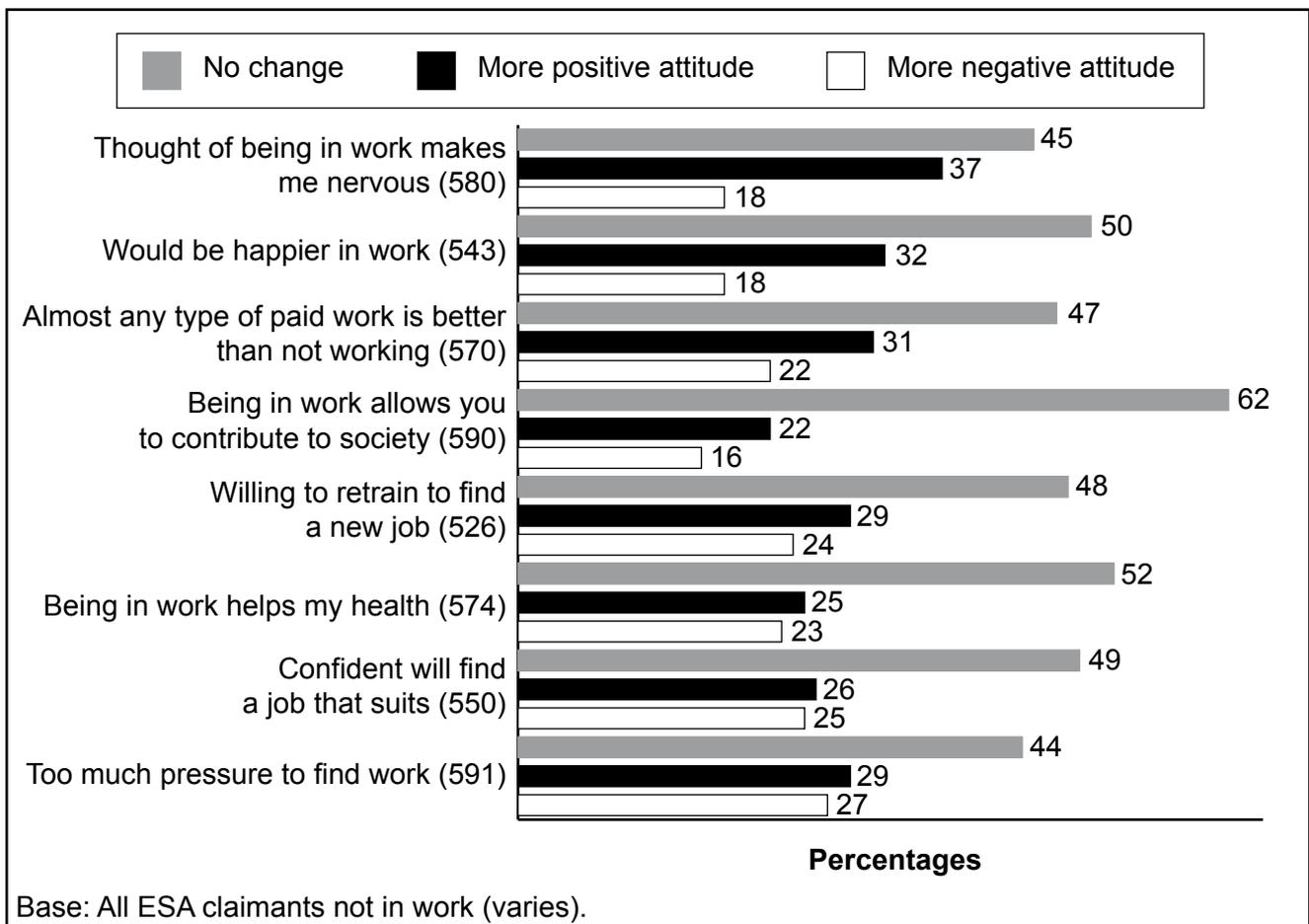
Unlike ESA claimants, there were no aspects of job search where there were significant net positive shifts in confidence. The two aspects which showed the biggest net positive increases in confidence were having skills that are up to date and doing well in interviews (both up by six percentage points). There was also one aspect which showed a negative shift which was confidence in learning new skills or retraining (down by five percentage points).

Within this though there were some interesting variations by age group. Those aged 50 or over showed a net positive shift in confidence that employers will want to offer them an interview (+10 percentage points), but this was accompanied by a significant net negative shift in confidence about doing well in interviews (-13 percentage points). This may be a result of older claimants finding that they were being invited to interviews more than they anticipated but not being able to secure those positions at the interview. It should be noted, however, that older claimants did not have a net negative shift in confidence in their ability to cope with rejections and knockbacks.

### Analysis of ESA claimants

Figure 3.4 shows the extent to which ESA claimants' attitudes became more positive, more negative or stayed the same across the different attitude statements they were asked about.

**Figure 3.4 Change in attitudes towards employment amongst ESA claimants who did not find work**



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The biggest improvement for ESA claimants was on the measure 'the thought of being in work makes me nervous'. While just under one in five claimants (18 per cent) had a more negative attitude on this issue since starting the Offer, twice as many had moved in a more positive direction (37 per cent). In total, this represented a net positive movement in attitudes of 19 percentage points. This is encouraging, as one of the challenges noted above was the high proportion of ESA claimants saying that the thought of being in work made them nervous. It is also worth noting that the net increase was broadly uniform with no significant differences between claimants on this measure by subgroup.

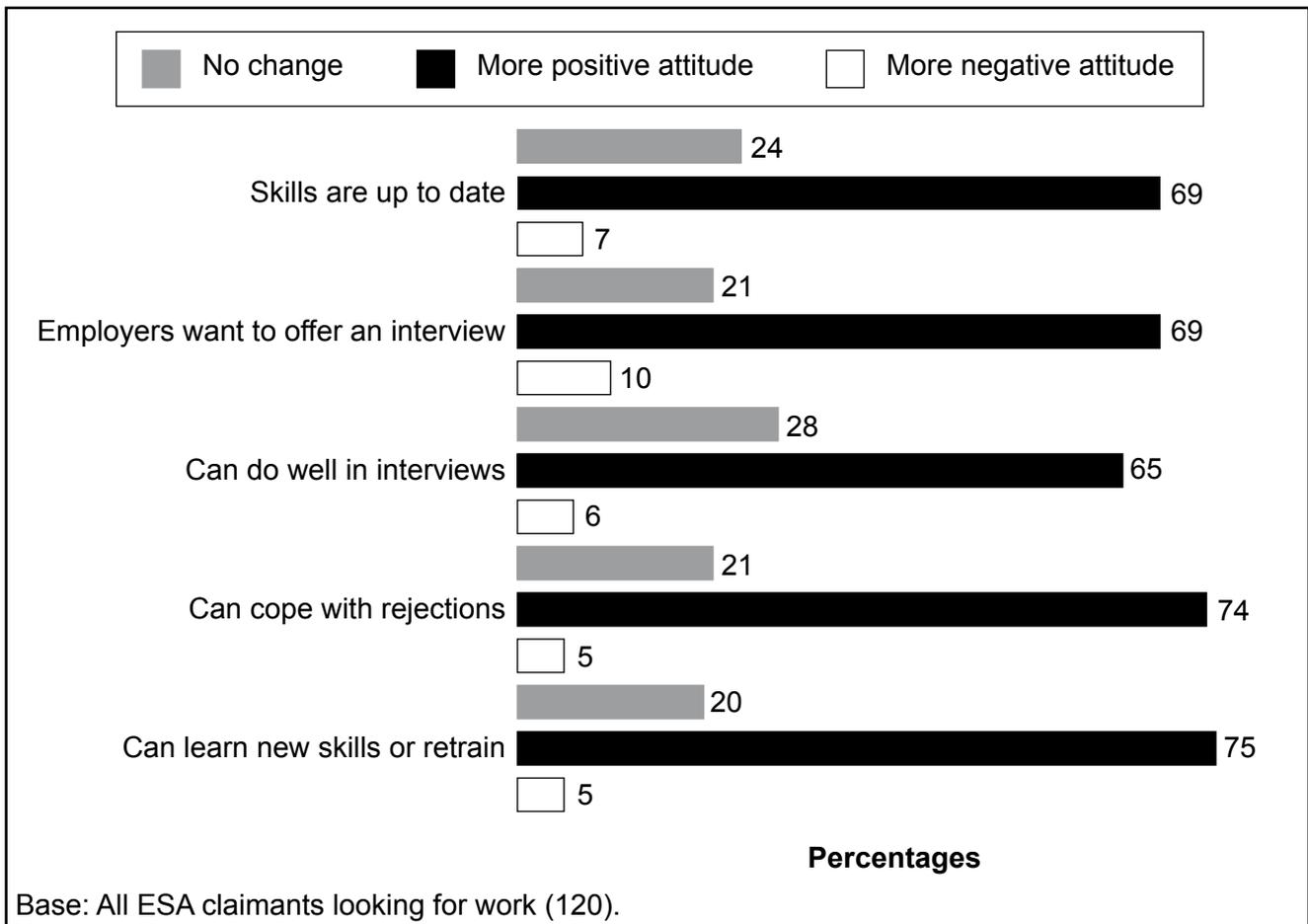
There were also significant net positive shifts for claimants on whether they 'would be happier in paid work' (+14 percentage points) and 'almost any type of paid job is better than not working' (+9 percentage points). Claimants whose health condition affected their mental, cognitive and intellectual functions had an even higher net positive shift for being happier in work than other ESA claimants (+17 percentage points compared to +5 percentage points).

The net change for the other attitudinal measures was also positive overall although not by significant margins. In particular it is worth noting that the net shift for being 'confident of finding a job that suits' was actually negative for ESA claimants who were currently looking for work (-6 percentage points). To some extent this is understandable as these are claimants who have not found work after 12 months; it might be argued that the fact that there was only a small negative shift on this measure is a positive result.

ESA claimants who were looking for work were also asked how confident they were in different aspects of their job search. Figure 3.5 shows how these confidence levels changed over the course of the Offer.

As Figure 3.5 illustrates, there have been significant increases in job search confidence across all aspects covered in the survey. The strong net positive increase in confidence for these different aspects may explain why confidence in finding a job had not declined significantly despite claimants being out of work for 12 months. These claimants were feeling demonstrably more confident about key aspects of the job search process, be it in terms of performing well in interviews or having skills that are up to date for the job market.

**Figure 3.5 Change in confidence for job search amongst ESA claimants who did not find work**



### 3.2.3 Perceptions of Jobcentre Plus in helping claimants' motivation

All claimants were asked whether they felt that the advice and support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped to increase their confidence about finding a job they can do and their motivation to find work. The views of JSA claimants were nearly evenly split for both measures, while ESA claimants were less likely to recognise any improvements in their confidence or motivation.

Just under half of JSA claimants (49 per cent) said Jobcentre Plus had increased their motivation to find work, while the same proportion said that it had not. Younger claimants were significantly more likely than older claimants to attribute an increase in their motivation to Jobcentre Plus. Three-fifths of 18 to 24 year old claimants (61 per cent) said Jobcentre Plus had increased their motivation compared to just under two-fifths of claimants aged 50 or above (37 per cent). The proportion saying that Jobcentre Plus had increased their confidence was slightly lower (45 per cent) and the proportion saying that it had not was slightly higher (53 per cent), but this still represented a broadly even split. Again younger claimants were slightly more likely to feel this, although the difference was not as marked as for motivation (54 per cent of 18-24 year-olds compared to 37 per cent of claimants aged 50 plus). Claimants with a degree were particularly unlikely to state that Jobcentre Plus had given them greater confidence (32 per cent).

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In contrast to JSA claimants, only a quarter of ESA claimants said that Jobcentre Plus had increased their motivation to find work (25 per cent) or their confidence that they could find a job that suits them (26 per cent). Within this, claimants with mental health conditions<sup>18</sup> were the most likely to be positive about the impact of Jobcentre Plus, with 46 per cent saying they had increased their motivation to find work.

### **3.3 Early diagnosis: New Jobseeker and New Joiner's Work Focused Interviews**

All new claimants begin their journey through the Jobcentre Plus Offer by attending an interview with an adviser. Findings regarding the NJI and NJWFI – including the topics discussed and next step information provided during these meetings – are covered in detail in the Year 1 report (see The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation – Section 5.1).

### **3.4 Ongoing adviser support**

Following the NJI and NJWFI, claimants' experiences of the Jobcentre Plus Offer begin to diverge as they start taking up elements of support according to their needs. The initial section below looks at claimant views of Jobsearch Review meetings before moving on to examine how much contact there is between claimants and advisers in other meetings, and claimants' perspectives on the levels and continuity of contact. There follows an overview of how claimants view advisers' understanding of their circumstances, and information about the basic support and advice they received from advisers with regards to looking for jobs and practical job seeking.

#### **3.4.1 Regular Jobsearch Reviews**

The depth interviews explored JSA claimants' experience of Jobsearch Review meetings. As noted in the first year of the evaluation, claimants were largely accepting of the need for Jobsearch Review meetings, but found them to be fairly basic meetings, focused more on demonstrating compliance with conditionality rather than substantive job search support.

In particular, claimants who felt they required minimal support from Jobcentre Plus to get back into work, found the meetings to be an ineffective use of their time. This was due to a perceived lack of job search support provided by Jobcentre Plus that they felt was appropriate to their area of interest. These claimants tended to be those who had a good work history and therefore knew what they were looking for, often having only been unemployed for a short period of time. Their lack of engagement may have been linked to their perception that their adviser could not do very much more to help them and ultimately a belief that their time could be otherwise spent more effectively carrying out an independent job search.

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<sup>18</sup> These are claimants whose conditions affect their mental, cognitive or intellectual functions.

*'When I signed on there wasn't anything for me, it was really a case of me being proactive to be honest, I mean for roles at my [professional] level there just wasn't too many that came up at the jobcentre.'*

(Female, JSA 50+)

*'They are very nice at the jobcentre, I just don't think they can do any more for you with the job search site they use'*

(Male, JSA 25-49)

Among claimants who had experience of Universal Jobmatch, those who were not comfortable with IT systems struggled to understand how to use it to search and apply for jobs. This meant their Jobsearch Review meetings could be a struggle for them, trying to understand what their adviser was doing on the site and how to then use it independently.

### 3.4.2 Level of other contact with advisers

The survey included a series of questions designed to measure whether the extent and nature of claimants' contact with advisers matched their needs. Claimants were asked about the number of times they met an adviser in the first few weeks of their claim and the overall frequency with which meetings were held throughout their claim.

In the early stages of their journey through the Offer, JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were looking for work maintained similar levels of contact with advisers (2.6 and 2.7 meetings on average respectively up until the point of their first interview for the survey. ESA claimants with no imminent plans to enter the labour market had the least contact with advisers in the early weeks of their claim (2.0 meetings on average), and around half had only attended a single meeting a few weeks after their NJWFI (51 per cent). Most of these claimants (74 per cent) judged this limited amount of contact to be about right for their needs, though a significant minority felt that some of this contact was unnecessary (12 per cent).

Throughout their journey on the Offer, the most common arrangement for JSA claimants was to see an adviser between two and three times a month excluding their regular Jobsearch Review meetings (Table 3.13). Two-fifths of JSA claimants (41 per cent) had this arrangement, double the proportion who met their adviser either just once a month (19 per cent) or less than once a month (20 per cent). Over one in eight JSA claimants (13 per cent) met with an adviser on a weekly or more frequent basis, with claimants under the age of 25 most commonly saying this (18 per cent), probably due to the Youth Contract. Notably, claimants who saw their adviser weekly or more than once a week were almost twice as likely as other JSA claimants to report that this felt like 'too much' contact (15 per cent, compared with eight per cent of those with less frequent or irregular contact).

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**Table 3.13 Frequency of meetings between JSA claimants and adviser throughout claim (excluding regular Jobsearch Review meetings)**

	JSA %
Once a week or more	13
2-3 times a month	41
Once a month	19
Less than once a month	20
It varied	3
Don't know	4
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	1,069

JSA claimants with a mental health condition were more likely than other claimants to be seen just once a month (29 per cent) rather than more frequently. However, advisers did not seem to vary their meeting appointments depending on whether or not claimants had a physical health condition or other disadvantage.

On average, advisers saw ESA claimants much less frequently than JSA claimants during the course of their claim.<sup>19</sup> ESA claimants were also more likely to report variation in the frequency of adviser meetings (14 per cent reported variation, compared with three per cent of JSA claimants). ESA claimants looking for work generally saw an adviser more often than those who were not looking for work when they made their ESA claim (Table 3.14): specifically, those who were looking for work were twice as likely as those who were not to meet with an adviser on a monthly or more frequent basis (30 per cent compared to 15 per cent).

**Table 3.14 Frequency of meetings between ESA claimants and adviser throughout claim**

	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Once a month or more	30	15
1-2 times every three months	14	19
Less than once every three months	36	44
It varied	16	13
Don't know	4	9

*Base: All ESA claimants looking for work (105); all ESA claimants not looking for work (571)*

The number of ESA claimants in the survey who were looking for work is too small to allow sub-group analysis within this category of claimant, but it is possible to explore how the frequency of meetings varied across the ESA claimant group as a whole. Those aged 50 or above were the most likely to have infrequent meetings, with over half (52 per cent) seeing an adviser less often than once every three months (compared with just 37 per cent of under-50s). Conversely, new ESA claimants and claimants who had been unemployed for

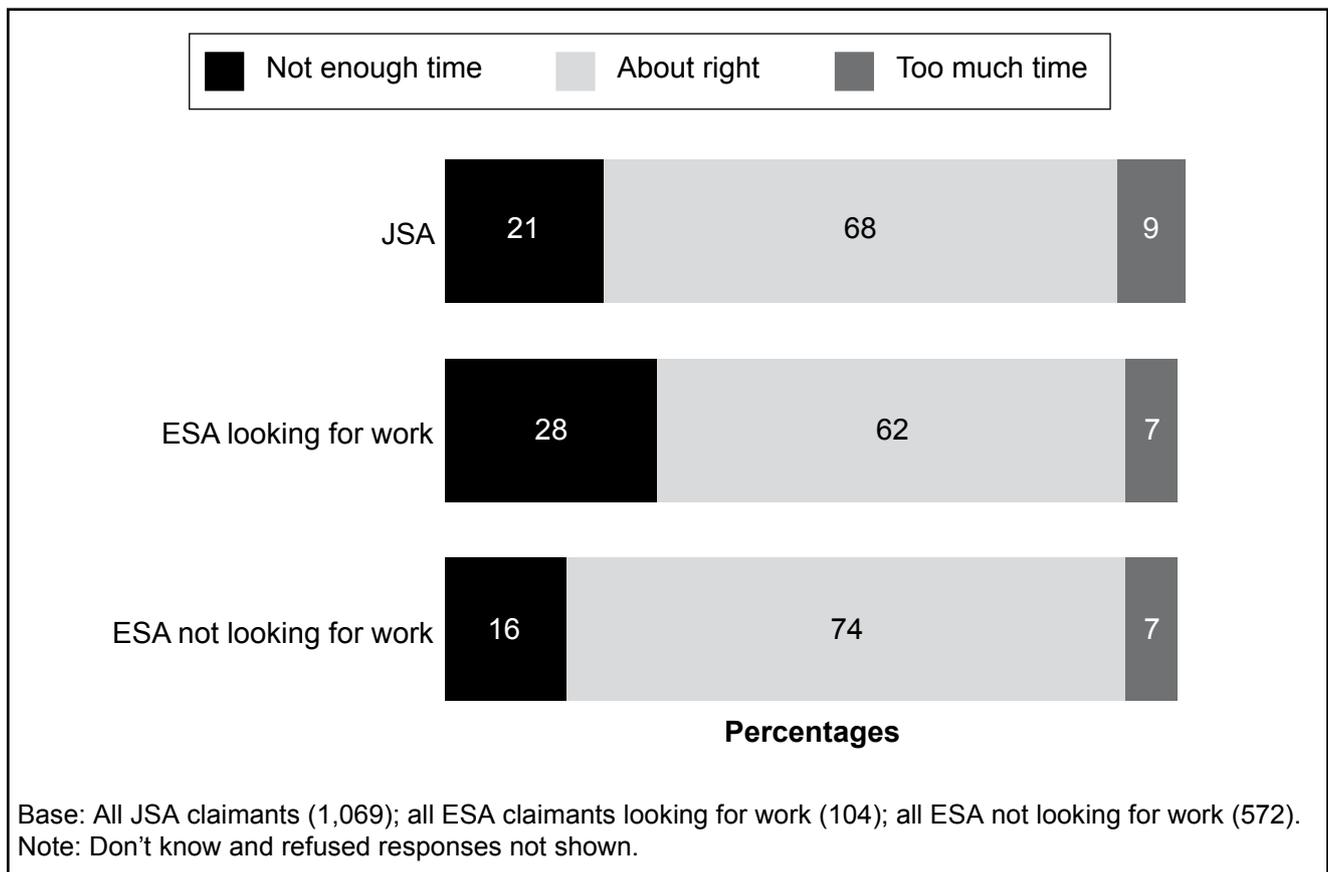
<sup>19</sup> At the time of the survey, ESA claimants were expected to participate in a minimum of two Work Focused Interviews a year.

less than five years were amongst the most likely to meet an adviser on a frequent basis, i.e. once a month or more (28 per cent each, compared with only 15 per cent of claimants who were transferred from IB and 13 per cent who had never worked or been unemployed for five years or more prior to making their ESA claim).

### 3.4.3 Claimant views on frequency of contact with advisers

Figure 3.6 shows how claimants viewed the amount of time they spent with advisers overall during the course of their claim. The majority of claimants in each category felt that they had spent about the right amount of time with advisers, though satisfaction varied depending on claimant type: ESA claimants who were not looking for work were significantly more likely to be satisfied than JSA claimants (74 per cent compared to 68 per cent), and JSA claimants in turn tended to be more satisfied than ESA claimants looking for work (68 per cent compared to 62 per cent).

Figure 3.6 Views regarding amount of contact



More than a quarter of ESA claimants looking for work believed that advisers had not spent enough time with them (28 per cent). This complaint was less widespread amongst JSA claimants (21 per cent) and ESA claimants who were not looking for work (16 per cent). Two sub-groups were more likely than the rest to feel that the time advisers had spent with them was insufficient for their needs: JSA claimants with a mental health condition (33 per cent, compared with 20 per cent of other JSA claimants), and ESA claimants who were not looking for work and were either seen irregularly, just once or twice every three months, or less frequently (18 per cent compared with five per cent who were seen on a monthly or more frequent basis). Furthermore, ESA claimants who were nervous about working were

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disproportionately more likely to mention that they did not spend enough time with advisers (23 per cent, compared with 17 per cent of those who disagreed that *'the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous'*.)

It is worth noting that the attitudes of ESA claimants who were looking for work shifted over the course of their claim. In the early stage of their claim, this group was the most likely to report that the amount of time spent with advisers felt 'about right' for their needs (80 per cent); however, only 62 per cent felt the same by the end of their claim or a year after their NJWFI, with many shifting their view and reporting that advisers had not spent enough time with them (up from 12 per cent to 28 per cent).

### 3.4.4 Adviser continuity

Around three-quarters of ESA claimants who had attended more than one meeting saw the same adviser every time (74 per cent). Fewer JSA claimants experienced the same level of continuity, with only 62 per cent seeing the same adviser on every occasion.<sup>20</sup>

The dominant view amongst both JSA and ESA claimants who had met with more than one adviser was that it did not matter which adviser they saw. This was expressed by around two-thirds of each type of claimant, though many added the proviso that the adviser they met with should know a bit about their circumstances (Table 3.15).

**Table 3.15 Views on seeing multiple advisers**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Prefer to see the same adviser	31	40
Prefer to see one of your usual advisers	4	2
No preference on which adviser you see	34	12
Spontaneous: Don't mind as long as they know a bit about your circumstances	31	42
Don't know	*	4

*Base: All JSA claimants who met with more than one adviser (224); all ESA claimants who met with more than one adviser (104)*

Almost half of the JSA claimants who had met with multiple advisers and said they did not have a preference regarding the adviser they saw mentioned that this was on condition that the adviser knew a bit about their circumstances (31 per cent of all JSA claimants who met with more than one adviser). This represents a departure from the attitudes reported by claimants who had already seen multiple advisers at an early stage of their claim, far fewer of whom mentioned this condition (three per cent). A similar pattern was seen amongst ESA claimants who had met with multiple advisers, with the proportion mentioning that their

<sup>20</sup> Due to an error in the computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) programming of the second survey interview, this question was not asked of respondents who reported having had a single meeting or no meetings at all with an adviser in their first survey interview (in the early weeks of their claim). Since it is not known whether these claimants saw multiple advisers during the course of their claim, the claimants in question have been removed from the calculation. Consequently, the proportions reported above regarding claimants who experienced adviser continuity should be treated with caution.

lack of preference was conditional rising from four per cent to 42 per cent. This suggests that claimants place increasing value on advisers who know something about them as their claims progress, so that they do not have to describe their circumstances afresh.

Amongst claimants who met with more than one adviser, a substantial minority (31 per cent JSA claimants and 40 per cent ESA claimants) said they would have preferred the continuity of seeing the same adviser. This preference was more common amongst JSA claimants with a disability<sup>21</sup> (44 per cent, compared with 27 per cent of other claimants).

It should be noted that the attitudes of ESA claimants shifted over time: whereas more than half of the ESA claimants who had experienced a change of adviser at an early stage of their claim stated a preference for continuity (52 per cent), this was not the prevailing view amongst claimants interviewed a year later or after off-flowing from the Offer (40 per cent of those who had come into contact with multiple advisers). Moreover, while the preference for continuity was more widespread amongst ESA claimants than JSA claimants at an early stage of the claimant journey, there was little disparity between the two groups at a later stage of the claimant journey.

In the depth interviews, claimants' views about continuity of adviser typically varied according to their perception of the quality of their adviser and how much tailored support they felt they required from Jobcentre Plus. 'Good quality' in this context refers to the claimant's view of the adviser, and whether they were friendly, encouraging and responsive to their support needs. It was found that if claimants did not perceive their adviser to be 'good quality' this could affect their engagement with the adviser and/or the support offered.

Claimants who had seen the same 'good quality' adviser consistently were often clear about its benefits, as they felt it ensured continuity of support and allowed for familiarity and trust to build with the adviser. However, it was also noted that some claimants were less concerned about receiving a personalised and tailored service and therefore did not mind seeing multiple advisers of potentially varying quality. This was underpinned by a sense that the role of the adviser was minimal in terms of them getting back into work and they were satisfied as long as they were aware of what support was available to them should they need it.

*'If you see the same adviser it's more comfortable as they know a little bit of your history, and that's good because it gives you structure.'*

(Female, JSA 25-49)

*'It doesn't really bother me who it is every time, as long as they are doing their job properly... take the time to listen to me, try to help me...'*

(Male, JSA 25-49)

Claimants who said they required more individualised support and had not seen the same adviser, felt they had lost out on developing a relationship that could bring them closer to employment. They believed a consistent and good adviser would be beneficial as they could rely on their advisers' understanding of their needs and broader personal context to support their job search.

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<sup>21</sup> These are claimants who reported having a disability or health condition expected to last for 12 months or more.

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*'It's nice to see the same face because obviously once you've kind of seen someone, it's all that nervousness hopefully dissipates and it does make it a bit easier to see someone who knows you. That's nice because seeing someone different every time, it just gets a bit uncomfortable, it puts me on edge.'*

(Female, JSA 16-24)

*'It's a bit disheartening because you start to build up a bit of rapport and somebody will remember you and you know they will say, "how did you get on with such a thing?"... then you go and see somebody else and they've got no history of what you've been doing or who you are.'*

(Male, JSA 50+)

Additionally, continuity of adviser support was of particular importance among ESA claimants and JSA claimants with complex needs who valued having one adviser who understood the sensitivity of their situation and could provide the appropriate support. This view was most prevalent among claimants with health needs (physical and mental) and other issues around drugs, alcohol and having a criminal record, who did not want to have to explain their situation on multiple occasions. They appreciated having a consistent adviser who they could build up a trusting relationship with and fully explore their barriers to work.

*'Because once you start getting to know someone you can talk to them a bit easier and open up a bit more ... rather than speak to one person and then go to a stranger and it's like you're starting all over again – all they know is what's written on a computer.'*

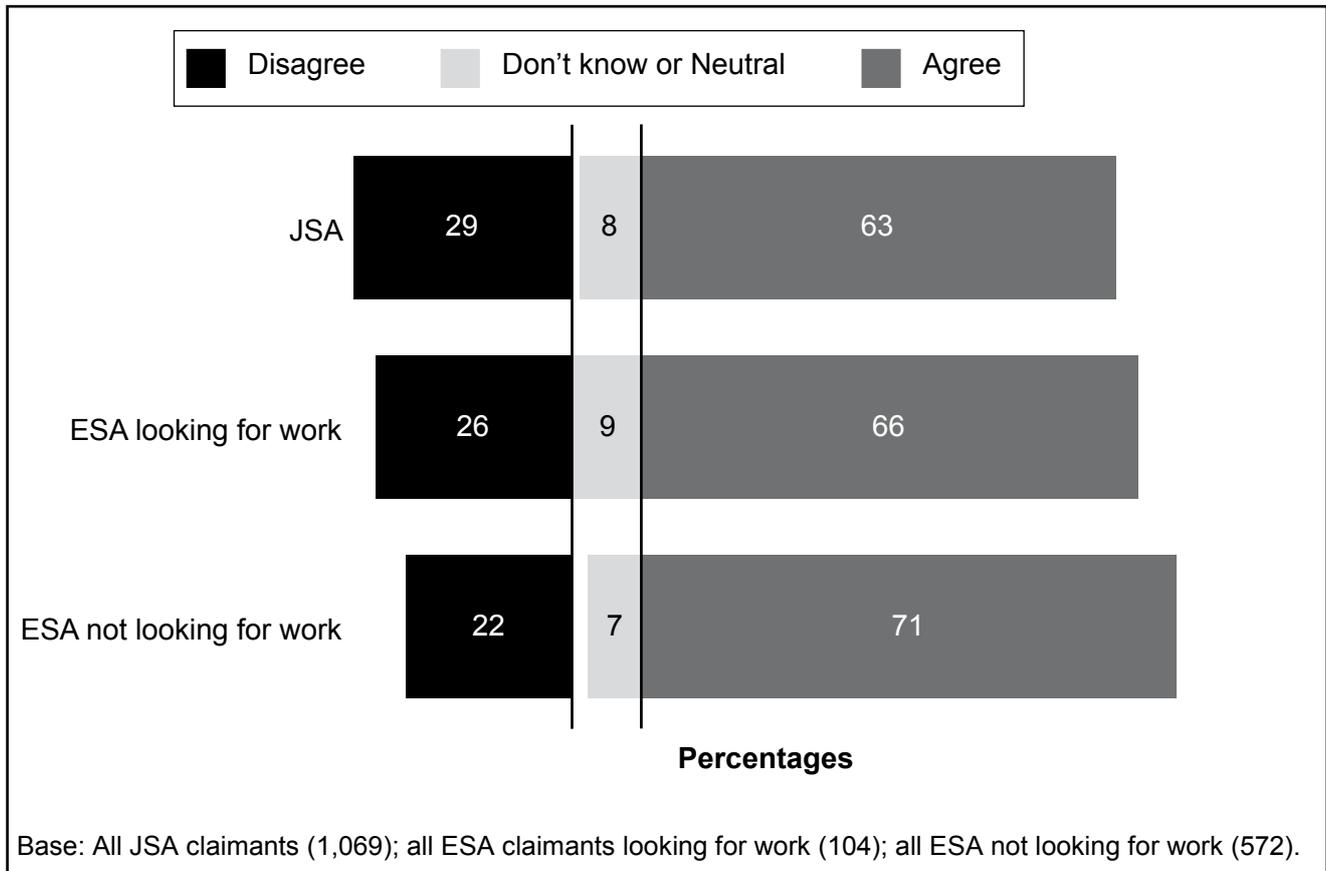
(Male, ESA)

### 3.4.5 Adviser support: Understanding personal circumstances

To gauge the level of tailoring of the support claimants received from advisers, the survey asked whether claimants felt that their advisers understood their particular circumstances. Between six and seven in ten claimants agreed that advisers they had come into contact with during their claim understood their circumstances (Figure 3.7). The opinions of the three claimant groups were broadly similar, though the proportion who felt that advisers had failed to appreciate their circumstances was higher amongst JSA claimants than ESA claimants who were not looking for work (29 per cent compared to 22 per cent).

The pattern of responses illustrated in Figure 3.7 matches the pattern recorded after the first wave of claimant interviews. However, when claimants were asked to consider a longer term view (the course of their entire claim or a year since their first interview) rather than concentrating only on the first weeks of their claim, fewer in each group agreed that advisers understood their circumstances. The fall in agreement levels was most marked amongst JSA claimants (down from 70 per cent to 63 per cent agreement) and ESA claimants who were not looking for work (down from 78 per cent to 71 per cent agreement), and suggests that claimants felt there was less understanding from advisers the longer their claim continued.

Figure 3.7 Views regarding advisers' understanding of personal circumstances



### Analysis of JSA claimants

JSA claimants' views regarding how well advisers understood their circumstances did not vary by most of their demographic characteristics. The exception to this was amongst claimants with a mental health condition, who were less likely than other claimants to feel that advisers treated them with understanding (44 per cent, compared to 28 per cent of other claimants).

While the actual frequency of adviser meetings had no bearing on claimants' views on this matter, seeing the same adviser was associated with a positive perception of advisers' understanding: around seven in ten (71 per cent) of the claimants who had seen the same adviser throughout their claim felt that the adviser understood their circumstances, whereas only 58 per cent of those who met with multiple advisers felt the same. Beyond this, views were shaped by claimants' perception of the time and support received from their advisers. Those who felt that the time advisers spent with them was 'about right' were more likely to agree that advisers understood them (78 per cent, compared with 37 per cent of those who believed that they had too much time with an adviser, and 29 per cent of those who felt the time was insufficient). Similarly, claimants who agreed that they received the 'right amount' of support, or that the support they received matched their requirements, were more likely to feel understood (86 per cent and 89 per cent, respectively) than those who disagreed that this was the case (23 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively).

### Analysis of ESA claimants

ESA claimants who maintained higher levels of adviser contact or greater continuity of contact were more likely to acknowledge advisers' understanding of their circumstances. While over four in five (83 per cent) of ESA claimants who met with advisers on a monthly or more frequent basis agreed that advisers understood their personal circumstances, just three-quarters (76 per cent) of those who had meetings once or twice every three months felt the same, falling to 64 per cent of those who met with advisers less often. As with JSA claimants, ESA claimants who saw a single adviser were more inclined than those who saw multiple advisers to describe advisers as understanding (73 per cent compared to 61 per cent). Moreover, around three-quarters of claimants who received clear 'next steps' information at their NJWFI (such as being clear when their next appointment was going to be) believed that advisers understood their situation (74 per cent agreement amongst claimants who received an appointment, and 76 per cent agreement for those who were clear about the frequency of subsequent meetings).

Agreement with the statement 'Jobcentre Plus Advisers understood your particular circumstances' was more common amongst ESA claimants who felt that advisers dedicated adequate time for their needs (84 per cent, compared with 40 per cent who spent 'too much' time and 29 per cent who spent 'not enough' time with advisers). Moreover, around nine in ten claimants who stated that the support they received was right for them (89 per cent) or tailored to their needs and circumstances (92 per cent) agreed with this statement.

The depth interviews highlighted sporadic evidence of tailored adviser support. Claimants' perceptions of this were typically dependent on what they considered to be the quality of the adviser and the complexity of their support needs. Advisers who were deemed to be 'good' provided tailored support to claimants by developing a relationship with them which meant they could understand the range of their needs to then provide the appropriate support. This happened in a variety of ways, from developing a trusting rapport with claimants who struggled to express their needs to keeping in touch with claimants in between appointments over job search progress via text message or the telephone.

#### Case Study: Male JSA 50+

Michael, aged 51, struggles with mental health issues which mean he often finds himself easily frustrated and regularly loses his temper. When he started attending the Jobcentre Plus office he saw a range of advisers and was frequently aggressive to them as he felt misunderstood and pushed into support that he believed was inappropriate for his needs. After eight months of his claim, he was referred to an adviser who he felt understood his needs; specifically, that he wanted to get into work, but would need some support and training in order to manage his behaviour. She referred him to a customer service course where he learned the necessary skills and then successfully applied for a job as shelf stacker at a supermarket. *'I relaxed a little ... we tried to work with each other rather than against each other which is how it seemed at the time. There was a better understanding ... so they said, "right, if you go on this course you have got a better chance of getting in at [supermarket]" and I said, "right, put me on it".'*

Additionally, in cases where claimants had support needs regarding soft skills, such as confidence building and interview techniques, tailored adviser support could often be beneficial in helping to overcome this. For example, claimants described gaining these skills through the development of a professional and supportive relationship with their adviser who was able to provide informal coaching.

### Case study: Female, JSA 16-24

Mia, aged 17, started claiming JSA after leaving college and was keen to get a role in retail. She felt that her lack of confidence in interviews and lack of relevant work experience were preventing her from being successful. After claiming JSA for three months without seeing the same adviser, she was referred to a personal adviser who she saw weekly. The adviser telephoned Mia if she found any jobs she believed were suitable, showed her several job search websites and gave her one-to-one informal coaching in interview skills. Mia felt her confidence increased from this personalised support and attributed her success to the support she received from her adviser. She is now very pleased to have a job in retail. *'She was just really helpful ... every time I had an interview she would always tell me to go in there confident and even if I didn't get the job she'd be like don't give up.'*

However, there was also evidence from the depth interviews to suggest that claimants who faced more complex barriers to finding work felt that their experience of tailored adviser support had been fairly limited. This sub-group included claimants such as lone parents, those with health problems, and the homeless. Many felt that their adviser had not understood the complexity of their needs, particularly around what might be needed in order to overcome these barriers, such as childcare support, counselling or coaching. Therefore, for these claimants, returning to work often felt like an insurmountable task without support to overcome their initial barriers. For example, a number of lone parents described a lack of support encouraging them to explore options that could assist them into employment, such as childcare support or part-time working.

Similarly, a number of ESA claimants who described themselves as 'ready for work' claimed that their support needs for returning back to work were not understood by their adviser. Specific support needs that they felt were not being addressed included more personalised job search or CV writing support, assistance finding employers who could be adaptable to their health condition, and coaching to regain confidence to return to the workplace. The perceived lack of such support from their adviser to address these issues meant that these claimants frequently felt that returning to work would be very challenging.

*'I want a job and they're [Jobcentre Plus] asking me for my CV and I've said 'I've not got a clue how to do a CV' and their answer to that is 'there's loads of websites that you can go onto help.' That's easy for them to say, if you've got someone to go through it with you it just makes it that much easier.'*

(Male, ESA)

*'They were just doing their job asking standard questions, and weren't particularly interested to be honest in what I needed [to get back into work] which was skills retraining.'*

(Female, ESA)

### Case study: Female, JSA 25-49

Sarah, aged 40, is in recovery from long-term drug addiction and now has multiple barriers to finding a job, including a criminal record, childcare responsibilities and depression. *‘My CRB check is as long as your arm, so it’s quite difficult to find anything ... Particularly working in a school, where I would like to be.’* Despite these barriers, the health team involved in her recovery referred Sarah to volunteer in a drug recovery centre, which she finds rewarding.

Since claiming JSA for 12 months her contact with Jobcentre Plus has been mostly through Jobsearch Review meetings, where she feels under pressure to find employment regardless of whether it would sustain her recovery. She feels uncomfortable discussing her barriers to work with Jobcentre Plus staff as she has not had the opportunity to build up a trusting relationship with a single adviser. She feels that she is still far from finding work and that Jobcentre Plus has offered her limited guidance or training. *‘The more you go to the jobcentre, you see a different adviser every time and then you know you become a normal person as you assume they know about you, which they don’t. I would have liked to have been offered some training ... some positivity ... I would like to have been given some more options rather than [being told] “you need to find work”.’*

### 3.4.6 Adviser support: Job search advice

Respondents were asked whether they had been offered certain types of job search advice by an adviser during their claim: advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare for and carry out a job interview and suggestions about where they should look for job vacancies

Most JSA claimants (90 per cent) said they had discussed at least one of these issues. However, the proportion was lower for ESA claimants who were looking for work (61 per cent). In particular, these ESA claimants were less likely to have been offered suggestions about where they should look for job vacancies (55 per cent, compared with 86 per cent of JSA claimants). Table 3.16 provides further details. Overall, these findings indicate that there is a stronger focus on practical job search advice for JSA claimants than ESA claimants, even where ESA claimants are looking for work.

**Table 3.16 Discussion of job search activities**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %
Offered:		
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	65	39
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	86	55
Any of the above	90	61

*Base: All JSA claimants (1069); all ESA claimants looking for work (104)*

The depth interviews found that claimants of all age ranges reported attending group CV writing sessions at Jobcentre Plus, typically within the first few weeks of their claim. JSA claimants aged between 16 and 24 and those who had been out of work for a long time for various reasons most typically described the sessions as useful, as many did not have a CV before this. They mentioned that it was useful to learn how to format the document and how to present their often limited work experience in a way which would be attractive for prospective employers. However, among the older age groups there was a common view that the CV course had been forced upon them by their adviser as a consequence of poor diagnosis of their support needs. This was linked to a sense that the course was pitched to those who did not know how to write a CV, which was frustrating for this sub-group as they typically had a CV or they felt a CV would not help them to find an appropriate job. They felt that their time would have been better spent learning how to look for jobs that would match their current skillset.

*‘The CV course they ran was really helpful as it made me realise that I have a lot more skills than I thought.’*

(Female, JSA 25-49)

*‘When you get to my age you are not bothered about CVs and stuff like that. I only ever had one interview in my whole life.’*

(Male, JSA 50+)

In addition to being directed to sources of vacancies or being offered support with their CVs and job applications, advisers may try to direct claimants to vacancies for specific jobs that might be suitable for them. Almost nine in ten JSA claimants (87 per cent) and two-thirds of ESA claimants looking for work (66 per cent) said that their adviser had tried to do this. However, claimants did not always feel that the recommendations they received were aligned to their requirements. Table 3.17 shows the proportion of JSA claimants who felt that the recommendations they received throughout their claim were suitable. The base size for ESA claimants looking for work who received recommendations is too small to include in the table (n=29).

**Table 3.17 Suitability of job suggestions**

	JSA %
All suitable	52
Some suitable	18
None suitable	28
Don't know	3
<i>Base: All JSA claimants who received job suggestions</i>	428

Notably, there has been a decline since the first interview in the proportion of JSA claimants who felt that all of the recommendations they received were suitable (down from 69 per cent to 52 per cent). This may be the result of advisers recommending a broader range of jobs to claimants at later stages of their claim, and claimants perhaps feeling uncomfortable with this greater variety.

### Analysis of JSA claimants

Younger JSA claimants were more likely to have been offered job search advice: 93 per cent of 18-24 year olds were offered at least one of the types of advice, compared with 87 per cent of those aged 25 or over. The same age group was also more likely than older claimants to be signposted to sources of vacancies (90 per cent compared with 84 per cent) and receive suggestions from an adviser for jobs that may be suited to them (93 per cent compared with 84 per cent). However, the job recommendations made to claimants in this age band seem to have become more varied and unsuitable as their claims progressed: whereas 65 per cent of under-25s who received recommendations said, at an early stage of their claim, that all the recommendations they received were suitable, only 56 per cent said the same about the suggestions made over the entire course of their claim. Suitability did not decline in the same way amongst older respondents, though it is worth noting that claimants aged 50 or above were the most likely to say that none of the recommendations they received were suited to their requirements (36 per cent compared with 27 per cent of younger claimants).

Respondents who had been out of work for a longer period of time were also more likely to have been signposted to sources of vacancies or received advice on CVs, job applications and job interviews, as were those who described themselves as being nervous at the thought of being in work. By contrast, those who had already moved off JSA and into work by the time of the first survey interview were less likely to have been offered job search advice, perhaps reflecting the fact that they often did not need this type of advice.

Another indication that advisers may have avoided offering advice to those least likely to need it is the extent to which advice was offered to claimants with a degree. Around nine in ten claimants qualified to A' level or below or lacking formal qualifications had been signposted to sources of vacancies (88 per cent), and similar proportions were offered advice regarding CVs, job applications and job interviews (91 per cent) or suggestions for specific vacancies that advisers thought might suit them (89 per cent). By contrast, only four in five claimants with a degree were offered the same support (79 per cent, 83 per cent, and 81 per cent, respectively). It is worth adding that any selectivity on the part of advisers in proposing jobs to highly qualified claimants may have been well founded. This is suggested by the fact that claimants with a degree who received recommendations for specific vacancies were more likely to deem all of them appropriate (58 per cent of those who received suggestions) than lesser qualified claimants (32 per cent of those who received suggestions).

### Analysis of ESA claimants

There is very limited scope for sub-group analysis of ESA claimants, as these questions were only asked of those looking for work. However, analysis indicates that (as was the case with JSA claimants) discussion of job search activities was higher for those who had been out of work longer. For those on ESA, the division is between those who had worked in the last five years, compared with those that had not worked for over five years or at all.

## 3.5 Flexible menu of back-to-work support

This section looks at the flexible menu of support in terms of the proportion of claimants who were offered the various support options and the proportions who went on to take them up. It also looks at the profile of the claimants who were offered each type of support, in order to assess the extent to which support was tailored based on need.

Since very few ESA claimants were offered work experience, skills training or self-employment support, the figures discussed below in connection with these types of support are limited to JSA claimants. Findings relating to support with health, finances, childcare and homelessness cover both types of claimant.

The survey results in this section rely on respondents' ability to recall accurately the specific types of support they have discussed and taken up. Although experiences were still recent when the interviews were conducted, it is likely that some respondents had difficulty in recalling the detail of what they had discussed with advisers. Some caution should therefore be taken when interpreting the findings.

### 3.5.1 Work experience

Jobcentre Plus offers various work experience opportunities as part of its flexible menu of support. Claimants were asked whether they had discussed internships and apprenticeships, or opportunities to take part in the work experience scheme; a work trial; a mandatory work activity placement; or a sector-based work academy. They were also asked whether they received any advice about volunteering which might help them develop some work experience. The proportions of JSA claimants who discussed these options with an adviser are shown in Table 3.18.

**Table 3.18 Offer of work experience**

	JSA %
Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience	41
Discussed:	
Work experience scheme	14
Work trial	9
Mandatory work activity	6
Internships	5
Apprenticeships and 'Access to Apprenticeship scheme'	8
Sector-based work academy	5
Volunteering	35
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	<i>1,069</i>

Over the course of the Offer, 41 per cent of JSA claimants discussed one of the work experience opportunities listed above with their adviser. Amongst the schemes offered by the jobcentre, the work experience scheme was the most common type of scheme discussed (14 per cent), though higher proportions discussed volunteering opportunities (35 per cent).

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Claimants who reported towards the start of their claim that a lack of work experience was preventing them from finding work were no more likely than anyone else to discuss work experience options with an adviser (37 per cent compared with 55 per cent). Instead, work experience opportunities of any type were most frequently discussed with 18-24 year-olds (62 per cent), reflecting the increased provision of placements on some schemes for under-25s through the Youth Contract.<sup>22</sup> Advisers may also have been targeting placements towards those who had been out of the labour market the longest. Discussions about work experience opportunities were more likely to be held with claimants who had been unemployed for over two years or had never worked (54 per cent) than claimants who had been in work more recently (39 per cent), and only around a third (36 per cent) of claimants who had been in work within three months of making their JSA claim discussed these options with their adviser.

Claimants who discussed a work experience opportunity or voluntary position were more likely (69 per cent) than those who did not (58 per cent) to say that the support offered by Jobcentre Plus felt right for their needs. Having these discussions was also associated with a positive perception of the tailoring of the advice and support offered by the jobcentre, with 71 per cent saying that the support they were offered matched their needs and circumstances (compared with 59 per cent of claimants who did not discuss a work experience or voluntary placement). Amongst claimants who actually went on to take up such an opportunity, the proportion indicating that the support fitted with their needs and circumstances was even higher (75 per cent).

A third of those who discussed a work experience opportunity (equating to fourteen per cent of all JSA claimants) went on to take this up (Table 3.19). The most common types of opportunity to be taken up were placements on the work experience scheme (six per cent) and positions with voluntary organisations (eight per cent).

**Table 3.19 Taking up work experience opportunities**

	JSA %
Taking up any work experience opportunity	14
Attended:	
Work experience placement	6
'Work Trial' placement	3
Mandatory Work Activity placement	4
sector based work academy placement	1
voluntary position	8
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	<i>1,069</i>

Seven in ten (72 per cent) claimants who attended a work experience placement or volunteering opportunity said they were satisfied with the service that Jobcentre Plus provided in helping them find employment. Claimants who undertook some work experience

<sup>22</sup> The introduction of the Youth Contract, a cross-department initiative aimed at helping youth unemployment, has led to an increase in the provision of work experience and sector-based work academy placements to claimants under the age of 25. However, both schemes are also available to claimants aged 25 or above, but require local funding.

but did not succeed in finding work, had larger positive attitudinal shifts for being confident they can do well in interviews (+21 percentage points) and being less nervous about work (+16 percentage points) than claimants who did not undertake any work experience. Moreover, claimants who attended a work experience placement or voluntary position but did not manage to find work, were less inclined to say that *'people are put under too much pressure to find work'* after they had been on their claim for 12 months than they were at the start of their claim (+17 percentage point shift).

The depth interviews highlighted that the views of claimants who had been on work experience varied depending on their perception of the quality of their placement and whether they felt it had helped them get closer to work. For example, a number of claimants described the experience as being integral in helping them to understand the demands of the workplace and also appreciated having it to add to their CV thereby improving their employability. However, claimants also described experiences where they felt unsupervised, underused, and bored. For these claimants, the experience had not been worthwhile and they felt resentful for having to attend.

*'There is value in the work experience because I learned more about working life ... I wish that there was a job at the end of a work experience'*

(Female, JSA 16-24)

*'Working for a company for a month ... You don't earn a penny; they earn a fortune out of you ... that was my impression.'*

(Male, JSA 50+)

### Case study: Work experience: Male, JSA 16-24

Tim, aged 18, had been claiming JSA since he left school six months ago. He believed that his main barriers to finding work were travel difficulties, as he lives in a remote village, lack of work experience and low confidence with interviews and filling out job applications. After six months of his claim, his Jobcentre Plus adviser referred him to a six-week skills training course, which he found to give him practical advice for interviews and applications. He is now on a work experience placement at another local Jobcentre Plus office where he helps other claimants in the PC suite to register online for Universal Jobmatch. He finds the work rewarding and it has helped him explore the type the jobs he might be interested in, bringing him closer to employment. *'I am meeting new people, I am actually doing something. This is giving me motivation to look even harder for more jobs.'*

## 3.5.2 Skills and training

Jobcentre Plus advisers can recommend claimants go on various types of skills and training courses as part of the flexible menu of support. Respondents were specifically asked whether they had discussed any of the following types of skills and training courses with their adviser: education courses at local colleges or other training providers; skills assessments with a skills provider (not based at Jobcentre Plus); referral to the National Careers Service or a careers adviser; and mandatory courses to improve their basic skills in subjects such as English, maths or IT.

A quarter of JSA claimants (25 per cent) discussed skills support options with their adviser (Table 3.20). The most commonly discussed type of skills support was an education course

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at a local college or private provider (discussed by 20 per cent of all JSA claimants). JSA claimants who reported, towards the start of their claim, that a lack of skills was preventing them from finding work were no more likely than anyone else to discuss skills support with an adviser (34 per cent compared with 29 per cent).

**Table 3.20 Offer of skills or training course**

	JSA %
Offered an opportunity to go on a skills or training course	25
Offered:	
Advice on or referral to an education course	20
Referral to a skills assessment	12
Referral to the National Careers Service or a careers adviser	7
Referral on a mandatory course to improve skills	11
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	<i>1,069</i>

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of those who discussed or were referred to some type of skills or training option went on to attend a session or course. As shown in Table 3.21, the most common type of skills support undertaken by claimants was an education course at a local college or private provider (11 per cent).

**Table 3.21 Attend skills or training course**

	JSA %
Attended a skills or training course	16
Attended:	
An education course at a local college or private provider	11
Attended a skills assessment with a skills provider	7
Attended a session at the National Careers Service or with a Careers Adviser	4
Attended a mandatory course to improve skills	7
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	<i>1,069</i>

Claimants with basic qualifications were more likely to discuss skills and training sessions with their advisers (31 per cent) than either more qualified claimants (11 per cent) or claimants who lacked formal qualifications (17 per cent). However, the decision to attend a course or session did not vary by the claimants' highest qualification. This is perhaps surprising, given that many of the courses on offer relate to the development of basic skills which more qualified claimants would probably already possess. This may indicate insufficient use of discretion on the part of advisers when referring claimants.

Over two-thirds of claimants who attended a session or course to assess or improve their skills (68 per cent) said they were satisfied with the service that Jobcentre Plus offered in helping them find employment (compared with 55 per cent of those who did not attend). Moreover, claimants' rating of the level and tailoring of support provided by the jobcentre

varied according to whether or not they received any skills support. Three-quarters of claimants who took up some type of skills support agreed that the amount of support they received from the jobcentre overall felt right for their needs (76 per cent, compared with 59 per cent of claimants who did not receive skills support); a similar proportion believed that the support and advice they received matched their needs and personal circumstances (77 per cent), whereas only three-fifths of other claimants felt the same (62 per cent).

### 3.5.3 Self-employment support

Jobcentre Plus advisers can offer claimants support in setting up their own business through general advice; referring the claimant to a business mentoring scheme or an enterprise club; or through the New Enterprise Allowance, which offers financial support for starting a new business.

Less than one in ten JSA claimants (seven per cent) discussed self-employment support with their adviser (Table 3.22). General guidance and information about self-employment was the most commonly discussed form of support amongst JSA claimants (six per cent).<sup>23</sup>

**Table 3.22 Types of self-employment support discussed**

	JSA %
Discussed self-employment support	7
Offered:	
Information and guidance about self-employment or setting up own business	6
Referral to a business mentoring scheme	3
Referral to an enterprise club	2
Discussion of the New Enterprise Allowance	3
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	1,069

A quarter of the claimants who discussed some type of self-employment support went on to take this up (23 per cent). Overall, take up rates of self-employment support were relatively low (Table 3.23): only two per cent of JSA claimants went on to attend a business mentoring scheme or an enterprise club, or to apply for the New Enterprise Allowance.

**Table 3.23 Types of self-employment support discussed**

	JSA %
Took up self-employment support	2
Attended business mentoring scheme	1
Attended enterprise club	1
Applied for New Enterprise Allowance	*
<i>Base: All JSA claimants</i>	1,069

<sup>23</sup> The majority of respondents were interviewed before the campaign to raise awareness of the New Enterprise Scheme was launched in the summer of 2013.

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Discussions about self-employment support seem to have been targeted particularly towards older claimants and those with higher qualifications. Claimants aged 25 or above were more likely to discuss (10 per cent) and take up (three per cent) self-employment support than 18-24 year-old claimants (three per cent and nought per cent, respectively). The likelihood of discussing self-employment also varied by claimants' level of educational attainment: nearly one in six claimants with a degree (15 per cent) discussed self-employment support compared with just six per cent of claimants who were less qualified.

There was fairly limited mention of self-employment support in the depth interviews. The NEA Programme was the type of self-employment support most commonly cited by claimants who already had an idea that they would like to set up their own business prior to attending the jobcentre. The claimants described the programme as sufficiently wide-ranging and helpful as it included both practical support with a loan and also softer skills support, as courses in marketing and business skills were provided. The claimants who had undertaken the scheme were very positive about the new skills that they had learned and strongly believed that this had brought them closer to sustainable employment.

### Case study: NEA: Male, JSA 50+

Peter worked as a lorry driver for 30 years, but after suffering from a severe stroke he was told he would not be able to work in this role again. When he was found 'Fit for Work' following a Work Capability Assessment he found job search challenging as he had developed health problems and did not have any qualifications or previous work experience in areas other than lorry driving.

Initially, his Jobcentre Plus adviser sent him on maths and English short courses to improve his literacy skills but he found them to be too basic. Peter realised that he would be likely to have more success if he started up his own business in pest control, as it would suit his skills level and it would not be physically demanding. After a period of 12 months, Peter was referred onto the NEA programme, and subsequently undertook courses in pest control and business and used these to set up his own business. He is pleased with the support he received from Jobcentre Plus but feels frustrated that he had to wait a year before being referred to the programme which was the most suited to his needs (the rules for NEA have since changed, so that claimants are generally now eligible from when they start receiving JSA).

### 3.5.4 Volunteering

Claimants are encouraged to consider volunteering positions<sup>24</sup> to improve their chance of securing work, and Jobcentre Plus can help source these opportunities. Advisers are able to signpost opportunities to claimants, including websites such as 'Do It' and local organisations who have agreed to support unemployed people.

Whereas around a third of JSA claimants (35 per cent) discussed volunteering with an adviser (Table 3.18), almost half of ESA claimants (49 per cent) had similar discussions (Table 3.24).

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<sup>24</sup> Excludes claimants who are being supported through mandatory provision. Volunteering is subject to continued benefit eligibility conditions being met.

**Table 3.24 Types of volunteering support discussed**

	ESA %
Discussed volunteering support	49
Local organisations	35
Local volunteer centre	28
On-line (e.g. Do It)	21
None of these	12
<i>Base: All ESA claimants</i>	676

There was no significant difference between ESA claimants who were looking for work and those who were not looking for work (51 per cent and 48 per cent respectively). Furthermore, the two groups did not differ significantly in their level of take up of voluntary positions: amongst those who discussed volunteering, 21 per cent of those looking for work took up a placement compared with 14 per cent of those not looking for work.

Only seven per cent of ESA claimants actually took up a voluntary position. The large gap between the proportion being signposted and actually taking up a voluntary position may partly stem from advisers' reluctance to 'push' ESA claimants or follow up on their progress after initial signposting. The depth interviews from the first year of the evaluation indicated potential problems which may lead to the relatively low take up of volunteering options. Where volunteering had been discussed with ESA claimants, they did not necessarily take up support because of current health conditions. Others did not see the value as it was perceived as unpaid work and associated with negative media stories.

However, perhaps most worryingly of all from an organisational standpoint was that the discussion of volunteering was not always followed up with information regarding where they could find opportunities. As a result of this, some claimants found they had to look independently for contacts and organisations.

### Case study: Volunteering: Male, ESA

Robert suffers from psychosis and depression/anxiety problems and receives ongoing support from his local psychiatric support team. His adviser mentioned the possibility of volunteering but did not provide him with any details or signpost any suitable contact organisations. Although he initially felt reluctant about the idea of volunteering, he subsequently thought this could be a good idea. He found the discussion with his adviser unclear and did not know if this was something he had to organise himself and what next steps he needed to take.

*'You know a couple of months into it she was kind of saying, "you need to be doing something, whether it's voluntary work or whether it's getting on some kind of programme" ... and I said, "well, like what?", you know, and she said, "well the NHS do things" and so I asked my psychiatric nurse and she said that she doesn't really know what kind of programme or anything like that they're talking about anyway so it wasn't really clear exactly what I was meant to be doing.'*

### 3.5.5 Health

Jobcentre Plus advisers offer support and guidance to claimants with health conditions or disabilities, for example by encouraging voluntary referral to providers and treatment services where relevant. This can include advice around treatment for drug or alcohol dependencies or health service providers who can help with the claimant's health condition, as well as more basic discussion and advice around what jobs claimants feel they can and cannot do.

As shown in Table 3.25, nearly half of all ESA claimants (45 per cent) were offered some form of health support. The most common form of support was advice on health service providers who could help with the claimant's health condition or disability (37 per cent). JSA claimants who had a disability or health condition were less likely to be offered support relating to their health, with only around a quarter (24 per cent) discussing some form of support with their adviser. There was no difference in this respect between claimants with a physical or a mental health condition.

**Table 3.25 Types of health advice or support received**

	ESA %	JSA with disability %
Discussed some form of health support	45	24
Received advice or support:		
by adviser on health condition or disability	27	17
on health service providers who can help with health condition or disability	37	11
on treatment options for drugs or alcohol dependency	10	8

*Base: All ESA claimants (676); all JSA claimants with a health condition or disability (188)*

While over a quarter of ESA claimants (27 per cent) were offered help or support for their health condition or disability by an adviser at Jobcentre Plus, around a third of these claimants (36 per cent) did not discuss the potential suitability of particular types of jobs, such as jobs they would and would not be able to do. A further five per cent only discussed jobs they were able to do, and a similar proportion only discussed jobs they would not be able to do, rather than having a fully rounded discussion about the options available to them. These proportions are perhaps indicative of a lack of confidence or relevant knowledge on the part of advisers when interacting with claimants with health needs or advising them on their health needs.

Those who were offered health support had a higher propensity to give a positive report of the amount and tailoring of support on offer by the jobcentre. Seven in ten ESA claimants who discussed this type of support assessed the overall level of support provided by Jobcentre Plus as right for their needs (72 per cent); amongst JSA claimants who had a health condition or disability and discussed health support the proportion who felt this was even higher (85 per cent). Similarly, around four in five ESA claimants who were offered health support (81 per cent) and seven in ten JSA claimants who were offered health support (71 per cent) felt that the advice and support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances.

A further form of support available to ESA claimants is the chance to be referred to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA). Eight per cent of ESA claimants were referred to a DEA, where topics such as the 'Access to Work' and 'Work Choice' schemes were commonly discussed (Table 3.26).

**Table 3.26 Topics discussed with DEA**

	ESA %
Access to Work	56
'Work Choice'	50
Information on employers in your areas who have adopted the 'two ticks' disability symbol	29
Residential training	8
<i>Base: All ESA claimants referred to a DEA</i>	<i>70</i>

### 3.5.6 Other areas of support

Jobcentre Plus can offer a range of other types of support, such as advice or information regarding childcare support, homelessness, and caring responsibilities. Advisers may also offer information regarding support networks for the unemployed (specifically, signposting to local work clubs) and some types of financial support to cover one-off expenses or childcare costs in connection with job search activities.

Table 3.27 shows the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who received each type of support. Since these types of support are only relevant to claimants with specific circumstances, it is unsurprising that fairly low numbers were offered each type of support. The exception to this is information about work clubs, which was provided to over half of JSA claimants (53 per cent), but fewer ESA claimants who were looking for work (38 per cent, equivalent to eight per cent of all ESA claimants).

Additional information regarding financial support is provided in Section 3.5.7.

**Table 3.27 Other types of support offered**

	JSA %	ESA %
Information about 'work clubs' in the local area	53	8
Financial help for one-off expenses	25	13
Information or help with caring responsibilities for adults	8	12
Advice regarding homelessness	7	6
Information or help with childcare	4	2
<i>Base: All JSA claimants (1,069); all ESA claimants (676)</i>		

JSA claimants under the age of 25 or who were either unqualified or educated to GCSE level or below were more likely than other claimants to be directed to a local work club (61 per cent each, compared with 48 per cent of those aged 25 or over and 42 per cent with higher

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qualifications). This is perhaps because they were seen to be more in need of networking opportunities than other claimants. However, JSA claimants who had been out of the labour market for longer and arguably also needed opportunities to meet people in similar circumstances were no more likely than anyone else to be signposted to this resource.

Far fewer ESA claimants than JSA claimants were signposted to work clubs, perhaps partly because advisers were focusing referrals on those who had been in work within the last five years: whereas around one in six (16 per cent) ESA claimants who had been out of work for less than five years were directed to a local work club, the same was true for only six per cent of those who were unemployed for longer.

JSA claimants in the under-25 age band had a higher likelihood of being offered financial support (29 per cent), advice regarding homelessness (10 per cent), and information or help with caring responsibilities for adults (10 per cent) than claimants aged 25 or over (23 per cent, five per cent, and six per cent, respectively). The offer of information regarding homelessness or the care of adults is perhaps surprising for this group, who were no more likely than older respondents to report that they were homeless or to feel that caring responsibilities were a barrier to finding work.

Childcare support was offered to 19 per cent of JSA claimants with children, and was much more likely to be offered to single parents (36 per cent compared with nine per cent of claimants with a partner). Of the small number of people who said they were offered this kind of help (n=32), 28 said they received information about how working hours can fit around caring commitments; 28 received advice regarding support through tax credits for working parents; and 15 received information about childcare costs for attending job interviews. Fewer ESA claimants with children received any type of childcare support.

The low numbers of claimants overall who received these types of support prevent much sub-group analysis.

### 3.5.7 Financial support

Claimants can be offered financial support, notably through the Flexible Support Fund, for one-off expenses such as travelling to interviews, clothing and footwear, and childcare. Advisers can award these funds at their discretion. As summarised in Table 3.27, advisers spoke about the potential for financial help with a quarter of JSA claimants (25 per cent) and half as many ESA claimants (13 per cent). In the majority of cases, JSA claimants themselves asked for this support (20 per cent of all JSA claimants); this was also true for around half of ESA cases (six per cent of all ESA claimants).

The under-25s were the only sub-group who stood out amongst JSA claimants as having a higher than average likelihood of having discussions about financial help with advisers (29 per cent, compared with 23 per cent of other JSA claimants). Amongst ESA claimants there was more variation, indicating the use of greater discretion: advisers were more likely to discuss funding with claimants who were looking for work (24 per cent, compared with 11 per cent of claimants who were not looking for work) and those on new ESA claims (23 per cent, compared with 11 per cent of claimants who had transferred from IB). One in five ESA claimants who had been in work within the last five years had such a discussion (20 per cent, compared with 11 per cent of claimants who had been unemployed for longer or never worked), as did around one in six claimants who were under the age of 50 (16 per cent, compared with 10 per cent of older claimants).

Not everyone who spoke to an adviser about financial support actually received any. Around three-quarters of JSA claimants who had a discussion about financial help received some funds (73 per cent, the equivalent of 21 per cent of all JSA claimants), while three in five ESA claimants who had a discussion received help (60 per cent, the equivalent of nine per cent of all ESA claimants). The rest of the claimants who had a conversation with an adviser about funding said that the possibility of funding was mentioned but ultimately they received nothing, or that financial help was offered to them but they declined it, often because they felt they did not need it.

Table 3.28 shows the types of help received by those who accepted financial assistance.

**Table 3.28 Types of financial help received**

	JSA %	ESA %
Transport or parking	72	70
Clothing or footwear	24	11
Work-related licence (including CRB check)	7	-
Courses or training	5	2
Tools or equipment	2	5
Something else	9	8
Don't remember	2	8

*Base: JSA claimants who received financial support (197); ESA claimants who received financial support (58)*

The most common type of financial help was for transport or parking, received by over seven in ten JSA and ESA claimants, followed by help with buying or renting clothing or footwear appropriate for interviews or work in particular industries or environments. Seven per cent of JSA claimants received assistance with securing a work-related licence required for practising certain professions, such as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme card or a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Around one in 20 were supported to attend a course or training: notably, this funding was only received by people with GCSE or higher qualifications. Similar proportions received funding to buy or rent necessary tools or equipment. Almost one in ten received assistance for other things, including childcare or crisis loans.

The depth interviews highlighted sporadic and fairly limited use of Flexible Support Fund (FSF) by advisers, with it most typically being used to enable claimants to attend job interviews. Examples of this included the provision of high street shopping vouchers to enable claimants to purchase suitable clothes for an interview and petty cash to cover travel costs to an interview. In these instances, claimants acknowledged that often small sums of money were significant in assisting them to overcome barriers to employment, such as a lack of professional clothing and minimal funds to cover travel.

### 3.5.8 Awareness and take up of the flexible menu of support

While the claimant survey covered specific measures in the flexible menu of support, the depth interviews explored claimant's awareness and take-up of the options and their views of the support offered by the jobcentre more widely.

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Younger JSA claimants had a good awareness of the provision available to them through Jobcentre Plus. Options such as work experience, apprenticeships and job fairs were widely known to these claimants, many of whom had taken up one or more of these. This is likely to be linked to broader policy changes in this area; specifically the introduction of the Youth Contract in April 2012 entailed increased investment in a range of support options for young people. For many, these 'hands on' support measures had significantly helped claimants to overcome their barriers to work such as low confidence and lack of work experience.

*'Absolutely superb ... well, my careers adviser just refers me to these different programmes and all of that, it is absolutely superb. I am hearing back more [from employers] now than I did before I did the work placement, before I did anything else with the jobcentre, I hear back more often.'*

(Male, JSA 16-24)

Conversely, JSA claimants in the 50+ age group described a lack of relevant support from Jobcentre Plus. This was linked to a perception by these claimants that employers were less interested in employing them as their age could be indicative of a limited skillset and meant they would not be able to make a long-term commitment to the business. They believed they could benefit if Jobcentre Plus offered them specific support, such as further skills training, to make them more attractive to employers. Instead, several described feeling forced onto support measures that were inappropriate for them, as the measures did not address their specific barriers to work or bring them closer to employment. For example, attending a CV writing course was described as an inadequate support measure for this group, as they had a long work history but needed upskilling in order to find employment in new sectors. Additionally, for some a lack of IT skills presented a range of barriers in terms of job searching online, using Universal Jobmatch, communicating with employers over email and generally lacking the necessary IT skills required by employers. Consequently, JSA claimants aged 50+ had taken up less support than other groups, though this was perhaps also linked to their lower awareness of what was available.

ESA claimants also had a limited awareness, and made limited use of, the provision available through Jobcentre Plus. This was linked to a sense that often these claimants did not understand why they were at the jobcentre so did not know what to ask for and that they had very limited contact with Jobcentre Plus. These factors combined meant that there was limited time for support measures to be explored in any detail.

*'She didn't really talk about me getting back into work in the near future – I don't know what I expected when I went there.'*

(Male, ESA)

### 3.5.9 Barriers to take up of support options

The depth interviews found that across the support options available to claimants, there were several barriers preventing take up. These included the following:

- Perceived relevance of referrals: There was evidence to suggest that advisers' referrals to support were sometimes based on an inappropriate diagnosis of claimants' needs. This was particularly raised by JSA claimants who had multiple and complex needs, such as homelessness or health issues, who felt that it was more important to deal with that immediate challenge rather than embarking on support measures aimed at moving them into work.

*'And I've been told [by the doctor] that I can't drive so I'm flogging a dead horse trying to find a warehouse job or a driving job ... but my adviser keeps trying to get me to sign up for a forklift truck licence.'*

*(Male, JSA 50+)*

- Lack of availability of tailored provision: This was of most relevance for claimants with multiple and complex barriers to work and, in particular, having a criminal record, health conditions and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) needs. They found that Jobcentre Plus offered no specific support in order to overcome this barrier when they were looking for work. Additionally, it was found that advisers did not address the limited information and communications technology (ICT), basic literacy and numeracy skills and lack of work experience that overlaid these claimant groups.

*'Well I explained that I've got a criminal record and I've been in prison, and basically the jobcentre didn't want to know, they said I'd have to get a job anywhere, But I've been told by the police that there's places that I'm not allowed to work.'*

*(Male, ESA, ex-offender)*

*'I need help to get some skills where I can type and work in office. Just telling me to widen my job search isn't going to help me with that really.'*

*(Male, JSA 50+)*

### **3.5.10 Assessment of support on offer**

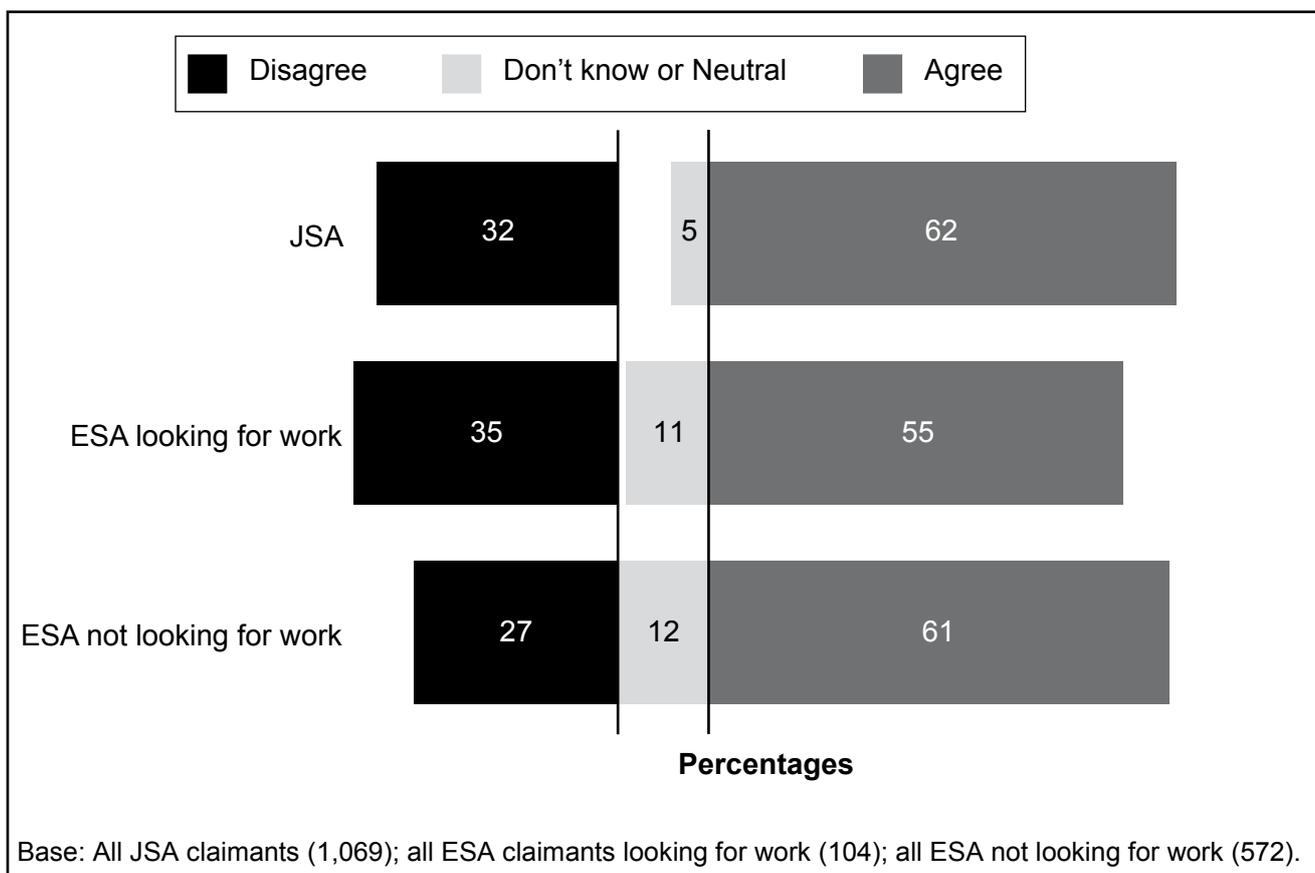
Claimants were asked to think about all the advice, information and support they received from Jobcentre Plus since starting their claim, and to assess the level of support they were offered, consider whether the support was tailored to their needs and circumstances, and rate their satisfaction with the service offered by the jobcentre in helping them find employment.

#### **Whether offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus**

In response to the first question, around three-fifths of claimants agreed that the support they were offered was the 'right amount' for them, with no significant differences between JSA claimants, ESA claimants looking for work and ESA claimants who were not looking for work (Figure 3.8)

As might be expected, claimants who had been offered some type of support from the flexible menu were more likely to agree with the statement 'you have been offered the right amount of support' than those who been offered none of the options from the menu. Two-thirds of claimants who had been offered some support (67 per cent JSA and 65 per cent ESA) agreed with the statement, compared with less than half of claimants who had not been offered support (47 per cent of each type of claimant).

**Figure 3.8 Agreement with statement: ‘You have been offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus’**



The offer of certain types of support was associated with higher levels of agreement. JSA claimants with a disability or health condition who had been offered health support were the most likely to agree that the amount of support they received felt right (85 per cent, compared with 52 per cent of those with a disability or health condition who were not offered support). Agreement levels were also high for JSA claimants who were offered support with childcare or adult caring responsibilities (79 per cent compared with 61 per cent who were not offered this support); claimants offered skills support (74 per cent compared with 59 per cent who were not offered skills support); and those offered work experience support (69 per cent, compared with 58 per cent who were not offered work experience support). In addition, agreement was more common amongst JSA claimants who received financial support than those who did not (70 per cent compared with 61 per cent).

Similarly, amongst ESA claimants views regarding the level of support on offer differed depending on whether they were offered, or not offered, certain types of support. Almost four-fifths of ESA claimants who were offered help or advice with caring responsibilities or childcare (79 per cent) or support with their skills (77 per cent) agreed that they had received the right amount of support (compared with 57 per cent who were not offered care-related support and 59 per cent who were not offered skills-related support). Around seven in ten ESA claimants who were offered support with their health (72 per cent) or help to develop their work experience (68 per cent) felt the same (compared with 50 per cent and 53 per cent who were not offered these types of support).

Table 3.29 presents a profile of JSA claimants who felt they were offered the right amount of support and the profile of those who felt they had not been offered the right amount of support, breaking down the types of support each group had been offered. Table 3.30 presents the equivalent profiles for ESA claimants. The majority of people in all groups had been offered at least one item from the flexible menu, though there were more people in receipt of this support amongst the groups that gave a positive assessment of the amount of support on offer.

**Table 3.29 Profile of JSA claimants who felt they had, or had not, been offered the right amount of support**

	Offered right amount of support %	Was not offered right amount of support %
Offered any support from flexible menu	82	65
Offered:		
Signposting to local work club	60	39
Work experience support	46	32
Skills support	29	17
Support with funding	27	21
Health support	15	5
Support with caring (children or adults)	13	6
Support with homelessness	9	2

Base: JSA claimants who felt they received right amount of support (674);  
JSA claimants who felt they did not receive the right amount of support (337)

**Table 3.30 Profile of ESA claimants who felt they had, or had not, been offered the right amount of support**

	Offered right amount of support %	Was not offered right amount of support %
Offered any support from flexible menu	80	65
Offered:		
Signposting to local work club	11	6
Signposting to volunteering	54	41
Skills support	11	5
Support with funding	18	7
Health support	54	30
Support with caring (children or adults)	18	5
Support with homelessness	7	4

Base: ESA claimants who felt they received the right amount of support (404);  
JSA claimants who felt they did not receive the right amount of support (191)

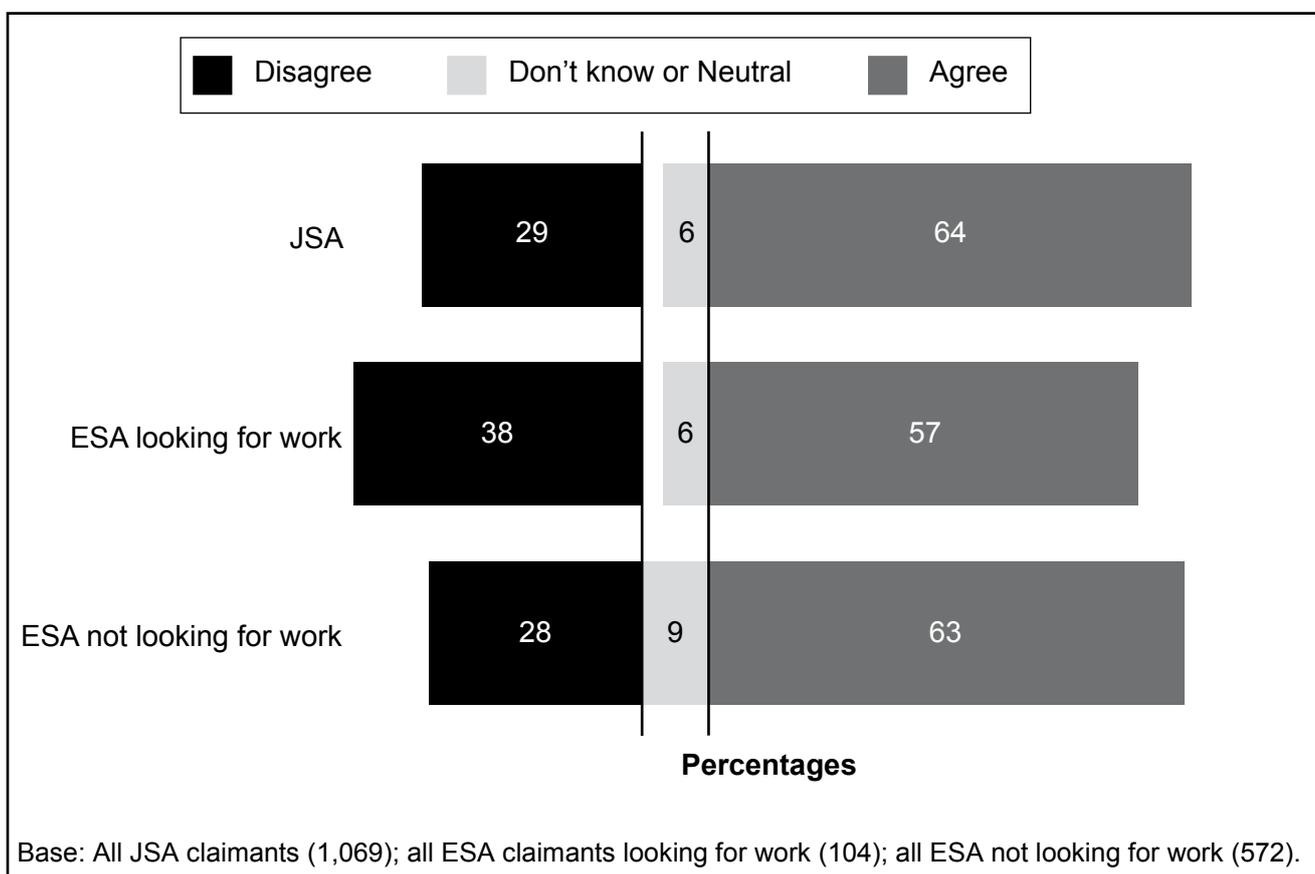
### Whether advice and support offered matched personal needs and circumstances

Over three in five JSA claimants and a similar proportion of ESA claimants who were not looking for work felt that the support they received was tailored to their needs and circumstances (Figure 3.9). ESA claimants who were looking for work were more likely than the other two groups to disagree that this was the case (36 per cent), indicating a needs gap amongst these claimants.

Claimants who were offered support from the flexible menu were more likely (71 per cent JSA and 66 per cent ESA) to perceive the support on offer as tailored than those who were not offered any support (47 per cent JSA and 51 per cent ESA). JSA claimants aged 18-24 were more likely to say this (69 per cent) than older claimants (62 per cent), as were those who had been unemployed for less than three months before making their claim (67 per cent) compared with claimants who had been unemployed for longer (62 per cent).

However, some groups were less likely than average to feel that the support on offer was tailored to their requirements and circumstances: this included disadvantaged JSA claimants (60 per cent compared with 66 per cent who were not disadvantaged) and JSA claimants with a disability or health condition (57 per cent compared with 66 per cent who were not disabled), particularly those with a mental health condition (53 per cent compared with 65 per cent of other claimants). Amongst ESA claimants the only group that stood out were those seeking work.

**Figure 3.9 Agreement with statement: ‘The advice and support you have been offered matched your personal needs and circumstances’**



## Whether satisfied with service that Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment

Almost three in five JSA claimants (57 per cent) and around half of ESA claimants (52 per cent who were not looking for work and 48 per cent who were looking for work) said they were satisfied with the service offered by the jobcentre in helping them find employment (Table 3.31).<sup>25</sup> Dissatisfaction levels were higher amongst ESA claimants who were looking for work than those who were not (34 per cent compared with 21 per cent). The proportion of ESA claimants looking for work who reported being ‘very’ dissatisfied was particularly high (24 per cent). Since there is an association between satisfaction and perceptions of tailoring of the service, their dissatisfaction may be linked to the fact that fewer people in this group felt the service was suited to their needs and circumstances.

**Table 3.31 Satisfaction with service that Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Very satisfied	20	21	20
Fairly satisfied	37	31	27
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	15	14	24
Fairly dissatisfied	11	10	7
Very dissatisfied	17	24	14
Don't know	*	1	7
Satisfied	57	52	48
Dissatisfied	28	34	21

*Base: All JSA claimants (627); all ESA claimants looking for work (98); all ESA claimants not looking for work (541)*

Satisfaction levels were higher amongst JSA claimants who were offered options from the flexible menu of back-to-work support (62 per cent) than those had not been offered any options (37 per cent), and highest for claimants offered help with homelessness or health (81 per cent each) or support with self-employment (73 per cent). Similarly, ESA claimants who had been offered some type of support from the flexible menu tended to be more satisfied than those who had not (53 per cent compared with 36 per cent). In the case of ESA claimants, particularly high satisfaction levels were linked with the offer of skills support (81 per cent) or financial assistance (65 per cent). In addition, satisfaction was more common amongst claimants of both types who were offered support with childcare or caring responsibilities for adults (75 per cent of JSA claimants and 69 per cent of ESA claimants).

Satisfaction did not vary by JSA claimants’ demographic characteristics. For the most part the same was true for ESA claimants, with the exception that claimants who lacked any qualifications were more likely than those who had basic or higher qualifications to say they were satisfied with the service on offer (64 per cent compared with 44 per cent).

<sup>25</sup> This question was only asked in the second interview, so the results do not include anyone who off-flowed by the time of the first interview.

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Dissatisfaction was linked to views regarding the amount of support on offer, as well as views about the extent to which the service matched claimants' needs and circumstances. Around two-thirds of JSA claimants who disagreed that the jobcentre offered the right amount of support (65 per cent) or disagreed that the service was tailored (69 per cent) were dissatisfied with the service. Amongst ESA claimants, two-thirds of those who gave a negative assessment of the level of support on offer (64 per cent) and three-fifths of those who felt the support did not match their requirements (60 per cent) were dissatisfied.

### 3.6 Summary

This chapter focused on claimants' perspective of the Offer and their destinations and attitudes following their experience of the Offer

#### 3.6.1 Proportions remaining on their claim or off-flowing

Benefit off-flow rates were significantly higher for JSA claimants than for ESA claimants in the 12-month WRAG group: while two-thirds of JSA claimants off-flowed, around a quarter of ESA claimants did the same.

Only two in five JSA claimants who were still on the same claim after 12 months (and might be expected to have moved onto the Work Programme) had actually started on the Work Programme. A quarter of ESA claimants (in the 12-month WRAG group) had moved onto the Work Programme, with three in ten starters volunteering. Volunteers tended to have positive attitudes about work and job searching at the start of their claim.

Three-fifths of all JSA claimants stopped claiming their benefit in order to start a job. This was more common for claimants aged 25-49, claimants who had higher qualifications and those who had received little additional, flexible support from the Offer. This is probably a reflection of the fact that they required less assistance from Jobcentre Plus and suggests the effective allocation of resources.

Five per cent of ESA claimants off-flowed into work. Those who moved into work were more likely to be people who were looking for work at the start of their claim, had been employed within the past five years, and had positive attitudes to work and job searching at the start of their claim.

One in seven of the claimants who off-flowed into work said that they found their job *'though Jobcentre Plus'*. People who said this were more likely to have had an adviser who tried to find suitable jobs for them and offered suggestions for where to look for job vacancies, and they were more likely than other claimants to have undertaken work experience.

The jobs that JSA claimants moved into mostly fitted with their family commitments and matched their skills and abilities, but only three in five felt they met the criteria they were looking for when talking to their Jobcentre Plus advisers, suggesting that claimants were willing to be flexible about the types of jobs they took up. Claimants who felt they received adequate support during their time on the Offer, and possibly had more time to think about or discuss what might suit their circumstances, were more likely to find suitable jobs.

One in seven of those who off-flowed into work were offered the chance to stay in touch with the jobcentre after starting their job, and two-fifths of them actually did, though views about the helpfulness of the advice and support received during that time were mixed.

Around a fifth of JSA claimants and ESA claimants who were looking for work closed their claim at some point in the 12 months after starting on the Offer, but did not start work after off-flowing. A quarter of ESA claimants who were not looking for work (at the time of their first interview for the survey) did the same.

### 3.6.2 Claimant attitudes

This section explored claimants' attitudes towards employment and job search at the start of their claim, and how these changed over the course of their journey on the Offer.

When they started on the Offer most JSA claimants were highly motivated and wanted to be in work. The picture was more mixed for ESA claimants, but still a majority felt they would be happier in work.

Amongst JSA claimants there were negative shifts in attitudes for being put under too much pressure to find work and being confident that they will find a job that suits them. However, it could be argued that a negative shift on this last point is only to be expected given that these are people who have not managed to find work after 12 months. There was a net positive shift in being nervous about paid work and this was particularly marked for the youngest claimants, in the 18-24 age category.

As ESA claimants progressed through their claim, there was a net reduction in anxiety levels about the prospect of being in paid work. Even more encouragingly, ESA claimants who were looking for work also showed dramatic increases in confidence for all aspects of their job search activities.

### 3.6.3 Ongoing adviser support

This section looked at the level and nature of the contact that claimants had with advisers during the course of their claim, as well as claimants' views of advisers.

Outside regular Jobsearch Review meetings, JSA claimants saw advisers more frequently than ESA claimants. The majority of claimants felt that the time they spent with advisers was about right, with fewer than one in ten claiming that some of that time was unnecessary, and around twice as many believing that the time spent with advisers was insufficient for their needs. Notably, amongst ESA claimants looking for work there was a shift in perceptions as their claim progressed, with more reflecting that they did not have enough time with their adviser later into their claim.

Around three-quarters of ESA claimants and three-fifths of JSA claimants saw the same adviser every time. The dominant view amongst both types of claimant was that it did not matter which adviser they saw, though many added the proviso that the adviser they met with should know a bit about their circumstances. This requirement seemed to become more important at later stages of the claimant journey.

Between six and seven in ten claimants agreed that advisers they had come into contact with during their claim understood their circumstances. The proportions reduced over time, suggesting that claimants felt there was less understanding from advisers the longer their claim continued. Claimants' views were partly contingent on whether they saw the same adviser throughout their claim, and varied in line with their perceptions of the time and support they received from their advisers.

### 3.6.4 Flexible menu of back-to-work support

This section presented findings on the proportion of claimants who were offered and who took up various support options from the flexible menu.

Two-fifths of JSA claimants discussed the opportunity to develop some work experience, though advisers seemed to focus discussions on the under-25s and the long-term unemployed. A third of those who discussed these opportunities went on to attend a placement. Even when this did not result in a job, claimants tended to benefit from positive attitudinal shifts, feeling more confident they could do well in interviews and less nervous about the prospect of paid work.

A quarter of JSA claimants discussed skills support with an adviser and two-thirds of these claimants went on to take up some support, most commonly a course in a local college or private provider. While advisers were more likely to have these discussions with claimants who had only basic qualifications, educational attainment made no difference to whether or not claimants attended a skills assessment or course.

Fewer than one in ten discussed self-employment support, with discussions mostly focused on older JSA claimants and those with a degree. Of those who were offered self-employment support, a quarter went on to take up some form of support.

A third of JSA claimants and half of ESA claimants discussed the possibility of volunteering, but only a small proportion of ESA claimants went on to take up a voluntary position.

Half of JSA claimants were signposted to a work club. Fewer than one in ten ESA claimants were signposted to a work club, with a focus on those who had been in work in the last five years.

Of some of the other support available through Jobcentre Plus:

- Half of ESA claimants and a quarter of JSA claimants with a disability or health condition discussed health support options with their adviser.
- A fifth of JSA claimants with children were offered some type of childcare support.
- A quarter of JSA claimants discussed financial support with an adviser. Around half as many ESA claimants did the same. Overall, a fifth of JSA claimants and around one in ten ESA claimants received some type of financial assistance. The funds were most commonly aimed at covering transport or parking expenses, but could include a range of other uses relating to job search.

The levels of take up of support reflected both awareness and barriers towards take up by particular groups. Younger JSA claimants had a good awareness of the provision available to them through Jobcentre Plus, possibly stemming from recent policy changes such as the introduction of the Youth Contract. By contrast, older JSA claimants as well as ESA claimants more generally had limited knowledge of support options. In the case of ESA claimants this may be because of their limited contact with the jobcentre.

At the same time there were factors preventing the take-up of some of the support on offer, with some claimants – particularly those with multiple and complex needs – feeling that their needs had not been correctly identified and the support they were offered was not appropriate for their needs.

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Most claimants gave a positive assessment of the support on offer by Jobcentre Plus. Almost three in five JSA claimants and around half of ESA claimants said they were satisfied with the service provided by the jobcentre in helping them find employment. In addition, three-fifths of both JSA and ESA claimants agreed that the jobcentre offered them the right amount of support, and that the advice and support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances. The proportions giving a positive assessment were higher amongst those who were offered support from the flexible menu, suggesting that support options are generally being used for the right people at the right time.

However certain groups were less likely to feel that the support on offer was tailored to their requirements. This applied to ESA claimants who were looking for work, disadvantaged JSA claimants, and JSA claimants with a disability (particularly those with a mental health condition).

## 4 A focus on three potential barriers to work

The Jobcentre Plus Offer enables Jobcentre Plus flexibility in tailoring support to claimants to help move them into, or closer to, work. As well as providing a more individualised service to claimants, it should also ensure more efficient use of resources, with claimants who have complex needs receiving more support than those who are closer to the labour market.

Jobcentre Plus recognises that certain claimants may face additional challenges when trying to get back into the labour market, particularly those who:

- have health conditions;
- have a drug or alcohol dependency;
- have a criminal record;
- are homeless;
- have been in local authority care; or
- served in the armed forces

Chapter 3 includes analysis of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who experienced one or more of the conditions listed above, predominantly health issues. These claimants are referred to as 'disadvantaged', and this sub-group's experiences and views of the Offer were compared to the experiences and views of the rest of the JSA claimant population.

This chapter focuses on three potential barriers to work in more detail. It presents the views and experiences of JSA and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants who reported that they were in one or more of the following groups: those with a drug or alcohol dependency; those with a criminal record; and those living as homeless. These conditions or circumstances were self-reported<sup>26</sup> and some claimants indicated that they were in more than one group, as shown in Table 4.1. Details of the claimants' other characteristics are included in Appendix C.

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<sup>26</sup> Claimants with these conditions or circumstances were identified from the survey partly on the basis of what they reported discussing with advisers. In addition, claimants with a criminal record were identified by their response to the question '*What would you say is preventing you from finding work at the moment?*' and the question '*Do you have any unspent criminal convictions?*'. Claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were identified by their response to the question '*What would you say is preventing you from finding work at the moment?*'. Claimants who reported that they were squatting, in temporary accommodation provided by a housing association or local authority, in bed and breakfast accommodation, in a hostel, staying with friends (sofa surfing), 'have no fixed home', or sleeping rough, were classified as homeless.

**Table 4.1 Claimants with criminal record, drug or alcohol dependency or who were homeless who fall into one, two or three groups**

	Criminal record	Drug or alcohol dependency	Homeless
	%	%	%
<b>One group only</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>35</b>
Criminal record only	43	-	-
Drug or alcohol dependency only	-	31	-
Homeless only	-	-	35
<b>Two groups only</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>38</b>
Criminal record and drug or alcohol dependency	42	53	-
Criminal record and homeless	7	-	22
Drug or alcohol dependency and homeless	-	6	16
<b>Three groups</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>28</b>
Criminal record and drug or alcohol dependency and homeless	8	10	28

Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)

It should be noted that claimants in these three groups were surveyed as part of a boost survey and were in various stages of their claimant journey when interviewed. The claimants they are compared with (who were not in one of these groups) were interviewed as part of the main survey and belong to a cohort who made their claim at a particular point in time (March 2012 for JSA claimants, and December 2011 or January 2012 for ESA claimants). Any comparisons between these populations should therefore be treated with caution.<sup>27</sup>

## 4.1 Claimant attitudes

All claimants were asked a series of statements about their attitudes towards being in work and their job search prospects, to assess their motivation to find work and any psychological barriers that might undermine this. The attitudes of claimants with a criminal record, claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency, and homeless claimants were compared to those of claimants who were not in one of these groups.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> In this chapter, homeless claimants are analysed as a single group, regardless of whether they were receiving JSA or ESA, as base sizes would otherwise be too low for robust analysis. The number of ESA claimants who were looking for work and were in one of the three groups was also low, and analysis therefore combines JSA and ESA claimants looking for work. Particular caution is advised when interpreting findings regarding homeless claimants, as the base sizes are very low.

<sup>28</sup> To increase comparability, the attitudes of claimants who did not have these constraints were those recorded at a mature point during their claim (a year after their New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) or New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI) or after they had already off-flowed) rather than at the start of their claim.

### 4.1.1 Motivation to find work

Nine in ten claimants with a criminal record (89 per cent) expressed a desire to be in paid work. As shown in Table 4.2, JSA claimants with a criminal record were as likely to feel this way as JSA claimants without a criminal record (93 per cent each), but ESA claimants who were ex-offenders were more motivated to be in work than ESA claimants with no criminal record (83 per cent compared with 69 per cent).

**Table 4.2 Agreement that ‘I would be a happier person if I was in paid work’, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	93	69	93	83
Disagree	4	14	4	11
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5	3	-
Don't know/Not applicable	1	21	-	6

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with a criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (82)*

Around four-fifths of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (83 per cent) believed they would be happier in paid work. Within this group, the proportion who felt they would be happier in paid work was lower for claimants on ESA (76 per cent) than claimants on JSA (93 per cent). JSA claimants with a dependency were as likely to say they would be happier in work as JSA claimants who were not in this group; similarly, there was no significant difference in the views of ESA claimants who did or did not have a dependency (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3 Agreement that ‘I would be a happier person if I was in paid work’, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	93	68	93	76
Disagree	4	15	4	17
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5	1	1
Don't know/Not applicable	1	12	1	6

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (100)*

Homeless claimants were more likely to want to be in work (81 per cent) than ESA claimants who were not homeless (69 per cent). The base size for the homeless group is too small to explore variation between JSA and ESA homeless claimants.

**Table 4.4 Agreement that ‘I would be a happier person if I was in paid work’, by whether was homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and ESA %
Agree	93	69	81
Disagree	4	15	12
Neither agree nor disagree	2	5	3
Don't know/Not applicable	1	11	5

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

These findings indicate that claimants in the three groups were generally positive about wanting to find work, which previous research has shown to be a key factor in the success of provision.<sup>29</sup> Further evidence of this is that around three-quarters of claimants in one of the three groups agreed that having any kind of paid job is better than not working (78 per cent claimants with a criminal record; 74 per cent claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency; and 78 per cent of homeless claimants).

### 4.1.2 Anxiety about work

A potentially demotivating factor for job seekers can be a sense of anxiety about the prospect of being in work. This was expressed by a substantial minority of claimants within each of the three groups.

Around a third of claimants with a criminal record who were not in work at the time of the interview said that ‘*the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous*’ (35 per cent). Table 4.5 shows that, within this group, it was those on ESA who were most likely to express anxiety (62 per cent ESA compared with 14 per cent JSA). Anxiety was more common amongst ESA claimants who were ex-offenders (62 per cent) than ESA claimants who were not (48 per cent). There was no difference in anxiety between JSA claimants who did, or did not, have a criminal record.

**Table 4.5 Agreement that ‘The thought of being in paid work makes me nervous’, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	18	48	14	62
Disagree	79	42	81	30
Neither agree nor disagree	2	4	3	3
Don't know	1	6	2	5

*Base: Claimants not in work at time of interview: JSA with no criminal record (430); ESA with no criminal record (605); JSA with criminal record (50); ESA with criminal record (119)*

<sup>29</sup> Hasluck, C. and Green, A. (2007). *What Works for Whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions*, DWP Research Report No. 407.

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Claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency who were not in work were more likely than claimants in the other two groups to be nervous about the prospect of employment. Half (49 per cent) said they felt anxious, though Table 4.6 illustrates that this high proportion was chiefly driven by the views of ESA claimants with a dependency (69 per cent ESA compared with 16 per cent JSA). Anxiety was more common amongst ESA claimants with a dependency than those without (69 per cent compared with 47 per cent).

**Table 4.6 Agreement that ‘The thought of being in paid work makes me nervous’, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	17	47	16	69
Disagree	80	42	75	26
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4	6	2
Don't know/Not applicable	1	6	3	4

*Base: Claimants not in work at time of interview: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (444); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (599); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (65); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (104)*

Two-fifths of homeless claimants who were not in work felt nervous about the prospect of working (41 per cent). Anxiety was as common amongst this group as it was amongst ESA claimants who were not homeless (47 per cent).

**Table 4.7 Agreement that ‘The thought of being in paid work makes me nervous’, by whether was homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and ESA %
Agree	17	47	41
Disagree	79	42	50
Neither agree nor disagree	2	4	5
Don't know	1	6	5

*Base: Claimants not in work at time of interview: JSA who are not homeless (451); ESA who are not homeless (622); JSA and ESA who are homeless (63)*

### 4.1.3 Confidence in job search

Tables 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10 show the proportions of claimants who disagreed with the statement ‘I am confident that I will be able to find a job that suits me’ or who said that they were not very or not at all confident about different aspects of their job search.

Ex-offenders were as likely as JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record to feel that they would be able to find a suitable job, they could do well in interviews, and could cope with rejections and knock-backs (Table 4.8); however, they were more likely than JSA

claimants with no criminal record to feel apprehensive about all other aspects of their job search, with particular concerns around the currency of their skills and whether employers would want to offer them interviews. Whilst many in this group felt a lack of confidence, they were less likely to express reservations about their job search than ESA claimants without a criminal record who were looking for work.

**Table 4.8 Confidence in job search, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record
	JSA	ESA looking for work	JSA and ESA looking for work
	%	%	%
Not confident that ...			
Will be able to find a job that suits me	15	50	19
Skills are sufficiently up-to-date for the current job market	13	40	26
Employers will want to offer you an interview	19	48	31
Can do well in interviews	11	17	18
Can cope with rejections and knock-backs	7	17	8
Can learn new skills or re-train	5	9	8

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA who are looking for work with no criminal record (58); JSA and ESA who are looking for work with criminal record (146)*

Claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were more likely than other JSA claimants to feel unsure about every aspect of their job search (Table 4.9). Their confidence levels were similar to those of ESA job seekers who did not have a drug or alcohol dependency. The only exception to this was in the proportion who disagreed with the statement *'I am confident that I will be able to find a job that suits me'*: claimants with a dependency were less likely to disagree with this (28 per cent) – and were therefore more confident about their job prospects – than ESA claimants without a dependency who were looking for work (49 per cent).

The confidence levels of homeless claimants were broadly on a par with those of JSA claimants who were not homeless (Table 4.10). In general, this group was less apprehensive about their job search than non-homeless ESA job seekers. However, caution is advised in interpreting these results, given the small base sizes involved.

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**Table 4.9 Confidence in job search, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency
	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	JSA and ESA looking for work %
Not confident that ...			
Will be able to find a job that suits me	15	49	28
Skills are sufficiently up-to-date for the current job market	14	40	42
Employers will want to offer you an interview	19	51	37
Can do well in interviews	12	18	24
Can cope with rejections and knock-backs	7	17	16
Can learn new skills or re-train	5	12	10

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA who are looking for work with no drug or alcohol dependency (58); JSA and ESA who are looking for work with drug or alcohol dependency (83)*

**Table 4.10 Confidence in job search, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	JSA and ESA looking for work %
Not confident that ...			
Will be able to find a job that suits me	15	52	17
Skills are sufficiently up-to-date for the current job market	14	39	20
Employers will want to offer you an interview	19	49	23
Can do well in interviews	11	17	23
Can cope with rejections and knock-backs	7	17	3
Can learn new skills or re-train	5	12	3

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are looking for work who are not homeless (58); JSA and ESA who are looking for work who are homeless (30)*

#### 4.1.4 Perceived barriers to employment

Claimants who were looking for work and either had a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency, or were homeless were asked to state what barriers, if any, they felt they faced in trying to get a job. This was an open question and respondents were permitted to cite barriers spontaneously. The results are shown in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.11 Main perceived barriers to finding work**

	Criminal record	Drug or alcohol dependency	Homeless
	%	%	%
Job availability	27	30	20
Issues relating to criminal record	26	21	23
Health issues	10	18	7
Lack of skills/qualifications	4	6	–
Caring responsibilities	4	1	3
Issues relating to drug or alcohol misuse	3	7	10
Lack of work experience	3	3	–
Transport	2	3	–

*Base: JSA and ESA who are looking for work and: have a criminal record (146); have a drug or alcohol dependency (83); are homeless (30)*

One of the first things to note is that issues relating to drug or alcohol dependency were mentioned by less than one in ten claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (seven per cent) although a fifth did mention health problems more generally (18 per cent). This may be because claimants feel they do not need to disclose their dependency to prospective employers. By contrast, ex-offenders need to reveal information about their previous convictions to prospective employers; accordingly a fairly large proportion (26 per cent) reported that issues relating to their criminal record – including presenting their past convictions, and issues around probation and curfew restrictions – were preventing them from finding work.

Only one homeless claimant mentioned housing as a barrier to finding work. The main concern for most claimants in any of the three groups was the availability of jobs, similar to other job seekers.

#### 4.1.5 Perceptions of Jobcentre Plus in helping claimants' confidence and motivation

The role of the Offer is to help claimants move closer to work, a key element of which is having confidence about finding work and motivation to find employment. All claimants were asked whether they felt that the advice and support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped to increase their confidence about finding a job they can do, their motivation to find work, and their chances of finding employment.

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Table 4.12 below shows the results for claimants with, or without, a criminal record. Around half of JSA claimants with a criminal record felt there were improvements to their motivation to find work (51 per cent) and their chances of finding suitable employment (52 per cent) as a result of the advice and support they received, whilst slightly fewer (44 per cent) felt that their confidence had developed during their contact with Jobcentre Plus. The proportions who felt this way were lower amongst ESA claimants with a criminal record.

Notably, the views of ex-offenders regarding the effect of the Offer on their confidence, motivation and prospects were no different to those of claimants who did not have a criminal record.

**Table 4.12 Whether Jobcentre Plus helped to improve confidence and motivation, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Build up confidence about finding a job they could do	44	27	44	21
Increase motivation to find work	50	25	51	19
Increase chances of finding suitable work	48	21	52	23

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (93)*

As shown in Table 4.13, around half of JSA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (51 per cent) reported increases in their motivation to find work, and even more (59 per cent) felt that their job prospects had improved. In fact, JSA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were more likely than other JSA claimants to feel that their chances of finding suitable work had increased after their contact with Jobcentre Plus (59 per cent compared with 47 per cent). In other respects, however, the views of JSA claimants with a dependency were similar to those without a dependency.

Between a fifth and a quarter of ESA claimants with a dependency reported feeling more confident of finding a job they could do (26 per cent), that their motivation to find employment had increased (21 per cent) and that their chances of finding suitable work were better (26 per cent) after receiving advice and support from Jobcentre Plus. The views of this group were similar to those of ESA claimants who did not have a dependency.

**Table 4.13 Whether Jobcentre Plus helped to improve confidence and motivation, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Build up confidence about finding a job they could do	43	25	42	26
Increase motivation to find work	49	25	51	21
Increase chances of finding suitable work	47	20	59	26

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (111)*

There were also perceived improvements amongst homeless claimants in terms of their confidence, motivation and perceived prospects (Table 4.14). The proportion who felt that their chances of finding suitable work had improved was higher amongst the overall group of homeless claimants (33 per cent) than amongst ESA claimants who were not homeless (21 per cent), though still lower than amongst JSA claimants who were not homeless (48 per cent).

**Table 4.14 Whether Jobcentre Plus helped to improve confidence and motivation, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and ESA %
Build up confidence about finding a job they could do	43	26	30
Increase motivation to find work	49	25	29
Increase chances of finding suitable work	48	21	33

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

## 4.2 Adviser support

This section looks at the contact and relationships that claimants with a criminal record, claimants who had a drug or alcohol dependency, and claimants who were homeless had with their Jobcentre Plus advisers. It explores the discussions they had, including whether claimants disclosed these issues to advisers; claimants' views on the level and continuity of adviser contact; how claimants viewed advisers' understanding of their circumstances; and information about the basic support and advice claimants received from advisers, both with regards to job seeking and dealing with any particular barriers to work.

## 4.2.1 Discussion with advisers

In order for Jobcentre Plus to be able to help claimants move closer to work it is important that any circumstances which form potential barriers to employment are correctly identified and appropriate support is offered. This can be done either at the initial interview between claimant and adviser (NJI or NJWFI), or during regular meetings.

Claimants who had a criminal record or drug or alcohol dependency and claimants who were homeless were asked whether they had discussed criminal convictions, a dependency, housing circumstances and debt with advisers. The proportions who had discussed these issues are presented in Table 4.15.

**Table 4.15 Topics discussed with advisers**

	Criminal record	Drug or alcohol dependency	Homeless
	%	%	%
Issues relating to...			
criminal conviction	77	51	35
alcohol or drug dependency	43	83	38
housing or homelessness	40	40	46
debt	17	17	12

*Base: JSA and ESA with criminal record (228); JSA and ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (182); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

Three-quarters of ex-offenders (77 per cent) discussed their criminal conviction with an adviser. Around two-fifths also spoke about a drug or alcohol dependency (43 per cent) and their living arrangements (40 per cent), which is unsurprising as over half of ex-offenders faced more than one constraining condition or circumstance (see Table 4.1).

Around four-fifths of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (83 per cent) discussed their dependency with an adviser. It is worth noting that three-quarters of claimants with a dependency who disclosed this during these discussions (77 per cent) were already participating in a structured treatment programme. It was also common for these claimants to discuss criminal convictions (51 per cent) and housing or homelessness (40 per cent).

Less than half of homeless claimants (46 per cent) discussed their housing circumstances with advisers. It is not clear why such a low proportion talked about this subject, though this may perhaps be explained by the fact that around two-thirds of homeless claimants had a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency as well, and the focus of discussions may have been on these other issues.

All claimants, including those who did not disclose having a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency or housing difficulties, were asked whether they had discussed a range of other issues with an adviser and the results are shown in Tables 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18.

**Table 4.16 Topics discussed with advisers, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA	ESA	JSA	ESA
	%	%	%	%
Type of work looking for, availability	94	74 <sup>1</sup>	93	67 <sup>2</sup>
Previous jobs and work experience	88	73	84	57
How far willing to travel for work	87	59 <sup>1</sup>	87	75 <sup>2</sup>
Skills and qualifications	85	66	84	56
Changing career or retraining	54	47	64	42
Caring responsibilities	52	35	39	25
Possibility of working in the future	n/a	73 <sup>3</sup>	n/a	53 <sup>4</sup>
Support you might need to prepare for work	n/a	57 <sup>3</sup>	n/a	43 <sup>4</sup>

Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (93);

<sup>1</sup> ESA looking for work with no criminal record (103);

<sup>2</sup> ESA looking for work with criminal record (12);

<sup>3</sup> ESA not looking for work with no criminal record (552);

<sup>4</sup> ESA not looking for work with criminal record (81)

JSA claimants with a criminal record most commonly discussed the types of work they were looking for, their work experience and skills, and the flexibility (with regards to location) that claimants were willing to show in finding work. These discussions were as common amongst JSA ex-offenders as JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record. However, JSA claimants with a criminal record were more likely than other JSA claimants to discuss retraining or a change of career (64 per cent compared with 54 per cent), perhaps because their previous conviction limited the types of jobs they could apply for.

Ex-offenders in receipt of ESA were less likely than ESA claimants with no criminal record to cover topics such as their previous work experience, their skills and qualifications, or how work might fit around their caring commitments. Moreover, for ESA claimants who were not looking for work, discussions around the possibility of working in the future and the support they would need to prepare for work were less common if the claimant had a criminal record than if they did not. These discrepancies may result from focusing on non-work related issues during discussions with advisers, which perhaps overrode concerns with general job seeking, but it is not clear why this should not also be the case for JSA claimants with a criminal record (although the requirement to be actively seeking work is a condition of JSA receipt).

Table 4.17 shows the topics discussed between advisers and those with, or without, a dependency on drugs or alcohol.

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**Table 4.17 Topics discussed with advisers, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Type of work looking for, availability	94	73	91 <sup>1</sup>	60 <sup>2</sup>
Previous jobs and work experience	88	72	90	57
How far willing to travel for work	87	59	90 <sup>1</sup>	60 <sup>2</sup>
Skills and qualifications	85	65	86	54
Changing career or retraining	54	47	64	35
Caring responsibilities	51	34	46	21
Possibility of working in the future <sup>3</sup>	n/a	73 <sup>3</sup>	n/a	57 <sup>4</sup>
Support you might need to prepare for work <sup>3</sup>	n/a	56 <sup>3</sup>	n/a	41 <sup>4</sup>

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (111);*

<sup>1</sup> *ESA looking for work with no drug or alcohol dependency (101);*

<sup>2</sup> *ESA looking for work with drug or alcohol dependency (15);*

<sup>3</sup> *ESA not looking for work with no drug or alcohol dependency (547);*

<sup>4</sup> *ESA not looking for work with drug or alcohol dependency (96)*

There was no difference between the topics discussed by JSA claimants who had a dependency and those who did not: around nine in ten from both groups discussed the types of jobs they were looking for, previous work experience, their willingness to travel for work, and their skills and qualifications, and similar proportions from both groups discussed the possibility of changing career or retraining, as well as caring commitments.

The range of topics covered by advisers in discussions with ESA claimants who had a dependency were more limited than in discussions with ESA claimants who did not have a dependency. Claimants who had a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely to discuss all job searching issues, including the types of jobs they were interested in, previous work experience, skills and qualifications, or the possibility of changing career. It was also less common for ESA claimants with a dependency who were not looking for work to talk about the possibility of working in the future and the support they might need to move closer to work. These findings suggest that advisers were treating ESA claimants with a dependency as if they were further away from the labour market than their counterparts who did not have a dependency.

It was not possible to disaggregate the proportions of JSA and ESA homeless claimants who spoke about each topic due to the small base size of this group, so Table 4.18 presents a breakdown of the topics covered by the entire group of homeless claimants.

**Table 4.18 Topics discussed with advisers, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA	ESA	JSA and ESA
	%	%	%
Previous jobs and work experience <sup>1</sup>	88	73	62
Skills and qualifications <sup>1</sup>	85	66	58
Changing career or retraining <sup>1</sup>	55	47	32
Caring responsibilities <sup>1</sup>	52	34	20
Type of work looking for, availability <sup>2</sup>	94	75	78
How far willing to travel for work <sup>2</sup>	87	61	72
Possibility of working in the future <sup>3</sup>	n/a	73	38
Support you might need to prepare for work <sup>3</sup>	n/a	57	27

Base:

1 JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless(68);

2 JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA looking for work who are not homeless (102); JSA and ESA looking for work who are homeless (32);

3 ESA not looking for work who are not homeless (570); ESA not looking for work who are homeless (36)

In general, the proportion of homeless claimants discussing each topic is lower than amongst JSA claimants who were not homeless, and comparable or higher than the proportions of ESA claimants who were not homeless. Homeless ESA claimants who were not looking for work were less likely than their non-homeless counterparts to discuss the possibility of working in the future and steps they could take to achieve this.

## 4.2.2 Claimant views on level of contact with advisers

Table 4.19 shows the views of claimants with a criminal record or drug or alcohol dependency, and of homeless claimants, regarding the amount of contact they had with advisers. Three-fifths of claimants with a criminal record (60 per cent) or a drug or alcohol dependency (62 per cent), and half of all homeless claimants (53 per cent) felt that they spent the right amount of time with their adviser, although there was a significant minority who felt they needed more time and support. A quarter of claimants with a criminal record (25 per cent) or who were homeless (27 per cent) wanted more time with their adviser as did around a fifth of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (20 per cent).

**Table 4.19 Views regarding amount of contact with advisers**

	Criminal record	Drug or alcohol dependency	Homeless
	%	%	%
About right	60	62	53
Not enough time	25	20	27
Too much time	8	8	7
Don't know or Refused	7	10	13

*Base: JSA and ESA with criminal record (228); JSA and ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (182); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

While most claimants in one of the three groups felt that their advisers had given them the right amount of time, the proportions who described the time as 'about right' was often lower than amongst other claimants. Ex-offenders were less likely (60 per cent) than either JSA claimants with no criminal record (68 per cent) or ESA claimants with no criminal record (72 per cent) to feel satisfied in this respect. The same applied to homeless claimants: whereas 53 per cent said that their advisers spent the right amount of time with them, the proportions of non-homeless claimants who felt this way were higher (68 per cent JSA and 72 per cent ESA). Similarly, claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely to report satisfaction with the amount of time they spent with advisers than ESA claimants who did not have a dependency (62 per cent compared with 72 per cent).

### 4.2.3 Adviser continuity

Two-fifths of claimants who had a criminal record (41 per cent) or a drug or alcohol dependency (41 per cent), and three in ten homeless claimants (31 per cent), said that they met with multiple advisers during their claim.

The proportions seeing multiple advisers were higher for claimants in these three groups than for other claimants. Only a third of JSA claimants without a criminal record, without a drug or alcohol dependency, or who were not homeless met with more than one adviser, and just a fifth of other ESA claimants did the same.

Those who saw more than one adviser were asked how they felt about seeing different advisers. Around half of claimants with a criminal record (53 per cent) said they had no preference about the adviser they saw, although most of the claimants who said this added the proviso that the adviser should know a bit about their circumstances. For claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency, there was a slight preference for seeing the same adviser (51 per cent) rather than different ones (45 per cent), even if the advisers knew about their circumstances. The number of homeless claimants who saw multiple advisers is too small to allow further analysis.

### 4.2.4 Adviser support: understanding personal circumstances

In order to tailor support to the requirements of individual claimants, advisers need to have a good understanding of claimants' personal circumstances. Claimants were asked whether they thought that their advisers understood their circumstances. Their responses are shown in Tables 4.20, 4.21 and 4.22.

Less than three-fifths of JSA claimants with a criminal record (56 per cent) agreed that advisers appreciated their circumstances (Table 4.20). There was no significant difference between the views of ex-offenders and JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record.

Fewer ESA claimants than JSA claimants with a criminal record felt that advisers understood them (43 per cent compared with 56 per cent). ESA claimants with a criminal record were also markedly less likely than ESA claimants without a criminal record to feel advisers understood their circumstances (43 per cent compared with 70 per cent).

**Table 4.20 Agreement that ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances’, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	64	70	56	43
Disagree	29	22	28	36
Neutral/Don't know	8	8	16	21

Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (93)

Table 4.21 shows that almost three-fifths of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency agreed that ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances’ (59 per cent JSA and 55 per cent ESA with a dependency). JSA claimants with a dependency were as likely to agree as other JSA claimants. However ESA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely to feel advisers understood their circumstances than other ESA claimants (55 per cent and 70 per cent, respectively).

**Table 4.21 Agreement that ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances’, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Agree	63	70	59	55
Disagree	29	23	23	32
Neutral/Don't know	8	8	19	13

Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (111)

Relatively few homeless claimants (41 per cent) believed that their circumstances were known and appreciated by advisers (Table 4.22). This group was less likely to acknowledge advisers’ understanding than either ex-offenders or claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency, and they were also less likely to feel advisers understood their circumstances than claimants who were not homeless (63 per cent JSA and 70 per cent ESA). Their views may be linked to the fact that only a small proportion had spoken to their adviser about their housing circumstances.

**Table 4.22 Agreement that ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances’, by whether was homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and ESA %
Agree	63	70	41
Disagree	29	22	34
Neutral/Don't know	8	8	25

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

### 4.2.5 Adviser support: job search advice

An important element of the advisers’ role is to assist claimants with their job search. Claimants who were looking for work were asked whether advisers had signposted them to job vacancies and offered them advice on writing a CV or job application, or preparing and carrying out job interviews. Tables 4.23, 4.24 and 4.25 display the responses given by claimants.

Seven in ten claimants with a criminal record who were looking for work (70 per cent) said they were offered suggestions about where to look for job vacancies (Table 4.23). Signposting was less common for this group than for JSA claimants without a criminal record (86 per cent), but more common than for ESA job seekers without a criminal record (62 per cent). Similar proportions of ex-offenders and JSA claimants without a criminal record received advice about CVs, job applications, and job interviews (62 per cent and 65 per cent respectively).

**Table 4.23 Job search advice received, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record
	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	JSA and ESA not looking for work %
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	86	54	70
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	65	39	62

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA looking for work with no criminal record (103); JSA and ESA looking for work with criminal record (146)*

Table 4.24 shows that over three-fifths of job seekers with a drug or alcohol dependency were signposted to vacancies (65 per cent) or given advice that could help them apply or secure jobs (62 per cent). This group was less likely to be offered suggestions for where to look for job vacancies than JSA claimants without a dependency, but no less likely to be given advice about CVs, applications and job interviews. A similar pattern applied to homeless claimants (Table 4.25).

**Table 4.24 Job search advice received, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency
	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	JSA and ESA looking for work %
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	86	57	65
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	64	41	62

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA looking for work with no drug or alcohol dependency (101); JSA and ESA looking for work with drug or alcohol dependency (86)*

**Table 4.25 Job search advice received, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	JSA and ESA looking for work %
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	87	55	67
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	65	40	57

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA looking for work who are not homeless (102); JSA and ESA looking for work who are homeless (30)*

Job seekers in the three groups were asked whether their adviser had suggested any jobs they could apply for. Just under two-thirds of claimants with a criminal record (65 per cent) said they had, similar to the proportion of ESA claimants without a criminal record (65 per cent). Over half of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (53 per cent) and 19 of the 32 homeless people who were looking for work also said they had received suggestions for particular vacancies. These proportions are well below the proportions of other claimants who were looking for work who received suggestions, and suggests that advisers may be reluctant to offer suggestions for jobs to claimants with particularly challenging circumstances.

Over three-quarters of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency who received suggestions said that the suggested jobs were appropriate (76 per cent) as did just over two-thirds of claimants with a criminal record (68 per cent), and 14 of the 19 homeless claimants.

## **4.2.6 Adviser support: with regards to the three potential barriers to work**

As well as offering practical advice to help claimants find, apply for, and secure jobs, claimants may need advice or support to help them manage or overcome their specific circumstances in order to move closer to work. Claimants in the three groups were asked whether they had received advice of this kind.

### **Advice or support on how to declare a previous criminal conviction**

Only a quarter of claimants with a criminal record (25 per cent) said they had received advice on how to declare a criminal conviction when speaking to an adviser. Even among claimants who had discussed their criminal conviction with an adviser, the proportion receiving advice was only around one in three (31 per cent). Three-fifths of claimants who received advice on how to declare a conviction said this was helpful.

### **Advice or support on treatment options for a drug or alcohol dependency**

Around three in ten claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (29 per cent) said that they had been offered advice about treatment options for their dependency. In view of the fact that most of the claimants in this category (83 per cent) had discussed their dependency with advisers, this suggests that advisers may be reluctant to broach the issue of treatment options with claimants. A further indication of their reluctance is that advice was offered to only five of the 32 claimants who were not already on a structured treatment programme but had discussed their dependency with their adviser.

Nearly three-fifths of those who received advice took up some kind of treatment option (59 per cent) and nearly all of those who took up the option said that they found it helpful (87 per cent).

### **Advice regarding homelessness**

A quarter of homeless claimants (25 per cent) were offered advice regarding homelessness. This is a surprisingly low proportion, but may be explained by the fact that less than half of homeless claimants (46 per cent) had discussed their homelessness with advisers. Five of the 17 homeless claimants who received advice said they found the advice helpful.

## **4.3 Flexible menu of back-to-work support**

Claimants with a criminal record, drug or alcohol dependency, or who are homeless may need more support than other claimants to help move them closer to work. Aside from any advice they may receive from advisers, further support may come from measures on the flexible menu of support.

The analysis below focuses on the support offered to claimants in the three groups. The number of claimants taking up each type of support is too small to allow robust analysis.

### 4.3.1 Types of support offered

Table 4.26 shows the proportion of claimants with, and without, a criminal record who were offered various types of support.

The most common support offered to ex-offenders in receipt of JSA was signposting to work clubs (50 per cent) or a discussion about work experience (35 per cent). Ex-offenders were as likely to be offered these, along with other support such financial assistance or the opportunity to go on a skills or training course, as JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record.

Ex-offenders in receipt of ESA were most commonly offered some form of health support (24 per cent) or volunteering support (17 per cent). However, the offer of these types of support was less commonly made to ex-offenders than to ESA claimants who did not have a criminal record. Ex-offenders were also less likely to be offered financial support, a discussion about caring responsibilities for adults, or information about local work clubs.

**Table 4.26 Support offered from the flexible menu, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience (including volunteering)	41	**	35	**
Offered an opportunity to go on a skills or training course	24	8	25	7
Discussed self-employment support	7	-	7	1
Discussed volunteering support	**	49	**	17
Discussed some form of health support	12	45	12	24
Offered financial support	26	14	24	6
Signposted to local work clubs	53	8	50	4
Discussed support with caring responsibilities for adults	8	12	7	3
Discussed childcare support	4	2	5	-

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (93)*

\*\* For JSA claimants, volunteering is included under 'Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience'; for ESA claimants this is shown under 'Discussed volunteering support'.

Table 4.27 shows the support offered to claimants with, or without, a drug or alcohol dependency.

JSA claimants with a dependency were as likely to be offered items from the flexible menu of support as JSA claimants who did not have a dependency, and more likely to be offered some type of health support, which included treatment options for substance abuse (30 per cent compared with 10 per cent). It is also worth noting that claimants with a dependency were more likely to be offered health support than those with a criminal record, as might be expected for people with their condition.

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There was a discrepancy between the offer of support to ESA claimants with, and without, a dependency: those with a dependency were less likely to be signposted to organisations and websites that offer volunteering (48 per cent compared with 20 per cent); to be signposted to work clubs (nine per cent compared with three per cent); or to be offered one-off expenses to support them with their job search (14 per cent compared with eight per cent). This is despite the fact that the proportion looking for work – and arguably in need of these types of support – was similar within both groups (11 per cent amongst ESA claimants with a dependency, and 16 per cent amongst ESA claimants without a dependency).

**Table 4.27 Support offered from the flexible menu, by whether had drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience (including volunteering)	41	**	35	**
Offered an opportunity to go on a skills or training course	24	9	29	5
Discussed self-employment support	7	-	6	-
Discussed volunteering support	**	48	**	20
Discussed some form of health support	10	42	30	38
Offered financial support	24	14	26	8
Signposted to local work clubs	52	9	42	3
Discussed support with caring responsibilities for adults	7	11	10	8
Discussed childcare support	4	2	6	-

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (111)*

\*\* For JSA claimants, volunteering is included under 'Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience'; for ESA claimants this is shown separately under 'Discussed volunteering support'.

The base sizes for homeless claimants are small, but the findings for this group indicate that it was less common for this group than other claimants to be offered most of the elements from the flexible menu of support (Table 4.28).

**Table 4.28 Support offered from the flexible menu, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and/or ESA %
Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience (including volunteering)	41	**	24 <sup>1</sup>
Offered an opportunity to go on a skills or training course	25	9	12
Discussed self-employment support	7	-	1
Discussed volunteering support	**	49	20 <sup>2</sup>
Discussed some form of health support	12	45	22
Offered financial support	25	13	10
Signposted to local work clubs	53	9	19
Discussed support with caring responsibilities for adults	8	12	6
Discussed childcare support	4	2	-

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68); <sup>1</sup> JSA who are homeless (29); <sup>2</sup> ESA who are homeless (39)*

\*\* For JSA claimants, volunteering is included under 'Discussed opportunities to develop some work experience'; for ESA claimants this is shown separately under 'Discussed volunteering support'.

### 4.3.2 Assessment of support on offer

Claimants gave their views on the level of support they were offered and the extent to which the support matched their personal needs and circumstances. They also rated their satisfaction with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find employment.

As shown in Table 4.29, the views of claimants with a criminal record were sharply divided, with those on JSA more likely to have a positive perception of the support offered by Jobcentre Plus than those in receipt of ESA.

Ex-offenders on JSA had very similar views to other JSA claimants: over three-fifths felt they were offered the right amount of support and that the advice and support they were offered was tailored to their needs and circumstances, and almost as many were satisfied with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find employment. By contrast, less than two-fifths of ESA claimants with a criminal record gave a positive assessment of the support on offer, well below the proportion of ESA claimants without a criminal record who expressed positive views.

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**Table 4.29 Positive assessment of support, by whether had criminal record**

	No criminal record		Has criminal record	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus	63	61	65	39
Advice and support matched personal needs and circumstances	65	63	60	38
Satisfied with the service Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment	58**	48**	58	38

*Base: JSA with no criminal record (1,025); ESA with no criminal record (655); JSA with criminal record (135); ESA with criminal record (93)*

\*\* Question only asked in Wave 2 of main survey. Base: JSA with no criminal record (593); ESA with no criminal record (618).

The views of JSA and ESA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were more aligned to one another, with no significant differences in the proportions saying the level of support they were offered felt right, that the support was tailored, and that they were satisfied with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus (Table 4.30). Furthermore, there were no differences between the views of JSA claimants with, and without, a dependency. However, ESA claimants with a dependency were slightly less likely (50 per cent) than ESA claimants without a dependency (65 per cent) to feel that the support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances.

**Table 4.30 Positive assessment of support, by whether had a drug or alcohol dependency**

	No drug or alcohol dependency		Has drug or alcohol dependency	
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA %	ESA %
Offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus	63	60	64	50
Advice and support matched personal needs and circumstances	65	62	64	50
Satisfied with the service Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment	57**	48**	59	49

*Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (1,051); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (648); JSA with drug or alcohol dependency (71); ESA with drug or alcohol dependency (111)*

\*\* Question only asked in Wave 2 of main survey. Base: JSA with no drug or alcohol dependency (613); ESA with no drug or alcohol dependency (611)

Homeless claimants gave a less positive assessment of the level and tailoring of support than either JSA claimants or ESA claimants who were not homeless (Table 4.31). However, their satisfaction with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find employment was similar to that of claimants who were not homeless.

**Table 4.31 Positive assessment of support, by whether homeless**

	Not homeless		Homeless
	JSA %	ESA %	JSA and ESA %
Offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus	63	61	47
Advice and support matched personal needs and circumstances	64	63	52
Satisfied with the service Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment	57**	48**	49

*Base: JSA who are not homeless (1,061); ESA who are not homeless (672); JSA and ESA who are homeless (68)*

\*\* Question only asked in Wave 2 of main survey. Base: JSA who are not homeless (622); ESA who are not homeless (636).

## 4.4 Summary

This chapter focused on three potential barriers to moving into work and explored the views and experiences of the Offer amongst claimants who indicated that they were in one or more of the following groups: claimants with a criminal record; claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency; and homeless claimants.

### 4.4.1 Claimant attitudes

Claimants in the three groups expressed attitudes indicating that they want to work. Their motivation was as high as that of claimants who were not in one of these three groups; in fact, ESA claimants with a criminal record were even more likely than ESA claimants without a criminal record to say they would be happier in work. Despite the presence of initial motivation there were also high levels of anxiety about the prospect of being in paid work, particularly amongst ESA claimants. This was true of all ESA claimants but anxiety was especially common amongst ESA claimants with a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency.

Ex-offenders and homeless claimants shared similar reservations about succeeding in their job search and finding a suitable job as JSA claimants who did not have a criminal record or were not homeless. Claimants with a criminal record had particular concerns around the currency of their skills and whether employers would want to offer them interviews. Meanwhile, claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less confident than JSA claimants without a dependency about most elements of their job search.

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In terms of barriers to finding work, issues relating to past convictions were mentioned by a quarter of ex-offenders; issues to do with a drug or alcohol dependency were mentioned by a fifth of those with a dependency; and only one homeless claimant cited housing and homelessness as an issue preventing them from finding work. Instead, the biggest concern for all three groups was around the availability of jobs.

Substantial minorities of claimants in all three groups felt that the advice and support they received from Jobcentre Plus had increased their confidence in finding a job they could do and their motivation to find work, and improved their perceived job prospects. Positive views were as common amongst claimants with a criminal record as those without; the same was true of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency and those without.

### **4.4.2 Adviser support**

Advisers discussed a range of topics with claimants in the three groups, including issues to do with the specific challenges they were facing. The majority of ex-offenders reported receiving advice about their criminal record; similarly, the majority of claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency received advice about their dependency; however, relatively few homeless claimants discussed housing and homelessness. There was a notable amount of cross-over between these topics, owing to the fact that many claimants were in more than one group.

Discussions on specific job search-related issues were also very common. JSA claimants in the three groups were as likely to cover these topics as other JSA claimants, but the range of topics covered by advisers in discussions with ESA claimants with a criminal record or a dependency were more limited than in discussions with other ESA claimants.

Three-fifths of claimants with a criminal record or with a drug or alcohol dependency, and a half of homeless claimants felt that they maintained the 'right' amount of contact with advisers. Although these proportions indicate that most were satisfied with their level of contact, it is worth noting that satisfaction was not as high as amongst other claimants.

The majority of claimants with a criminal record or a dependency felt that advisers understood their particular circumstances. There was variation between the views of JSA and ESA claimants, with the latter less likely to feel their circumstances were understood. Homeless claimants were less likely than claimants in the other two groups to indicate that advisers appreciated their circumstances; this may be linked to the fact that few had actually discussed their housing circumstances with advisers.

Certain types of job-specific advice were less commonly offered to claimants in the three groups than other claimants. These included signposting to places where they might find jobs or suggestions for specific vacancies. A quarter of claimants with a criminal record also received advice about their previous conviction, while a quarter of homeless claimants received advice about their housing circumstances. Three in ten claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency received advice about their dependency, with half going on to take up a treatment option.

### 4.4.3 Flexible menu of back-to-work support

The flexible menu of support options present claimants with further sources of support. JSA claimants in the three groups were offered a similar range of options, and in similar numbers, as other JSA claimants. By contrast, ESA claimants who had a criminal record or a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely than other ESA claimants to receive most types of support.

When it came to assessing the support on offer by Jobcentre Plus, JSA claimants with a criminal record or dependency gave similar ratings of the support they were offered as other JSA claimants. Around three in five in each group gave a positive assessment of the amount of support they were offered; the tailoring of the support to their personal needs and circumstances; and their satisfaction with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping claimants find employment.

A positive assessment was less common amongst ESA claimants, and especially so amongst ESA claimants who had a criminal record, while ESA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency were less likely than those without a dependency to perceive the support they were offered as personalised. The less positive views held by ESA claimants in the three groups may tie in with several of the findings stated above including: the high levels of anxiety amongst these claimants about the prospect of being in paid work; the limited range of topics discussed by such claimants in their discussions with advisers; the tendency of ESA claimants in the three groups to view advisers as less understanding; and the differences in terms of what they were offered from the flexible menu of support compared to other ESA claimants (and of JSA and ESA claimants who were in each of the three groups).

## 5 A focus on IS claimants: lone parents whose youngest child is aged 3 or 4

Lone parents with a youngest child aged below five are eligible to claim Income Support (IS). When their youngest child reaches the age of five, they lose their eligibility for IS, and instead may claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) if they are capable of work or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) if their capability for work is limited by a disability or health condition.<sup>30</sup> The main survey includes lone parents with a youngest child aged five or over claiming JSA and ESA, but not those with younger children.<sup>31</sup>

Lone parents on IS have voluntary access to the Jobcentre Plus Offer.<sup>32</sup> They are also subject to mandatory interventions, including attendance of Work Focused Interviews (WFI), the frequency of which depends on the age of their youngest child.<sup>33</sup> In the year before lone parents lose eligibility to IS, they attend quarterly WFIs, with the intention that greater preparation for an eventual move into work, if they move onto JSA, may be needed.

This chapter considers whether lone parents are taking up the support available through the Offer, particularly as their child approaches the age when they lose entitlement to IS (i.e. parents with a youngest child aged three or four). It explores the extent to which these claimants volunteer for Jobcentre Plus Offer activities, their perceptions of this support and how they perceive it has influenced them in looking for work. Where appropriate, findings for this group of lone parents are compared with other benefit claimants: lone parents claiming JSA, as well as claimants of JSA and ESA as a whole, to provide context.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> There are groups of lone parents who are exempt from Lone Parent Obligations (LPO): those in receipt of Carer's Allowance; foster carers; parents whose child is eligible for the middle or higher rate of Disability Living Allowance. There are also cases where lone parents can be exempt from LPO for a transitional period: those on full-time study or who are on an approved full-time training course.

<sup>31</sup> These comprise lone parents who have transferred from IS, as well as those making a new benefit claim.

<sup>32</sup> Through European Social Fund (ESF) funding, IS claimants in England are also able to volunteer for the Work Programme.

<sup>33</sup> Lone parents with a youngest child aged under one are not subject to any conditionality but will be able to volunteer for Jobcentre Plus support if they choose. Lone parents with a youngest child aged between one and three will be required to attend regular WFIs every six months; Lone parents with a youngest child aged four are required to attend WFIs every three months. As well as attending regular WFIs, lone parents on IS are encouraged by advisers to volunteer for additional flexible interventions. Take-up enables advisers to assess their needs and consider other appropriate activities and support to move them closer to the labour market.

<sup>34</sup> Where comparisons are made, findings for other groups are taken from the main Wave 1 survey, which asked similar questions to those covered in this chapter.

## 5.1 Claimant attitudes

This section explores lone parents' commitment to work, and the perceived constraints to finding employment amongst those looking for work.

### 5.1.1 Looking for work

Around a third of lone parents on IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four (35 per cent) were looking for work at the time of the interview. Looking for work was strongly associated with the length of time since lone parents had last worked. More than half (59 per cent) of respondents who had worked in the previous 12 months were looking for work, compared with 26 per cent of those who had not worked for more than a year.

The length of time since lone parents had last worked varied considerably (see Table C.28 in Appendix C) and was, in turn, linked to the age of their child. Around half (47 per cent) said that they left their last job because they were pregnant or to look after children. This group of lone parents had typically spent longer away from work than JSA claimants, including lone parents on JSA.

Lone parents who were not looking for work were asked why they were not looking. Family commitments were given as the main reason: 47 per cent said that their child(ren) were too young to be left in childcare, while 24 per cent mentioned family or caring commitments. One in four (24 per cent) said a lack of suitable or affordable childcare stopped them from looking for work.

Claimants who were not looking for work gave a range of answers regarding when they thought they might start looking for work: 36 per cent said they would start looking in the next few months, but 29 per cent said it would be a year or two, and 29 per cent said it would be 'some time in the future'. When asked what single thing would need to change before they started to look for work, the most common answer (given by 28 per cent) related to childcare (e.g. more available/cheaper childcare), while 22 per cent said that they were waiting for their youngest child to start school. Other answers related to improving health (10 per cent) and gaining new qualifications (nine per cent).

On the whole there appears to be a division between those who have worked recently (since their youngest child was born) and who were looking for work again, and others who have not worked since their youngest child was born, and who were waiting for them to get older before looking for work. The findings suggest that lone parents' expectations for work are often related to when their children will start school and their ability to find appropriate childcare.

### 5.1.2 Motivation to find work

All lone parents on IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four were asked a series of statements about their attitudes towards being in work and their job search prospects.

Most claimants expressed positive attitudes about their motivation to work. Four in five (82 per cent) agreed that having almost any type of paid work is better than not working, and 83 per cent agreed that they would be a happier person if they were in paid work. As many as 88 per cent agreed that they were willing to change career or re-train to find a job they can do.

### 5.1.3 Anxiety about work

While it is encouraging to note that most lone parents want to work, one potential demotivating factor for job seekers can be a sense of anxiety about the prospect of being in work. All lone parents on IS, whose youngest child was aged between three and four and who had not yet found a job, were asked whether they agreed with the statement: *'the thought of being in paid work makes me nervous'*.

Around one in five (21 per cent) said that the thought of being in paid work made them nervous. This was higher among respondents with a long-term health problem or disability (35 per cent), and also those that had not worked for more than five years/at all (33 per cent).

As Table 5.1 shows, the majority of IS claimants of this type (68 per cent) agreed that they would be happier in work and were not nervous about the prospect, while 15 per cent said they would be happier in work but remain nervous.

**Table 5.1 Attitudes towards employment**

	%
Happier in work and not nervous	68
Happier in work but nervous	15
Not happier in work but not nervous	13
Not happier in work and nervous	4
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS</i>	<i>341</i>

These findings are similar to those for lone parents on JSA, and are closer to JSA claimants overall than to ESA claimants. This indicates that although only a minority of these lone parents are currently looking for work, they have positive attitudes towards working.

### 5.1.4 Confidence in job search

Lone parents on IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four and who were currently looking for work were asked how confident they were in different elements of their job search activities – the results are shown in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2 Confidence in job search**

	Very confident %	Fairly confident %	Not confident %
Your skills are sufficiently up-to-date for the current job market	29	41	27
Employers will want to offer you an interview	22	54	23
You can do well in interviews	30	56	14
You can cope with rejections and knock-backs	44	47	8
You can learn new skills or retrain	66	27	7
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS currently looking for work</i>		<i>110</i>	

IS claimants were confident about their ability to learn new skills or retrain (66 per cent were very confident) and to cope with rejections and knock-backs (44 per cent). They were also at least fairly confident in their ability to do well in interviews. The majority were very or fairly confident that their skills were sufficiently up-to-date for the current job market and that employers would want to offer them an interview, although around a quarter (27 per cent and 23 per cent respectively) were not confident about these two items. Overall, these findings suggest that lone parents on IS feel confident in their own ability, but are slightly less confident about their position in the labour market.

Once again, these findings are similar to those observed for lone parents on JSA.

### 5.1.5 Perceived barriers to employment

All IS claimants who were lone parents of a three to four-year-old and were looking for work were asked what they thought was preventing them from finding a job. This question was answered spontaneously by respondents and the results are shown in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3 Barriers to finding work**

	%
Family or caring commitments	45
Lack of suitable/affordable childcare	16
Lack of jobs in local area	13
Lack of jobs for people with caring responsibilities	10
Lack of vacancies/too much competition for jobs interested in	9
Not having right skills for jobs interested in	7
Transport/travel difficulties	4
Lack of work experience	4
Health issues/disability limit kind of work I can do	3
Time involved in getting to workplace/interviews	1
Language difficulties	1
Other	16
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS currently looking for work</i>	<i>110</i>

The main barrier that lone parents felt was preventing them from finding work was family or caring commitments (45 per cent); a further 16 per cent said that the lack of suitable or affordable childcare was a barrier. The other main barrier was in relation to job vacancies: 13 per cent said that lack of jobs in the area was a barrier, and nine per cent said there was too much competition for the jobs they were interested in; ten per cent specifically mentioned the lack of jobs for people with caring responsibilities.

### 5.1.6 Perceptions of Jobcentre Plus in helping claimants' confidence and motivation

All lone parents on IS were asked whether they felt that the advice and support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped to increase their confidence about finding a job they can do, their motivation to find work, and their chances of finding employment. As shown in Table 5.4, lone parents were equally divided as to whether Jobcentre Plus support had helped them or not, and in each case around one in five said that the question did not apply to them (generally those that had not had any recent meetings).

**Table 5.4 Perceived soft outcomes**

<i>Do you believe the advice and support you have received from Jobcentre Plus has helped ...?</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Not applicable</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
To build up your confidence about finding a job that you could do	40	40	1	18
To increase your motivation to find work	44	35	1	21
To increase your chances of finding suitable work	34	42	3	21

*Base: All lone parents claiming IS*

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There were no differences in any of the measures in terms of whether lone parents were looking for work or not. However, there were other variations for the first two measures (building up confidence about finding a job and increasing motivation to find work). In both cases, respondents were more likely to say the support had helped them if they had spent longer out of the labour market. For example, 51 per cent of those that had not worked for five or more years (or at all) said that the support had increased their motivation to find work, compared with 36 per cent of those who had worked in the previous 12 months. Related to this, lone parents who were nervous about the prospect of work (generally those who had been out of work for longer) were also more likely to say the support had helped them.

The other main variation was in relation to adviser meetings. Lone parents who had attended frequent meetings were more likely to say the support had helped them; for example, 58 per cent of those that attended meetings at least every three months said that the advice had helped them build up confidence about finding work, compared with 39 per cent of those that had attended meetings less frequently.

There was less variation in relation to increasing chances of finding suitable work. Lone parents who had seen an adviser in the previous 12 months were more likely to say they had been helped in this way (39 per cent compared with 21 per cent who had not seen an adviser), but otherwise the findings were consistent by respondent characteristics.

Overall, these findings were similar to those seen for lone parents on JSA (although lone parents on JSA were less likely to give a 'not applicable' answer). The main difference was that lone parents on JSA were more likely to say that the advice and support they had received had increased their chances of finding suitable work (51 per cent).

## 5.2 Adviser support

### 5.2.1 Level of contact with advisers

Just three-quarters of lone parents on IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four (76 per cent) said that they had attended any meetings with a Jobcentre Plus adviser in the previous 12 months. This is surprising, given that lone parents would normally be expected to attend six-monthly or quarterly WFIs. Sub-group analysis gives no indication as to the reasons why lone parents had not attended any meetings; for example, this attendance rate is similar for those looking for work and not looking for work.

### 5.2.2 Discussions with advisers

This section examines the issues that lone parents claiming IS had discussed with Jobcentre Plus advisers since the start of their claim. These discussions are likely to have taken place at WFIs, which take place every six months for lone parents with a youngest child aged under four, and every three months if the youngest child is aged four.

The content of the WFI is largely shaped by the claimant's intentions regarding job attainment in the medium and short term. The analysis below therefore separates out the results for lone parents who said they were looking for work and those who were not.

Around seven in ten lone parents who were looking for work discussed their previous jobs and work experience with an adviser (72 per cent), and similar proportions discussed their skills and qualifications (73 per cent) and the availability of the type of work they were looking for (75 per cent). A slightly lower proportion discussed how far they were willing to travel to work (63 per cent). In addition, the majority of lone parents who were looking for work discussed their caring responsibilities (73 per cent) and the possibility of changing career or retraining (57 per cent).

Most lone parents who were not looking for work discussed the possibility of working in the future (71 per cent), as well as their previous jobs and work experience (58 per cent) and their skills and qualifications (57 per cent). A similar proportion (57 per cent) discussed their caring responsibilities (Table 5.5).

**Table 5.5 Topics discussed with advisers**

	Looking for work %	Not looking for work %
Type of work looking for and its availability	75	n/a
Caring responsibilities	73	57
Skills and qualifications	73	57
Previous jobs and work experience	72	58
How far willing to travel for work	63	n/a
Changing career or retraining to do something else	57	47
Possibility of working in the future	n/a	71
Steps or support needed to prepare for work	n/a	60

*Base: All lone parents on IS and looking for work (109); not looking for work (199)*

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Overall, this analysis indicates that most WFIs appear to cover a range of important issues. However, given the importance of caring commitments and childcare (as seen above in relation to barriers to work), it is possibly surprising that discussion of caring responsibilities was limited to 73 per cent of those looking for work and 57 per cent of those not looking for work; also that only 71 per cent of those not looking for work discussed the possibility of working in the future, given the strong motivation to working seen in the previous section. However, to some extent these figures reflect the fact that not all respondents had seen an adviser in the previous 12 months: for example, if looking only at respondents who had seen an adviser in the previous 12 months, 74 per cent discussed caring arrangements (82 per cent of those looking for work and 68 per cent of those not looking for work), while 86 per cent of those not looking for work discussed the possibility of working in the future.<sup>35</sup>

A small proportion of lone parents also said that they had discussed the following issues with an adviser: issues relating to housing or homelessness (nine per cent); issues relating to a criminal conviction (six per cent), to debt (five per cent) and to drug or alcohol dependency (three per cent).

When asked about the things they agreed as part of their action plan, around two in five lone parents said that these things would genuinely increase their chances of finding work (42 per cent), took account of their personal circumstances (48 per cent) and were achievable (46 per cent). However, many respondents said that these issues did not apply to them, presumably because they did not recall agreeing an action plan or (as noted above) because they had not attended any recent meetings with an adviser (Table 5.6). Findings were very similar between lone parents on IS looking for work and those who were not looking for work.

**Table 5.6 Perceptions of action plan**

<i>Whether felt that all things agreed ...?</i>	<b>Would genuinely increase chances of finding work (in future)</b>	<b>Took account of your personal circumstances</b>	<b>Were achievable</b>
	%	%	%
Yes	42	48	46
Some of them	2	*	3
No	12	8	6
Not applicable	41	41	41
Don't know	3	4	4
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS</i>		341	

The majority of lone parents on IS (73 per cent) said they were clear on how often they would need to meet with a Personal Adviser.

### 5.2.3 Claimant views on level of contact with advisers

Most lone parents claiming IS felt that they had spent about the right amount of time with staff or advisers at Jobcentre Plus (74 per cent), although one in six (16 per cent) said they had not spent enough time and two per cent felt they had spent too much time.

<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that the base size for IS claimants who had seen an adviser in the past 12 months and were looking for work was 85.

Table 5.7 shows how these findings differ for those looking for work and not looking for work. Views were less positive among lone parents who were looking for work, with fewer saying the amount of time was about right (65 per cent compared with 82 per cent of those not looking for work), and more saying they did not spend enough time with advisers (25 per cent compared with 11 per cent). There were no differences according to the actual frequency of meetings (e.g. quarterly, rather than more or less often).

**Table 5.7 Views on amount of time spent with advisers**

	Looking for work	Not looking for work
	%	%
Too much time	4	1
About right	65	82
Not enough time	25	11
Don't know	6	7

*Base: All lone parents on IS and looking for work (109); not looking for work (199)*

The overall figures for lone parents on IS are similar to those seen for other groups in the survey, including lone parents on JSA. However, lone parents on JSA were more likely to say that they spent too much time with advisers (13 per cent) than this group of lone parents on IS (two per cent).

### 5.2.4 Adviser continuity

Lone parents on IS were asked whether they had always dealt with the same adviser when they had meetings at Jobcentre Plus. Some respondents did not answer (if they had only met with an adviser once or could not remember who they saw). Of those giving an answer, 56 per cent said they always dealt with the same adviser.

If lone parents had not always seen the same adviser, they were asked how they felt about it. Around one in three said they would have preferred to see the same adviser (34 per cent), although other respondents did not have any preference on who they saw (23 per cent), and 36 per cent said that they did not mind as long as they knew a bit about their circumstances.

### 5.2.5 Adviser support: understanding personal circumstances

As shown in Table 5.8, the majority of lone parents on IS agreed that Jobcentre Plus advisers understood their particular circumstances (77 per cent) and that they were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus (74 per cent). However, respondents who were looking for work were again less positive than those not looking for work. They were less likely to agree that advisers understood their particular circumstances (70 per cent compared with 81 per cent of those not looking for work) and that they were offered the right amount of support (64 per cent compared with 83 per cent).

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**Table 5.8 Attitudes to adviser support**

	Agree %	Disagree %
Jobcentre Plus advisers understood your particular circumstances	77	11
You were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus	74	16
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS</i>		341

Lone parents who saw the same adviser all the time were more positive than those who saw different advisers, with 90 per cent agreeing that advisers understood their particular circumstances (compared with 70 per cent of those seeing different advisers) and 88 per cent agreeing that they were offered the right amount of support (compared with 66 per cent).

These findings indicate that adviser support may currently be better suited to lone parents who are more distant from the labour market, rather than those looking for work, and that views tend to be more positive when lone parents see the same adviser.

Overall, the findings for this group of lone parents were similar to those for other groups of claimants included in the main survey (JSA and ESA claimants). However, these findings were more positive than for lone parents on JSA, who were less likely to think advisers understood their particular circumstances (60 per cent agreed) or that they were offered the right amount of support (59 per cent).

### 5.2.6 Adviser support: job search advice

Lone parents who were looking for work were asked whether they had been offered various types of advice or support regarding their job search. More than half (56 per cent) were offered advice about looking for work online, while a third or more were offered the other types of support shown in Table 5.9.

**Table 5.10 Discussion of job search activities**

	%
Offered:	
Advice about how to write a CV or job application, or how to prepare and carry out a job interview	32
Suggestions about where you should look for job vacancies	40
Information about the local jobs market	33
Advice about looking for work online, particularly through the DirectGov website	56
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS currently looking for work</i>	110

In addition, 45 per cent of those looking for work said that the adviser tried to identify types of jobs that might be suitable for them. Among lone parents on IS who were given advice about potentially suitable jobs, 63 per cent said that the jobs that were suggested were suitable for them, while 12 per cent said that some of the jobs were suitable.

Around one in four lone parents who were looking for work (23 per cent) said that they had been given information by an adviser about work clubs. Only one of the 25 respondents given this information said that they had actually been along to a work club.

## **5.3 Flexible menu of back-to-work support**

This section examines the take-up of support options by lone parents on IS and attitudes to this support. The level of take-up of all of the various types of support was lower among this group of lone parents than among other groups in the survey, including lone parents on JSA. This is to be expected, given the less intensive level of advice and support provided on IS compared with JSA, and the voluntary nature of participation for lone parents on IS.

### **5.3.1 Work experience**

Three per cent of lone parents said that they had been offered an opportunity to develop some work experience by a Jobcentre Plus adviser. This was higher among lone parents who had not worked for more than five years or at all (six per cent) than those who had worked more recently (two per cent).

### **5.3.2 Skills and training**

Nine per cent of lone parents said that they had received a skills assessment or been offered some sort of training by an adviser; specifically, two per cent had received both types of support, while a further one per cent had received a skills assessment, and six per cent some sort of training. Base sizes are too small to provide further analysis on the type of training or whether respondents attended.

### **5.3.3 Self-employment support**

Just one per cent of lone parents said that they had been offered help with setting up their own business by an adviser. This was higher among those who were looking for work (three per cent) and those who had worked in the previous 12 months (four per cent).

### **5.3.4 Volunteering**

Around one in six lone parents (15 per cent) said that they had been advised about volunteering by an adviser. Among those that had been given this advice (50 respondents), the majority said that the adviser had told them that they could look for voluntary positions at local organisations that had agreed to support unemployed people (36 respondents) and at a local volunteer centre (29 respondents), while 23 respondents said they were told they could look for voluntary positions on-line.

Of those who were advised about volunteering, three people said they had taken up a volunteering opportunity.

### **5.3.5 Childcare**

Around a quarter of lone parents (27 per cent) said that they had been offered information or help with childcare by an adviser at Jobcentre Plus. This was higher among lone parents who were looking for work (36 per cent compared with 24 per cent of those not looking for work).

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The overall proportion who were offered information or help on childcare was similar to that seen among lone parents on JSA (25 per cent).

The types of support offered are shown in Table 5.10.

**Table 5.11 Types of childcare support offered**

	%
Advice and support with childcare through tax credits when you find work	77
Information about how working hours can fit around caring commitments	67
Information about childcare costs for attending interviews or Jobcentre Plus activities	52
None of these	16
Don't know	1
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS who were offered information or help with childcare</i>	92

In almost every case, lone parents who were offered information or help with childcare said that they found the support helpful. Specifically, 97 per cent of those who received advice and support with childcare through tax credits found it helpful, while 91 per cent said the information they received about how working hours can fit around caring commitments was helpful.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, 43 of the 47 claimants who were offered information on childcare costs for attending interviews or Jobcentre Plus activities felt that this had been helpful.

### 5.3.6 Financial support

Eleven per cent of lone parents said that they had been offered financial help by their adviser for one-off expenses, and a further four per cent were not offered this type of financial help but asked their adviser for it. The proportion that was offered financial help was similar to that seen among other groups in the survey (JSA and ESA claimants).

Of those who were offered this type of help, or who asked for it, a quarter (25 per cent) said that they received financial help. Because of the small base size (n=53), it is not possible to examine what the financial help was for or why some respondents did not receive it.

### 5.3.7 Work Programme

One per cent of lone parents said that they had been on the Work Programme since the start of their IS claim (three respondents), and a further four per cent said that they had discussed the Work Programme with an adviser (13 respondents). It is not possible to provide further details on Work Programme discussions or participation because of the small number of respondents concerned.

### 5.3.8 Barriers to take up of support options

One in seven lone parents on IS (14 per cent) had not taken up any of the support covered in this section. The 46 claimants who had not taken up support were asked the reasons for this. Twelve said that they were not offered any support while a further 11 said that they were already taking, or were planning to take, steps to find work independently.

<sup>36</sup> The base sizes for those who received advice and support about childcare through tax credits was 71; for how working hours can fit around childcare was 61.

### 5.3.9 Assessment of support on offer

Claimants gave their views on the extent to which the support they were offered was tailored to their requirements. They were asked whether the advice and support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances, and whether they felt pressure to take part in unsuitable activities (Table 5.11).

**Table 5.12 Tailoring of support**

	Agree %	Disagree %
The advice and support you were offered matched your personal needs and circumstances	75	14
You felt under pressure to take part in activities that were not suited to your needs and circumstances	10	70
<i>Base: All lone parents claiming IS</i>	<i>341</i>	

The majority of lone parents on IS agreed that the advice and support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances (75 per cent), while 14 per cent disagreed. Lone parents who were looking for work were less likely to agree with this than those who were not looking for work (68 per cent compared with 82 per cent), and views were also more positive when respondents saw the same adviser all the time (89 per cent compared with 68 per cent of those who saw different advisers). These patterns are the same as those seen above in relation to adviser support.

Very few lone parents agreed that they felt under pressure to take part in activities that were not suited to their needs and circumstances (10 per cent)

These findings were more positive than among lone parents on JSA, 26 per cent of whom disagreed that the advice and support they received matched their needs and circumstances, and 27 per cent of whom agreed that they felt under pressure to take part in unsuitable activities.

When asked if there was any additional support they could receive from Jobcentre Plus that they would find helpful, there were few suggestions. Six per cent said that support in relation to childcare would be helpful, while two per cent said that each of the following would be helpful: information or availability of courses or training, help to find work, and more information or explanation about eligibility and benefit rules.

Claimants were also given the chance to rate their satisfaction with the service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find employment. Most lone parents on IS said they were satisfied with the service (60 per cent), although 12 per cent were dissatisfied. As shown in Table 5.12, views were less positive among those looking for work, who were less likely to be very satisfied (25 per cent compared with 34 per cent) and more likely to be very dissatisfied (ten per cent compared with three per cent), compared with those who were not looking for work.

**Table 5.13 Satisfaction with service that Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment**

	Looking for work	Not looking for work
	%	%
Very satisfied	25	34
Fairly satisfied	30	30
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24	20
Fairly dissatisfied	7	5
Very dissatisfied	10	3
Don't know	5	9

*Base: All lone parents claiming IS and looking for work (109); not looking for work (199)*

Views were more positive among those who had seen an adviser frequently. Among those who had seen an adviser at least every three months, 44 per cent were very satisfied, compared with 26 per cent of those who had seen an adviser less often.<sup>37</sup> In addition, lone parents on IS who had seen the same adviser all of the time were more likely to be very satisfied (39 per cent compared with 21 per cent of those who had seen different advisers).

There was also a difference among lone parents who had a longstanding illness or disability, 16 per cent of whom were very satisfied with the service offered, compared with 33 per cent of lone parents without a longstanding illness or disability.

Overall, these findings suggest that lone parents were generally happy with the service they received, but that views were less positive among those with more specific needs (those looking for work and those with a longstanding illness or disability). The findings also suggest that more frequent contact and adviser continuity help to produce more positive views.

## 5.4 Summary

This chapter focused on the experiences and views of the Jobcentre Plus Offer given by lone parents claiming IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four. On most characteristics, this group is similar to other lone parents who are claiming JSA.

### 5.4.1 Claimant attitudes

Lone parents on IS with a youngest child aged three or four expressed a strong commitment towards work, although only around one in three were currently looking for work. The findings also showed that these lone parents have distinctive constraints to working, notably in relation to caring commitments and childcare, but also other barriers such as low qualifications and lack of recent work experience.

<sup>37</sup> There were 63 respondents who had seen their adviser more frequently than every three months.

## 5.4.2 Adviser support

Only three-quarters of respondents had attended meetings with an adviser in the previous 12 months. Where respondents had attended meetings, they discussed a range of topics, including work options and caring responsibilities. There was also some discussion of job search activities: over half said they received advice about looking for work online.

While the majority (74 per cent) said that the amount of time spent with advisers overall was about right, one in six said that they did not spend enough time with advisers. Views regarding the amount of time spent with advisers were less positive among lone parents who were looking for work, who were more likely than those who were not looking for work to say they did not spend enough time with advisers.

Three-quarters agreed that Jobcentre Plus advisers understood their particular circumstances and that they were offered the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus. However, respondents who were looking for work were again less positive than those not looking for work.

## 5.4.3 Flexible menu of back-to-work support

One in four lone parents were offered information or help with childcare, while around one in six were advised about volunteering. Otherwise, very few lone parents were offered support options (such as skills assessment, training or work experience).

Overall, most lone parents were satisfied with the support they received, and the majority felt that the support was appropriate to their needs and circumstances. On a number of items, lone parents who were looking for work were less positive towards the support they were receiving; for example, they were less likely than those not looking for work to say that the support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances or that they were satisfied with the service that Jobcentre Plus offers in helping find employment. This suggests that current support may be more tailored to preparing lone parents for an eventual move into work (when they move onto JSA as a result of LPO) rather than identifying and actively supporting those who want to move into work earlier.

The other consistent pattern was that lone parents who had more frequent adviser meetings, and those who saw the same adviser all the time, were more positive towards the support they received than other lone parents.

Comparisons with lone parents receiving JSA indicate that those on IS tended to be more positive about the support they were receiving, but acknowledged that it was less likely to increase their chances of finding suitable work.

## 6 Conditionality and sanctions

This chapter examines the extent to which claimants recalled being told about the conditions attached to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and specifically whether they were told that their benefit might be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions. It also looks at the perceived effect of this information: did claimants change their behaviour as a result of being told about benefit conditions?

The second half of the chapter explores whether claimants experienced their benefit being stopped or reduced, and if so why this happened. It also looks at whether these claimants were told about or applied for hardship payments.

Findings are analysed for both JSA and ESA claimants, as well as by lone parents on Income Support (IS) (where appropriate).

### 6.1 Conditionality

The initial interview between claimant and adviser presents an opportunity to inform claimants of the conditions associated with receipt of their benefit. For JSA claimants this includes the need to be available for and actively seeking work, having a signed and up-to-date Jobseekers' Agreement (JSAg), as well as attending regular Jobsearch Review meetings and participating in other activities, as required. For ESA claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), this includes attending Work Focused Interviews (WFIs), as well as undertaking work-related activity, as required.

Advisers are expected to give an explanation of the conditions that might lead to claimants having their benefit stopped or reduced. This section explores how well these issues were explained during the initial interviews between advisers and claimants, and claimants' understanding of the conditions that may lead to the reduction or withdrawal of their benefit payments.

#### 6.1.1 Explanation of conditionality

All JSA claimants ought to receive an explanation from an adviser of what they need to do in order to keep claiming JSA, as well as the requirement to attend regular Jobsearch Review meetings. In reality, nine per cent said they were not given an adequate explanation of the conditions associated with JSA. Around one in eight JSA claimants (13 per cent) and one in three ESA claimants (31 per cent) said they were never told by an adviser that their benefit would be affected if they did not agree to certain conditions.

#### Analysis of JSA claimants

More than half of JSA claimants (57 per cent) felt that the conditions associated with receipt of their benefit were explained 'very well'. Where the New Jobseeker's Interview (NJI) had been split into two separate meetings, claimants were slightly more likely to say that conditions were explained very well (62 per cent compared to 55 per cent). However, they were no more likely to say they had been told about the repercussions of failing to agree to the conditions.

Whilst nine per cent of all JSA claimants reported not having been given an adequate explanation of JSA conditionality, around one in six JSA claimants with a criminal record (16 per cent), a similar proportion of JSA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (16 per cent), and five of the 29 homeless JSA claimants said the same. The proportion of claimants in these groups who were told that their benefits might be stopped or reduced if they failed to agree to certain conditions was also lower than amongst the rest of the JSA population: only one in 20 ex-offenders (five per cent) and claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (six per cent) and four out of 29 homeless JSA claimants said that they were told this.

## Analysis of ESA claimants

Compared with JSA claimants, substantially fewer ESA claimants reported being told that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions (82 per cent compared with 62 per cent). The proportion of ESA claimants with a criminal record who were given this information was even lower (52 per cent).

## Analysis of lone parents on IS

Just over half (55 per cent) of lone parents on IS with a youngest child aged three or four said they were told that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions.

### 6.1.2 Understanding of conditionality

Respondents were asked what conditions may lead to their benefit being stopped or reduced. Their answers represent their understanding of conditionality.

When asked to name the conditions that might lead to the reduction or withdrawal of benefit, one in ten JSA claimants (10 per cent) were unable to answer, but this rose to almost half of ESA claimants (45 per cent), indicating a relatively low level of awareness surrounding the conditions associated with ESA. The conditions cited by claimants on JSA and ESA are shown in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1 Conditions that may lead to benefit being stopped or reduced**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %
Inadequate attendance or participation	63	40	37
Inadequate efforts to find work <sup>1</sup>	56	17	7
Fraud	11	4	5
No longer eligible	4	3	5
Failure to produce written evidence	1	6	4
Other conditions	2	3	2
Don't know	10	40	46

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,069); all ESA claimants looking for work (104); all ESA not looking for work (572)*

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that ESA claimants are not sanctioned for inadequate efforts to find work, as the requirement to be available and actively seeking work does not apply to ESA claimants.

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At the top of most claimants' minds were examples of inadequate attendance or participation in the support options offered by Jobcentre Plus, including failing to sign on (for JSA claimants only) or failing to attend a meeting with an adviser. Over half of JSA claimants (56 per cent) indicated that inadequate efforts to find a job could lead to their benefit being stopped or reduced. Interestingly, nine per cent of ESA claimants said that inadequate efforts to find work could lead to their benefit being stopped or reduced even though this is not the case<sup>38</sup> – this was even higher among ESA claimants who were looking for work (17 per cent).

### Analysis of JSA claimants

A key determinant of the number of conditions JSA claimants put forward was whether or not an adviser had explicitly told them their benefit could be stopped or reduced. Claimants who were not given this information were much more likely than other claimants to fail to name any conditions (34 per cent compared with five per cent).

Older claimants seemed less aware of the need to attend meetings and the support options organised by Jobcentre Plus. While 70 per cent of the under-25s said that failure to do this could lead to the withdrawal or reduction of their benefit, only 50 per cent of claimants aged 50 or above did the same.

### Analysis of ESA claimants

ESA claimants who were warned by their adviser that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they failed to agree to certain conditions were far more likely (70 per cent) than those who were not given this information (30 per cent) to be able to name at least one condition.

### 6.1.3 Attitudes regarding conditionality

Claimants who were aware their benefit could be reduced or stopped if they did not comply with certain conditions were asked whether this made them more likely to follow the rules associated with their benefit. Around seven in ten JSA claimants (72 per cent) and six in ten ESA claimants (63 per cent) replied that it would. However, fewer JSA and ESA claimants felt this information made them more liable to look for work or take steps that would move them closer to work (Table 6.2).

The responses of lone parents on IS were very similar to those given by JSA claimants: 73 per cent said that knowledge of potential sanctions made them more likely to follow the rules, while 60 per cent said it made them more likely to look for, or take steps to prepare for, work.

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<sup>38</sup> Even though there is no requirement on ESA claimants to be available and actively seeking work, they may be required to undertake work-related activity, which may be what ESA claimants were thinking of when answering this question.

**Table 6.2 Attitudes regarding conditionality**

<i>Whether knowing benefit could be reduced or stopped if certain rules are not followed makes you ...</i>	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA looking for work</b>	<b>ESA not looking for work</b>	<b>IS lone parents</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
More likely to follow rules	72	61	64	73
Makes no difference	27	27	31	21
Don't know	1	12	5	6
More likely to look for work/ take steps to prepare for work	63	44	32	60
Makes no difference	35	47	59	34
Don't know	2	9	9	7

*Base: All JSA claimants told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (915); all ESA claimants looking for work told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (66); all ESA not looking for work told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (349); all lone parents on IS told their benefit could be stopped or reduced (186)*

## Analysis of JSA claimants

Knowing the impact that conditions can have on JSA payments had a varying effect on different types of claimant. The impact was greater on younger claimants aged under 25: around four in five (81 per cent) felt this knowledge made them more likely to follow the rules (compared with 68 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 63 per cent of those aged 50 or over), while 74 per cent said it made them more likely to look for work (compared with 58 per cent of 25-49 year-olds and 54 per cent of those aged 50 or over).

Women were more likely than men to say that knowledge of the impact of JSA conditions had affected their behaviour. This applied in relation to both following the rules (78 per cent compared with 69 per cent) and looking for work (68 per cent compared with 61 per cent). Claimants who had spent longer out of work were also more likely to say that knowledge of conditions had affected them: among those who had not worked for more than two years (or at all), 79 per cent said that they were more likely to follow the rules, and 75 per cent more likely to look for work. By contrast, those who had worked in the previous three months were much less likely to say they were affected by this knowledge (66 per cent for following the rules, and 55 per cent for looking for work).

The risk of benefit reduction or loss evidently serves as a motivating factor for some claimants more than others.

We can also examine responses on this issue against outcomes. However, there was no evidence from the survey that knowledge of JSA conditions led to actual movement into work. Respondents who said they were more likely to look for work because of their knowledge of JSA conditions were no more likely than other respondents to have moved into work when they left JSA.

## Analysis of ESA claimants

Around two in three ESA claimants who were told that their benefit could be stopped or reduced if they failed to meet certain conditions said that this made them more likely to follow the rules associated with claiming ESA (64 per cent). There was no perceptible difference between the opinions of those who were looking for work and those who were not, although opinions did vary

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by age: claimants under the age of 50 (69 per cent) were more likely than older claimants (56 per cent) to say that this knowledge made them more liable to follow the rules.

Only in a third (34 per cent) of cases did this knowledge impact on claimants' inclination to search for jobs or prepare themselves for work. The claimants most likely to be motivated by this knowledge were those who started claiming ESA without previously having been on Incapacity Benefit (IB) (53 per cent). ESA claimants aged under 50 were more likely than those 50 or over to say that conditionality motivated them to find work (39 per cent compared with 26 per cent). Again, there was no statistically significant difference between the opinions of those who were looking for work and those who were not.

Amongst ESA claimants, there was a link between responses on these issues and outcomes. ESA claimants who said that knowledge of conditions had made them more likely to look for work (or take steps towards this) were more likely to leave ESA for employment (eight per cent) than ESA claimants who said this knowledge made no difference to them (two per cent). This analysis should not be taken as evidence of any direct impact, but at least suggests that messages around conditionality may encourage some ESA claimants to take steps towards moving into work.

In the depth interviews it was apparent that claimants believed conditionality requirements had increased over time. There was a perception of higher expectations being placed on claimants over the years, particularly through the JSAG, where claimants felt they were required to undertake more job searches and applications per week. This was combined with recognition of increased penalties (under the new sanctions regime) to create an impression that Jobcentre Plus was becoming increasingly tough on claimants. In general, this was accepted by claimants, who saw sanctions as a fair consequence of failing to meet job seeker responsibilities. Among those who had direct experience of being sanctioned, many accepted that this was justified, particularly in situations where claimants described having a good relationship with their adviser.

*'Well I think it was my second week I was there [when I was sanctioned] so I didn't fully understand, I was still learning and getting to grips with the system. But it's alright now ... that's the rules, it's the way it goes ... it's self-inflicted, my fault for not doing enough job searches.'*

(Male, JSA 16-24)

A view that both the conditionality rules and the consequences of not adhering to them had become stricter over time was pertinent among claimants suffering from health conditions. Such claimants felt that Jobcentre Plus did not provide them with an adviser who was sympathetic to their condition when drawing up their JSAG or Action Plan. Added to this was the view that they were not work ready and believed that the conditionality requirements of JSA exacerbated their condition. Many of these claimants had previously received ESA and felt that their adviser was cynical towards any continuing health condition that they might suffer from.

*'After I passed that [Work Capability] Assessment I had to go back to the jobcentre to look for jobs. She said to me "you should look for jobs" ... I said "yeah I will apply for jobs that I can do with my leg like this otherwise it's a waste of time me applying to it". I couldn't find very much and they stopped my money. It wasn't until my leg gave way and I fell in the jobcentre that she believed me that I couldn't stack shelves or be a waitress.'*

(Female, JSA 50+)

## 6.2 Experience of having benefit stopped or reduced

All respondents who were interviewed at Wave 2 (i.e. excluding those that had already left benefit by the time of the Wave 1 survey) were asked whether their benefit had been stopped or reduced for any reason by Jobcentre Plus (Table 6.3). It is important to bear in mind that claimants who said that their benefit was stopped or reduced did not necessarily receive a sanction, as there are other reasons for benefit payments being reduced (e.g. repayment of Social Fund loans, utility payments) or stopped (including terminating a claim for a particular benefit).

Around one in five JSA claimants (22 per cent) said that their benefit had been stopped at some point in their claim, while six per cent said that it had been reduced. Similar proportions of ESA claimants said that their benefit had been stopped (21 per cent) or reduced (eight per cent), while the proportions for lone parents who were claiming IS and whose youngest child was aged between three and four were somewhat lower for stoppages (nine per cent) and similar for reductions (10 per cent).

**Table 6.3 Whether benefits stopped or reduced by Jobcentre Plus**

	JSA %	ESA looking for work %	ESA not looking for work %	IS lone parents %
Yes – stopped	22	22	20	9
Yes – reduced	6	7	8	10
No	70	72	70	81
Don't know	1	0	1	*

*Base: All JSA claimants interviewed at Wave 2 (627); all ESA claimants looking for work interviewed at Wave 2 (98); all ESA not looking for work interviewed at Wave 2 (541); all lone parents on IS with a youngest child aged 3 or 4 (341)*

The occurrence of benefit reductions or stoppages did not vary by whether or not claimants were told about this possibility at their initial interview with their adviser. Moreover, there was no variation in this regard between claimants who said that their knowledge of sanctions made them more willing to comply with the rules associated with their benefit, and those who said the knowledge made no difference to them. This was true of both JSA and ESA claimants.

### Analysis of JSA claimants

The proportion of JSA claimants who said that their benefit had been stopped or reduced was consistent across most sub-groups. The only differences were that JSA claimants with a criminal record were more likely (33 per cent) than other claimants (22 per cent) to say that their benefit had been stopped or reduced; the same was true of JSA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (30 per cent) and those with lower qualifications (32 per cent of those with basic qualifications or none at all, compared with 20 per cent of those with GCSEs or higher qualifications).

### Analysis of ESA claimants

ESA claimants aged 50 or over were more likely to say their benefit had been stopped (26 per cent), compared with those aged below 50 (16 per cent). Respondents who had started claiming ESA without previously having been on IB were also more likely to say their benefit had been stopped (31 per cent).

### Comparison with administrative data

As part of the analysis, administrative data on sanctions was compared with the answers given by survey respondents. The proportion of claimants recorded as sanctioned in the administrative data was lower than the proportion of claimants in the survey who said their benefit had been stopped or reduced; specifically:

- In the JSA sample, 11 per cent of claimants were recorded in the administrative data as having received a sanction in their current claim, compared with 28 per cent (in the survey) who said that their benefit had been stopped or reduced.
- In the ESA sample, one per cent were recorded in the administrative data as having received a sanction in their current claim, compared with 29 per cent (in the survey) who said that their benefit had been stopped or reduced.
- In the sample of lone parents on IS, two per cent were recorded in the administrative data as having received a sanction in their current claim, compared with 19 per cent (in the survey) who said that their benefit had been stopped or reduced.

These findings suggest either that some claimants thought they had been sanctioned when this was not actually the case; that claimants were thinking about sanctions in previous claims; or perhaps that the administrative data was not fully complete or up-to-date for all claimants.<sup>39</sup> It is also possible that claimants may have had their benefit stopped temporarily, delayed, or reduced for a reason other than a sanction.

Further analysis of JSA claimants shows that around half (56 per cent) of those recorded as sanctioned in the administrative data confirmed in the survey that their benefit had been stopped or reduced (the remainder said that this had not happened to them). However, 23 per cent of those recorded as not being sanctioned in the administrative data said that their benefit had been stopped or reduced.

#### 6.2.1 Reasons for benefits being stopped or reduced

Claimants were asked why their benefits had been stopped or reduced. This question was partially open-ended, and some of the responses were not read out as options but provided spontaneously by respondents themselves. Table 6.4 shows claimants' responses.

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<sup>39</sup> There are various reasons for a reduction in benefit which are not related to a claimant being sanctioned. Previous research has shown that many claimants do not know they have been sanctioned, or think they have been sanctioned when they have not. Because of this, administrative data on sanctions is generally considered more reliable than reports given by claimants.

**Table 6.4 Reasons for benefit being stopped or reduced by Jobcentre Plus**

	JSA %	ESA %
Missed a signing on appointment	26	-
Not entitled	13	63
Got a job/was working	13	1
Missed an appointment at Jobcentre Plus	12	-
Told not actively seeking work	8	-
Missed an appointment with an outside organisation	7	1
Did not undertake required activities	7	1
Out of country/on holiday	7	-
Left previous employment voluntarily	4	-
Result of a medical	-	9
Failed to provide a fit note from doctor	-	3
Other	13	14
No answer	1	*
Don't know	4	5

*Base: All JSA claimants whose benefit was stopped or reduced (173); all ESA claimants whose benefit was stopped or reduced (194)*

Among JSA claimants, the most common reason mentioned for benefits being stopped or reduced was missing a signing-on appointment (26 per cent), while there were also instances of benefit reductions or stoppages resulting from claimants missing other appointments at Jobcentre Plus (12 per cent) or at outside organisations (seven per cent). Some respondents said their benefit had been stopped or reduced because they were working (13 per cent) or were no longer eligible for JSA (13 per cent).

By far the most common reason given by ESA claimants for having their benefit stopped or reduced was that they were no longer entitled to ESA (63 per cent). It should be noted that this would not be considered a sanction.

Among those who had been sanctioned in the depth interviews, claimants with complex needs and relatively chaotic lifestyles, such as those that were homeless, with a drug or alcohol dependency or suffered from mental health issues, described being significantly affected by the experience. For this group, sanctions were more likely to be deemed unjustified, with claimants believing that their barriers to finding work had not been taken into account when the sanction was applied. Examples included claimants who lacked internet access and therefore could not regularly use Universal Jobmatch, or described health issues that impacted on their ability to meet their JSAG.

*'I've had my money stopped because there were jobs they said that I had to apply for, and I didn't understand how to fill my book in properly ... stopping my two weeks money that put me into big hole, like, no food, no electric, no gas.'*

(Male, JSA 25-49)

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*'I was sanctioned because I missed one appointment as my anxiety means I am quite forgetful ... if I write things down I am fine but if I don't I find it hard to remember an appointment in my head.'*

(Female, JSA 16-24)

### 6.2.2 Hardship payments

JSA and ESA claimants who said their benefit had been stopped or reduced were asked whether they were told about hardship payments and whether they applied for one. Around a quarter of JSA claimants who said their benefit had been stopped or reduced (23 per cent) said they were told about hardship payments when their benefit was stopped or reduced, with half of these (22 claimants) saying they applied for a hardship payment. The equivalent figures for ESA claimants were lower: 13 per cent said they were told about hardship payments and about half of them (13 claimants) applied for one (Table 6.5).

**Table 6.5 Whether told about or applied for hardship payments**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Told about hardship payments	23	13
Applied for hardship payment	13	6

*Base: All JSA claimants whose benefit was stopped or reduced (173);  
all ESA claimants whose benefit was stopped or reduced (194)*

Only 35 of all JSA and ESA claimants interviewed for the survey said they had applied for a hardship payment. These respondents were asked whether they received a payment, and 21 claimants said that they had.

The depth interviews highlighted that the process for applying for hardship payments was seen as a challenging experience, with people struggling to cover household bills and day-to-day living costs whilst making the claim. This was particularly problematic for claimants who suffered from mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, for whom the stress of dealing with the situation could exacerbate their existing conditions. Even once the hardship payment was received, the effects from their condition would continue.

*'They wanted [me] looking for six jobs a week ... so I said "how can I apply for the jobs if I ain't got a car, got no driving license or anything like that ..." so the money was stopped. I went to my doctor, as my blood pressure went up high again so then they did give the hardship money as I couldn't cope.'*

(Female, JSA 50+)

## 6.3 Summary

This chapter examined the extent to which claimants recalled being told about the conditions attached to JSA and ESA, and claimants' experiences of having their benefits stopped or reduced.

### 6.3.1 Conditionality

Nine per cent of JSA claimants said they were not given an adequate explanation of the conditions associated with JSA, while 13 per cent said they were never told by an adviser that their benefit would be affected if they did not agree to certain conditions. Around one in three ESA claimants said they were never told by an adviser about the repercussions of failing to agree to the conditions.

Seven in ten JSA claimants and six in ten ESA claimants who were aware their benefit could be reduced or stopped if they did not comply with certain conditions felt this information made them more likely to follow the rules, but lower proportions said it made them more likely to look for work or take steps that would move them closer to work. The effect of this knowledge on JSA claimants aged 50 or above and those who had been in work within three months of starting their claim was minimal; these groups may have been more inclined to follow the rules anyway.

### 6.3.2 Experience of having benefit stopped or reduced

Around one in five JSA claimants said that their benefit had been stopped at some point in their claim, while six per cent said that it had been reduced. The figures for ESA claimants were very similar (21 per cent and eight per cent respectively). Among lone parents with a youngest child aged 3 or 4 who were claiming IS, nine per cent said that their benefit had been stopped at some point, and 10 per cent said it had been reduced.

The most common reason given by JSA claimants for benefits being stopped or reduced was missing a signing-on appointment, while by far the most common reason given by ESA claimants was that they were no longer entitled (though this would not be considered a sanction).

Among claimants whose benefit had been stopped or reduced, 23 per cent of JSA claimants said they were told about hardship payments, and 13 per cent applied for one. The proportions of ESA claimants were lower (13 per cent and six per cent respectively).

# 7 Conclusions

## 7.1 Delivery of the Offer from a staff perspective

From an organisational perspective, the implementation of the Jobcentre Plus Offer was seen as a success. There has been a clear move away from nationally determined process-based working towards more tailored approaches, where districts, and in some cases individual offices, feel able to decide how best to implement support to get claimants back into work. There were variations in the extent to which these decisions were influenced by national, district, and local pressures, resulting in a range of diverging practices – which further confirms the degree of shift from the previous nationally-determined structure.

A key finding in relation to delivery of the Offer was that greater flexibility was particularly embraced at senior district and office level management, allowing managers to tailor approaches in their area to more directly address local conditions. For frontline staff this sometimes meant that they did not always see much change in their working practices, describing process-driven working that was not dissimilar to previous practices. Although there had been a shift to more tailored approaches, frontline staff did not always feel that they had the discretion to respond to the needs of individual claimants on their caseloads and provide more personalised support.

At local level, delivery of the Offer was driven by national, district and office-level initiatives, and also by local area conditions. These resulted in a wide ranging and continually evolving range of delivery models. One of the key recommendations from the first year of the evaluation was the need for greater learning from these different models, to share and disseminate best practice. Over the course of the evaluation, this was increasingly recognised by senior managers, resulting in a number of mechanisms for identifying and sharing lessons within and between districts. However, there were remaining issues around how these lessons could be used more effectively at office level. In particular, staff wanted evidence on how certain practices worked on the ground, in order to make informed decisions about whether they would be appropriate in different settings.

In addition to national, district and local pressures, the extent to which flexibility was devolved within districts was also influenced by senior managers' views about advisers' ability to adapt to new ways of working and whether they had the necessary resources to make use of this new found flexibility. For example, managers were concerned about current practices around diagnosing claimant needs and had introduced processes to better monitor claimant progress to help with decisions about support provision. There is some anecdotal evidence from the six case study districts that this was a particular issue for larger offices, where more structured approaches were felt to be necessary to monitor claimant progress. In contrast, some of the smaller offices appeared to be more open to allowing frontline staff to determine how best to prioritise and support claimants.

To some extent, advisers' ability to respond to new ways of working were also influenced by the cycle of continuous improvements that were directly associated with increased flexibility. Changes to working practices were symptomatic of managers' experiments to improve delivery; however, some staff felt this had an adverse effect on them. In particular, leaving advisers confused with limited understanding of why changes had been implemented and what this meant in terms of how they should be supporting claimants. The findings overall suggest that there are issues around the variability of adviser skills and adaptability which

could be supplemented by further training and support, especially if the use of greater flexibility relies on the quality and training of advisers.

The year one evaluation findings showed how the Offer enabled more personalised provision with fewer restrictions on when support options could be offered in claimants' journeys. There had been substantial success in addressing barriers to access highlighted in the first year evaluation report, which included: lack of availability and awareness of local provision, limited confidence and knowledge of the provision available; access to non-contracted funding; and, challenges purchasing services from other organisations. Improvements in these areas resulted in a package of support that was seen to provide more flexible provision to meet claimants' needs. However, there were ongoing challenges noted around providing tailored support for all claimants, particularly for those with complex or multiple needs. There were also remaining issues around ensuring access to more bespoke or non-contracted provision and whether Jobcentre Plus is best placed to provide or signpost provision where more structured and/or tailored support is required.

Linked to this point, the Offer for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) claimants continued to involve a relatively 'light touch' approach to supporting and preparing claimants to feel ready for work. There were concerns from staff about whether the Offer provides a tailored and flexible approach to best meet this claimant groups' needs.

## 7.2 Claimant experience of the Offer

The relationship between the support claimants received through the Offer and their subsequent outcomes is not straightforward. This evaluation research was not designed to measure the impact of the Offer on claimants, so any relationship observed between support that has been offered by Jobcentre Plus and the destinations of claimants cannot be interpreted as causally linked. On the surface, the fact that claimants who received no support were more likely to off flow in to work could be taken to mean that support has not had a positive effect on outcomes. However, this is actually more likely to reflect the fact that support is being tailored effectively and is not being directed towards claimants who are close to the job market and in relatively little need of it.

Most JSA claimants began their claim wanting to work, and the fact that the types of jobs that claimants off-flow into often do not meet the requirements they discussed with their advisers and their hopes for future progression, suggests that they are willing to be flexible, taking up jobs that are available rather than holding out for options that fully meet their needs.

The challenge for the Offer is to help claimants move into or closer to the labour market, but for those who do not succeed in finding a job over the course of 12 months, the Offer needs to play a part in maintaining positive attitudes. In general, the motivation of JSA claimants remained high, but confidence that they would actually find work declined. In contrast to this, among ESA claimants looking for work there were positive attitudinal shifts during their time on the Offer across all key aspects of job search, and just as importantly a reduction in anxiety about the thought of being in paid work.

From the claimant's viewpoint, the nature of the relationship and contact they have with advisers are important factors in the success of the Offer. Claimants felt that it was important that advisers knew their circumstances so that they would not need to explain their situation multiple times, and this requirement seemed to become more important over the course of their claim and matter more to claimants with a disability or health condition. The majority

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of claimants agreed that advisers they had come into contact with during their claim understood their circumstances, although JSA claimants with a mental health condition were less likely to feel that advisers treated them with understanding compared to other JSA claimants. Additionally, ESA claimants who maintained higher levels of adviser contact or greater continuity of contact were more likely to acknowledge advisers' understanding of their circumstances. There was also evidence that claimants' perceptions of tailoring were typically dependent on what they considered to be the quality of the adviser and how well the complexity of their needs were understood through the development of good rapport and relationships.

While the majority of claimants felt the amount of time they spent with advisers was sufficient, certain key groups felt they would have benefited from more adviser support. This was particularly the case for ESA claimants who were looking for work.

In terms of the flexible menu of back-to-work support, work experience seemed to be a particularly successful tool in helping claimants progress towards work. Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants who found work were more likely to say that they got their job 'through Jobcentre Plus' if they had taken up a work experience opportunity. Claimants who had been offered or taken up work experience options but did not manage to find work showed positive attitudinal shifts during the course of their claim, both in terms of being less nervous about the prospect of paid work and in their confidence that they can do well in interviews. Findings from the case studies also indicated that claimants who had attended work experience placements felt this had contributed to them having a better understanding of what a job might entail, therefore increasing their confidence.

More generally, being offered any support from the flexible menu was linked to positive perceptions of the Offer. Claimants who had been offered support were more likely to be satisfied with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus in helping them find employment, more likely to agree that Jobcentre Plus offered them the 'right amount' of support, and more likely to feel that the advice and support they were offered matched their personal needs and circumstances. This suggests that support options are generally being used for the right people at the right time.

However, not all groups felt this benefit to an equal extent. Disadvantaged JSA claimants – particularly those with mental health conditions – and ESA claimants looking for work were less positive about the Offer, while others were more so.

### 7.2.1 18-24 year-old JSA claimants

The result of recent policies and the introduction of the Youth Contract mean that young claimants are increasingly being targeted for back-to-work support, and this is clearly reflected in their experiences of the Offer. This group was more likely than other claimants to meet with advisers on a weekly or more frequent basis, and be offered a host of support options, ranging from the more standard job search advice and signposting to vacancies, to financial assistance, support regarding homelessness or caring responsibilities, and discussions about work experience opportunities. Their perceptions of the Offer were accordingly more positive than those of other claimants, with many reporting that the support felt tailored to their personal circumstances. Those who did not manage to off-flow into work within a year benefited from increased motivation to find work.

### **7.2.2 JSA claimants aged 50 or above**

Those in the 50+ age group described a lack of relevant support from Jobcentre Plus. This was linked to a perception by these claimants that employers were less interested in employing them, as their age could be indicative of a limited skill set and meant they would not be able to make a long-term commitment to the business. Claimants in this age group believed they could benefit if Jobcentre Plus offered them specific support to make them more attractive to employers, such as further skills training. Instead, several described feeling forced onto support measures that were inappropriate for them, and high proportions reported receiving unsuitable recommendations for job vacancies from advisers. For some, a lack of IT skills presented a range of barriers in terms of job searching online, using Universal Jobmatch, communicating with employers over email and generally lacking the necessary IT skills required by employers. Consequently, this group was less likely to off-flow into work, while those who remained on their benefit for a year experienced a notable loss of confidence that they could find 'a job that suits me'.

### **7.2.3 JSA claimants who are disadvantaged or have complex or multiple needs**

The Offer is clearly less well suited to assisting those with a disability, or facing complex or multiple needs. Claimants with a disability were more likely to see an adviser just once a month, and many felt that they did not spend enough time with advisers and that the support they were offered did not meet their personal needs or suit their circumstances. Amongst claimants with complex or multiple needs there was a widespread perception that their requirements were not properly identified, and that the support they were offered was not tailored to their personal needs and circumstances. Such claimants felt that it was more important to deal with the immediate barrier they were facing – whether homelessness, having a criminal record, or health constraints – rather than embarking on support measures aimed at moving them into work. At the same time, many reported that advisers did not address the limited information and communications technology (ICT), basic literacy and numeracy skills and lack of work experience associated with these barriers. On average, those with a disadvantage were less likely to off-flow into work, with large proportions still claiming the same benefit a year later.

### **7.2.4 ESA claimants looking for work**

There were several indications that claimants in this group were dissatisfied with their experience of the Offer. Compared with other ESA claimants, they were more likely to disagree that the support they received matched their personal needs and circumstances, and relatively few were satisfied with the level of contact they had with advisers or with the service that Jobcentre Plus offered in helping them find employment. This is not to say that their needs were wholly overlooked; offers of financial assistance, for example, were more commonly received by this group than other ESA claimants. In general, however, further adviser support may be required to ensure they maintain confidence during their journey through the Offer, and are being signposted and referred to appropriate support to help them back into employment.

One concerning finding is the indication that ESA claimants have limited knowledge of the wider provision of support options available due to their limited contact with Jobcentre Plus and less discussion of options for going back to work. Depth interviews with claimants found that there was limited awareness and use of the provision available. Linked to this, ESA claimants often did not understand why they were at Jobcentre Plus, so did not know what

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to ask for and had limited contact with advisers. The experience of the New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI) for ESA claimants, and discussion of the basic points related to job search and preparation for a future move into work, was much more variable when compared to the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) for JSA claimants, with nearly half of all ESA claimants not discussing next steps at this meeting. ESA claimants were significantly more likely to report that they left their initial meeting with their adviser without an appointment for their next meeting and without a clear indication of when they would next meet their adviser. These factors indicate that advisers still take a 'light touch' approach with ESA claimants. As indicated in the first year evaluation report, this partly reflects the fact that ESA claimants are further from work and that advisers are consequently working with harder to help claimants, but it may also reflect the varying skill levels of advisers.

Despite moves at head office level to provide additional clarification for advisers on how to support and guide ESA WRAG group claimants across their journey, there continues to be the need for a more structured approach to the delivery of NJWFI in terms of the topics covered and confirming next steps. The findings also indicate issues around the following through of initial discussions of support so claimants know how and where they can access support options. As discussed in the first year report, this could be improved by ensuring that claimants are explicitly asked if they are interested in taking up support options.

There were similar experiences of limited tailoring and guidance for lone parents claiming Income Support (IS), which could potentially be restricting the help that Jobcentre Plus provides for claimants who are keen to get back to work. Most lone parents on IS were satisfied with the support they received and the majority felt that the support was appropriate to their needs and circumstances. However, lone parents looking for work were less likely than those not looking for work to say that Jobcentre Plus understood their circumstances, and less likely to say that they spent enough time with advisers. Again this suggests a more structured and tailored approach is required for those on inactive benefits (both ESA and IS) who want further support in finding or preparing for work.

### 7.3 Recommendations

At an organisational level there is appetite and need for effective sharing of best practice. There have been increased mechanisms for this, yet more concrete evidence would be helpful to understand what impact different delivery models have, and how they could be made to work in different local contexts. This suggests the need for greater evidence and monitoring of the effectiveness and impacts of new processes and initiatives. The need for greater outcome evidence is supported by other research carried out on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which considers the role the Department can play in facilitating greater exchange of knowledge and lessons learned to local policy makers.<sup>40</sup>

Further adviser support would help to meet the needs of ESA claimants looking for work to ensure they are being signposted and referred to appropriate support to help them back into employment. As discussed in the first year evaluation report, it would be beneficial to implement specific monitoring to identify advisers who are struggling in this area as simple off-flow metrics will not work in identifying where this is the case.

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<sup>40</sup> Anne Green, A., Atfield, G. and Adam, D. (2013). *Local worklessness policy analysis case studies*, DWP Research Report No. 844. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/207539/rrep844.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/207539/rrep844.pdf)

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The delivery of the Offer has seen gains in increasing flexibility at a local level and enabling practices that are more tailored to local conditions. There is currently uncertainty around how upcoming changes to the benefits system will impact both on claimants and Jobcentre Plus office working practices. It is important that the successes of the Offer are sustained in the new world of welfare reform, particularly in light of the introduction of Universal Credit.

# Appendix A

## Claimant survey technical details

TNS BMRB undertook two telephone surveys with claimants who had experienced the Jobcentre Plus Offer. One was a longitudinal survey with the two main claimant groups mandated to the Jobcentre Plus Offer at the time of the research: Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants in the 12-month prognosis Work Related Activity Group (WRAG). The longitudinal survey consisted of two waves of fieldwork. A separate survey was used to boost the number of survey responses from claimants on JSA and ESA who either had a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency, or who were homeless, and to collect information about lone parents on IS whose youngest child was aged between three and four.

The two surveys are referred to as the 'longitudinal survey' and 'boost survey' respectively, and this appendix outlines the sampling, fieldwork and weighting procedures used to collect and process the data from the two surveys.

### A.1 Samples

#### A.1.1 JSA sample

The first wave of the longitudinal survey was intended to capture the views and experiences of new JSA claimants shortly after having attended a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI). New JSA claims were identified by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) analysts during a period of a week in mid-March 2012 and were checked a few weeks later, shortly before the dataset was transferred to TNS BMRB, to ensure that they were still a live claim (and had not already off-flowed from benefit). The sample was proportionately stratified by district, gender and age for the three age bands of interest (16-24, 25-49 and 50+).

The sample received from DWP was checked by TNS BMRB, and any records with invalid, incomplete or missing addresses and telephone numbers were removed from the sample. The remaining records were again stratified by age group, region, district, and gender to ensure representative coverage of claimants. A total of 6,300 records were randomly selected and these claimants were sent advance letters inviting them to participate in the survey. Any claimants who contacted TNS BMRB to opt out were removed from the sample, and 5,400 of the remaining records were issued to the telephone centre in May 2012 for the first wave of the survey.

The second wave of the longitudinal survey was carried out in three tranches: the first two tranches took place shortly after claimants off-flowed from the Offer either into work or onto the Work Programme; the final tranche was used to reinterview all remaining claimants who had not yet had a second interview. In August 2012, and then again in November 2012, DWP provided a list of records for any claimants from the initial sample who had completed a first interview and had since then either closed their benefit claim or had started on the Work Programme. The lists were used to identify claimants who had moved off the Jobcentre Plus

Offer and were therefore ready to be incorporated into the second wave of the survey. These records were issued to the telephone centre in September and December 2012, respectively, for the first two tranches of the second wave. Any records which were not included in the lists provided by DWP were presumed to be ongoing claims; these records were issued to the telephone centre in March 2013, when the third and final tranche of follow-up interviews was carried out, to capture those who had off-flowed or moved onto the Work Programme since December 2012 or were still on the Offer.

### **A.1.2 ESA sample**

The first wave of the longitudinal survey was aimed at ESA claimants who had recently attended a New Joiner's Work Focused Interview (NJWFI), which takes place once the outcome of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is known, roughly 13 weeks after claimants make their claim for ESA. New ESA claimants (and those transferred from Incapacity Benefit (IB) and had also undergone a WCA) were identified during a period of three weeks, from mid-December 2011 to early January 2012. The list of claimants was checked just before the sample was transferred to TNS BMRB to ensure that their claim was still live.

In order to identify ESA claimants with a 12-month or longer prognosis, TNS BMRB crossed the sample received from DWP against a list which identified ESA claimants currently on the Work Programme. All cases of claimants who had already volunteered to enter the Work Programme were removed, along with cases which had invalid, incomplete or missing addresses and telephone numbers. The remaining records were stratified by whether they had previously been on IB or not, age, region, district, and gender to ensure the survey coverage was representative of the population of ESA claimants in the 12 month WRAG group. A total of 5,200 records were randomly selected and sent advance letters inviting them to participate in the survey. Any claimants who opted out were removed from the sample, and the remaining 4,918 records were issued to the telephone centre for the first wave of the survey, which took place in May 2012.

Following this, DWP provided lists of records for any claimants from the initial sample who had either closed their benefit claim or had started on the Work Programme since completing their first interview. Up-to-date lists were provided twice, in August and November 2012, and used to identify claimants who had moved off the Jobcentre Plus Offer and could therefore be invited to take part in the second wave of the survey. Fieldwork for the second wave was carried out in three tranches: in September 2012, December 2012, and March 2013. The last tranche included interviews with any claimants who had not been recorded as off-flows or Work Programme starters, and were presumed to be on the same ESA claim and still experiencing the Offer.

### **A.1.3 Boost sample**

The boost survey was designed to collect data on four groups of claimants:

- JSA and ESA claimants with a criminal record
- JSA and ESA claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency
- JSA and ESA claimants who were homeless
- IS claimants who were lone parents, and whose youngest child was aged between three and four.

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Claimants in these groups were identified by DWP analysts on the basis of their current claim (in early 2013), disadvantage markers, marital status and age of children. The sample was transferred to TNS BMRB where it was checked and any cases which had invalid, incomplete or missing addresses and telephone numbers were removed. A total of 3,169 records were randomly selected and sent advance letters inviting them to participate in the survey. Any claimants who opted out were removed from the sample, and the remaining 2,972 records were issued to the telephone centre. These consisted of 1,143 records for Income Support (IS) lone parents, and 1,829 records covering the remaining groups.

## A.2 Fieldwork and response

### A.2.1 Longitudinal survey

Telephone interviews for the first wave of the longitudinal survey were conducted between 16 May and 1 July 2012. This resulted in 3,034 telephone interviews which, together with an additional 25 completed postal questionnaires, gave a total of 3,059 interviews for the first wave. Response details from the first wave are shown in Appendix A of the first year report.<sup>41</sup>

Telephone interviews for the second wave of the longitudinal survey were carried out in three tranches. These were conducted between 24 September and 16 November 2012; between 4 December 2012 and 14 January 2013; and between 22 March and 11 June 2013 (excluding a period in late April and early May in the run-up to local elections). A total of 1,443 interviews were completed, consisting of 788 interviews with JSA claimants and 655 interviews with ESA claimants. The response details for the second wave of the survey are shown in Table A.1.

**Table A.1 Response details**

<b>Completed Wave 1 interview</b>	<b>3,034</b>
<b>Sample issued to telephone unit</b>	<b>2,875</b>
<b>Invalid sample data</b>	<b>422</b>
Invalid telephone number	306
Unknown at number	114
Respondent died	2
<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>36</b>
Respondent long-term ill/incapable of interview	36
<b>Valid sample (in scope of fieldwork)</b>	<b>2,417</b>
Refusal	592
Abandoned interview	31
Unavailable during fieldwork	21
Non-contact with respondent/unresolved	330
<b>Interview</b>	<b>1,443</b>
Interviews with claimants with ongoing claims at the end of Wave 1	1,275
Interviews with claimants who had off-flowed at the end of Wave 1	168

<sup>41</sup> Coulter, A. Day, N. Howat, H. Romanou, E and Coleman, N. (2012). *The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation*, DWP Research Report No. 814

## A.2.2 Boost survey

Telephone interviews for the boost survey were carried out between 29 May and 4 August 2013. A total of 751 interviews were completed. These consisted of 341 interviews with lone parents on IS, and 410 interviews with JSA and ESA claimants whose records had a disadvantage marker indicating that they had a criminal record or drug or alcohol dependency, or that they were homeless.<sup>42</sup> Response details for the boost survey are shown in Table A.2.

**Table A.2 Response details**

<b>Sample issued to telephone unit</b>	<b>2,957</b>
<b>Invalid sample data</b>	<b>1132</b>
Invalid telephone number	336
Unknown at number	206
Respondent died	2
No contact at all after 10 or more calls	588
<b>Ineligible</b>	<b>58</b>
Respondent long-term ill/incapable of interview	58
<b>Valid sample (in scope of fieldwork)</b>	<b>1,767</b>
Refusal	266
Abandoned interview	83
Unavailable during fieldwork	14
Non-contact with respondent/unresolved	653
<b>Interview</b>	<b>751</b>

## A.3 Weighting

The survey data was weighted before analysis. Weighting is carried out for two reasons:

- to correct for differences in sampling fractions across the sample (using so-called design weights);
- to try and reduce bias arising from non-response (using non-response weights).

The longitudinal sample was designed to provide sufficient numbers of interviews with JSA claimants in each age-group and equal numbers of interviews with ESA claimants who had, and had not, previously been on IB. It was therefore necessary to apply design weights to correct these imbalances. The same design weight was applied to data from both waves of the longitudinal survey. No design weight was applied to the boost data, as the true distribution of claimants who have a criminal record, who have a drug or alcohol dependency, or who are homeless within the overall population of JSA and ESA claimants was not known.

<sup>42</sup> During their interviews, 92 of these 410 claimants did not disclose having a criminal record, drug or alcohol dependency or being homeless. For this reason these records were excluded from the analysis for those three groups.

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In order to create the non-response weight for data from Wave 1 of the longitudinal survey, the profile of the Wave 1 respondents was compared to the true population profile of JSA and ESA claimants. This weight was used to correct for any discrepancies in terms of age, gender and claimant type. By comparing the profile of the Wave 2 survey population to the corrected profile of the Wave 1 survey population a non-response weight was created for data from Wave 2 of the longitudinal survey. This weight was used to correct any discrepancies in terms of age and gender, and any differences in answers regarding the presence of children and whether the claimant would feel happier if they were in paid work (as these were assumed to be relevant factors contributing to participation in the second wave of interviews).

# Appendix B

## Case study technical details

### B.1 Developmental stage

Telephone interviews were undertaken with District Managers between December 2011 and January 2012 to ascertain the varied characteristics of the districts and to obtain a broad understanding of national activity. From the data gathered at this stage, the six case study districts were selected to ensure a balanced mix of characteristics in relation to the organisation and delivery of the Offer in their district. These characteristics primarily included: the size of district; the geographical location; the number of offices within the district; the size of their budget; the Offer characteristics (for example, types of interventions/ support available, how the Offer had been implemented); the strength of the local labour market and labour market variation within the area; and whether there was other research activity occurring which would make it an unsuitable case study.

To ensure the anonymity of the staff and claimants observed and interviewed, the districts are not identified.

### B.2 Case study research

The case study approach included three elements:

- Ethnographic site visits
- Staff interviews
- Claimant interviews

#### B.2.1 Ethnographic site visits

Across Wave 1 and 2, observational and interviewing techniques were used in each of the six districts (two offices were selected in each district). Specifically the following were undertaken in all twelve offices:

- **Observations of adviser interviews:** A variety of adviser interviews were observed covering a range of touch-points (set time periods along the claimant journey), as well as interviews with different types of claimants (Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support (IS)).

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- **Follow up interviews with claimants:** Claimants who had been observed with their advisers were asked if they would be happy to take part in a short 15-20 minute follow up interview to discuss their views on the interview and other aspects of the Offer where relevant. These took place in the jobcentre in a private room set aside for this purpose. Claimants were provided with clear information about the purpose and nature of the interview and gave informed written consent.
- **Informal discussions with front line staff:** in addition to the interviews with claimants, informal ongoing discussions with staff were undertaken regarding their experiences of the Offer and the interviews observed throughout the course of the site visits.

### B.2.2 Staff interviews

A broad range of staff within each district were interviewed using different qualitative techniques depending on the needs of each staff group. These were group discussions, mini groups, paired depths and individual depth interviews. This tended to vary depending on how the different districts and Jobcentre Plus offices were organised on the ground. In Wave 2, additional telephone depth interviews were undertaken with District Managers (DMs) of the six case study districts.

The observations and interviews undertaken at each case study across Wave 1 are summarised in in Appendix B of the first year report.<sup>43</sup> Table B.1 (overleaf) shows the observations and interviews undertaken at each case study across Wave 2.

### B.2.3 Claimant interviews: Wave 1

Between April and May 2012, 169 telephone interviews were undertaken with claimants across the six case study districts. Claimants were sampled at different touch points along the claimant journey in order to capture the full range of support offered as part of the Offer; therefore sample was drawn at three, six and 12 months.

The primary and secondary variables were the following:

Primary variables

- Range of benefit streams: including JSA, ESA and IS and a range of specific benefit claimants within this which were: JSA 18-24; JSA 25-49; JSA 50+; ESA WRAG 3-6 months prognosis; ESA Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) 12-month prognosis; ESA voluntary; and IS voluntary.
- Geographic locations: claimants who accessed the Offer in the case study districts only.

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<sup>43</sup> Coulter, A. Day, N. Howat, H. Romanou, E and Coleman, N. (2012). *The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Findings from the first year of the evaluation*, DWP Research Report No. 814.

**Table B.1 Site visit – staff interviews & observations Wave 2**

	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	District 6
<b>Staff type</b>						
PAs, DEAs, Assistant Advisers	1 Group and 2 Depths	2 Groups	1 Group	1 Group	1 Group	2 Groups
ATMs/PTLs	1 Depth	2 Depth	1 group and 1 depth	2 Depths	2 Depths	4 Depths
LOMs, CSOMs, DMs**, TPPMs, External relationship managers, Partnership managers	2 Depths	1 Depth	2 depths	2 Depths	2 Depths	2 Depths
DMs	1 Depths	1 Depth	1 Depth	1 Depth	1 Depth	1 Depth
<b>Staff interviews (Total)</b>	10	15	18	9	15	17
<b>Observations (Total)</b>	6	10	11	8	10	12
JSA	6	9	9	7	8	12
ESA	0	1	2	1	2	0
IS	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Follow up interviews</b>						
Staff	6	4	12	7	8	12
Claimants	5	4	7	7	10	12

Secondary variables

- Disadvantaged claimants: including problem drug users, homeless and ex-offenders.
- Sanctions: target of two claimants per case study who had received a sanction from Jobcentre Plus.
- Early entry JSA stock: target of two per case study area.
- A mix of demographic characteristic: including age, gender, and ethnicity.

The achieved sample quotas for Wave 1 are displayed in Appendix B of the first year report.

**B.2.4 Claimant interviews: Wave 2**

Between March and May 2012, 95 telephone interviews were undertaken with claimants across the six case study districts. Claimant sample were drawn at different touch points, related to when they were been expected to off-flow into work or on to the Work Programme: nine months (JSA 18-24) or 12 months (JSA 25+ and ESA 12-month prognosis).

The primary and secondary variables were the following:

Primary variables

- Range of benefit streams: JSA 18-24; JSA 25-49; JSA 50+; ESA WRAG 12-month prognosis;
- Geographic locations: claimants who accessed the Offer in five of the six case study districts only<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> The overall numbers of claimant interviews were reduced in Wave 2 to focus on JSA and ESA WRAG claimants and as result it was decided to draw sample from five instead of six districts.

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### Secondary variables

- Disadvantaged claimants: including problem drug users, homeless and ex-offenders.
- Sanctions: target of two claimants per case study who had received a sanction from Jobcentre Plus.
- JSA from ESA as a result of a Fit for Work Assessment: target of two per case study area.
- Lone parents: target of two per case study area.
- A mix of demographic characteristic: including age, gender, and ethnicity.
- Early claimant off-flow three to six months: target eight across the whole sample

The achieved sample quotas for Wave 2 are listed in Table B.2.

**Table B.2 Achieved sample quotas**

	District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5	District 6	Total
<b>Total</b>							
<b>Primary variable:</b>							
JSA 18-24	4/4	4/4	5/5	5/5	5/5	–	<b>JSA</b>
JSA 25-49	5/5	5/5	5/5	4/4	4/4	–	
JSA 50+	5/5	5/5	4/4	5/5	5/5	–	
ESA 12 months	5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5		<b>ESA</b>
<b>Secondary variables</b> (NB these are all cross-cutting variables, operating across the sample as a whole rather than area-specific):							
Disadvantaged	Problem drug users						6
	Homeless						5
	Ex-offenders						9
Sanctioned	Target of 2 per case study area				Total across districts		15
Lone parents	Target of 2 per case study area				Total across districts		12
JSA from ESA as a result of a Fit for Work Assessment	Target of 2 per case study area				Total across districts		12
Gender	Balanced across sample						M:47 F:48
Age	18-24						26
	25-49						34
	50+					Total across sample	35
Ethnicity	Non-white claimants per case study area						15
Early off-flow months	3 – 6 months						8

# Appendix C

## Claimant profile

This appendix provides additional information on the characteristics of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants analysed in Chapter 3; the characteristics of JSA and ESA claimants with a criminal record, a drug or alcohol dependency, or who are homeless analysed in Chapter 4; and the characteristics of lone parents on Income Support (IS) analysed in Chapter 5.

### C.1 JSA and ESA claimants in the longitudinal survey

It is important to note that the profile information presented here is for a specific cohort of claimants: JSA claimants who made a claim in March 2012, and ESA claimants in the 12-month Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) who made a claim in December 2011 or January 2012. The profiles are therefore not representative of all benefit recipients.

#### C.1.1 Sex and age

Table C.1 displays the sex of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.1 Sex**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	67	48
Female	33	52

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

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Table C.2 shows the age of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.2 Age**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
16 – 17	1	*
18 – 19	12	*
20 – 24	23	3
25 – 29	12	5
30 – 34	10	6
35 – 39	9	9
40 – 44	10	14
45 – 49	9	20
50 – 54	7	18
55 – 59	5	20
60 – 64	2	4
65 – 69	*	*
Refused	-	*

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

### C.1.2 Caring responsibilities

Table C.3 displays the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants who had caring responsibilities at the start of their claim.

**Table C.3 Caring responsibilities**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Caring responsibilities within household	6	11
Caring responsibilities outside of household	2	3
Both	*	*
No caring responsibilities	92	85

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

Table C.4 shows the impact which caring for someone had on the work which JSA and ESA claimants could undertake.

**Table C.4 Caring responsibilities – effect on work**

	JSA %	ESA %
Yes – availability to work	29	42
Yes – types of work can do	9	25
No	66	48
Don't know	2	6

*Base: JSA claimants (143); ESA claimants (190) who care for someone*

Table C.5 depicts who JSA and ESA claimants with caring responsibilities cared for.

**Table C.5 Caring responsibilities – who care for**

	JSA %	ESA %
Adult/s	35	33
Children	65	67

*Base: JSA claimants (23); ESA claimants (3) whose main activity is caring for someone*

### C.1.3 Highest qualification

Table C.6 shows the highest qualification attained by JSA and ESA claimants, as recorded at the start of their claim.

**Table C.6 Highest qualification**

	JSA %	ESA %
No qualifications	8	18
Don't know	4	7
Entry level qualifications	5	11
GCSEs D-G, Vocational Level 1 qualifications and equivalent	11	14
GCSEs A*-C, Vocational Level 2 qualifications and equivalent	30	24
A Levels, Vocational Level 3 qualifications and equivalent	18	10
Certificates of Higher Education or equivalent	5	4
Higher National Certificates (HNC), Diplomas (HND) or equivalent	4	4
First degree or equivalent	11	7
Postgraduate degree (Masters) or equivalent	4	2
PhD (Doctoral degree) or equivalent	*	*

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.4 Ethnicity

Table C.7 displays the ethnicity of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.7 Ethnicity**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
White	82	94
Black	6	2
Mixed	3	*
Asian	7	3
Other	2	*

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.5 Language

Table C.8 shows the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who consider English to be their first language.

**Table C.8 Whether English is first language**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	93	97
No	7	3

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.6 Marital status and children

Table C.9 shows the marital status of JSA and ESA claimants at the start of their claim.

**Table C.9 Marital status**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Single (or engaged but not living with partner as a couple)	63	36
Married	12	32
Civil partnership	*	*
Living with partner	4	6
<b>Married, civil partnership or living with partner (NET)<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>24</b>	<b>41</b>
Widowed	*	2
Divorced	7	15
Separated	4	6

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

<sup>1</sup> Sum of married, civil partnership and living with partner does not equal NET as a proportion of claimants surveyed were not asked to specify their relationship status beyond 'married, civil partnership and living with partner'.

Table C.10 displays the claimants' number of children, divided into those who did not have a partner and those who did.

**Table C.10 Partner status and number of children by claimant type**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
No children	79	72
Single		
1 Child	4	6
2 Children	2	2
3 Children	*	1
More than 3 Children	*	*
Partner present		
1 Child	6	6
2 Children	4	7
3 Children	2	3
More than 3 Children	*	2

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

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### C.1.7 Tenure

Table C.11 shows the living accommodation of JSA and ESA claimants at the start of their claim.

**Table C.11 Tenure**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Rented privately	20	15
Rented from a council or local authority	14	27
Rented from a Housing Association	7	16
Owned outright	7	13
Being bought on a mortgage/bank loan	16	18
Shared ownership where you pay part rent and part mortgage	1	1
Living with friends/relatives	33	9
Supported housing	*	1
Living in hostel (including foyers)	*	*
Homeless (squatting or other temporary accommodation)	1	-
Living in caravan	*	*
Other	1	1

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

### C.1.8 Driving

Table C.12 shows the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who either possessed a driving licence and a car, just a driving licence or no driving licence at all.

**Table C.12 Driving**

	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Driving licence and car	39	40
Driving licence without car	15	13
No driving licence	46	48

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.9 Sexual identity

Table C.13 shows the sexual identity of JSA and ESA claimants.

**Table C.13 Sexual identity**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Heterosexual or straight	93	94
Gay or lesbian	2	2
Bisexual	1	*
Other	*	*
Refused	2	2
Don't know	1	*

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.10 Ex-armed forces

Table C.14 displays the proportion of JSA and ESA claimants who were members of the armed forces.

**Table C.14 Ex-armed forces**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Yes	*	*
No	99	100

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.1.11 Criminal record

Table C.15 shows the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants with a criminal record.

**Table C.15 Ex-offenders**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Yes	6	5
No	95	96

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

### C.1.12 Drug or alcohol dependency

Table C.16 shows the percentage of JSA and ESA claimant who revealed a drug or alcohol dependency at the start of their claim.

**Table C.16 Drug or alcohol dependency**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Yes	2	5
No	98	95

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

### C.1.13 Homeless

Table C.17 shows the percentage of JSA and ESA claimants who reported that they were homeless at the start of their claim.

**Table C.17 Homeless**

	JSA	ESA
	%	%
Yes	1	*
No	99	100

*Base: All JSA claimants (1,749); all ESA claimants (1,285)*

## C.2 JSA and ESA claimants with a criminal record, drug or alcohol dependency, or who were homeless

This section presents the demographic characteristics of JSA and ESA claimants who were interviewed in the boost survey and fell into the following groups: those with a criminal record; those with a drug or alcohol dependency; and those who were homeless.

## C.2.1 Groups in boost sample

Table C.18 shows which groups the claimants belonged to.

**Table C.18 Groups in boost sample**

	JSA and ESA in boost sample
	%
<b>One group only</b>	<b>56</b>
Criminal record	31
Drug or alcohol dependency	18
Homelessness	7
<b>Two groups only</b>	<b>39</b>
Criminal record and drug or alcohol dependency	30
Criminal record and homelessness	5
Drug or alcohol dependency and homelessness	3
<b>All three groups</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Base: All claimants in at least one group</i>	<i>318</i>

## C.2.2 Type of claim

Table C.19 shows the proportion of claimants in each group who were claiming JSA, and the proportion claiming ESA.

**Table C.19 Type of claim**

	Criminal record	Drug or alcohol dependency	Homeless
	%	%	%
JSA claimant	58	38	42
ESA claimant	42	62	58
<i>Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)</i>			

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### C.2.3 Health

Table C.20 shows the proportion of claimants in one of the three groups who had physical health conditions, or mental, cognitive, or intellectual health conditions.

**Table C.20 Health barriers**

	<b>Criminal record</b>	<b>Drug or alcohol dependency</b>	<b>Homeless</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Physical health condition only	6	6	6
Mental health condition only	8	15	9
Physical and mental health conditions	34	47	49
No health conditions	52	33	37

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

### C.2.4 Sex and age

The age and gender profile the three groups are shown in Tables C.21 and C.22.

**Table C.21 Sex**

	<b>Criminal record</b>	<b>Drug or alcohol dependency</b>	<b>Homeless</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	86	83	87
Female	14	17	13

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

**Table C.22 Age**

	<b>Criminal record</b>	<b>Drug or alcohol dependency</b>	<b>Homeless</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
18 to 24	18	9	15
25 to 49	70	79	75
50+	12	13	10

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

## C.2.5 Caring responsibilities

Table C.23 shows the proportion of claimants in the three groups who were caring for someone sick or disabled.

**Table C.23 Caring responsibilities**

	<b>Criminal record</b>	<b>Drug or alcohol dependency</b>	<b>Homeless</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Caring responsibilities within household	3	6	-
Caring responsibilities outside of household	2	3	3
Both	1	1	-
No caring responsibilities	92	91	96

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

## C.2.6 Highest qualification

Table C.24 shows the highest qualification of claimants in the three groups.

**Table C.24 Highest qualification**

	<b>Criminal record</b>	<b>Drug or alcohol dependency</b>	<b>Homeless</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
No qualifications	28	41	35
Entry level qualifications	5	8	4
GCSEs D-G, Vocational Level 1 qualifications and equivalent	21	16	21
GCSEs A*-C, Vocational Level 2 qualifications and equivalent	28	22	22
A-levels, Vocational Level 3 qualifications and equivalent	8	6	4
Certificates of Higher Education or equivalent	1	1	2
Higher National Certificates (HNC), Diplomas (HND) or equivalent	2	-	3
First degree or higher	3	2	4
Don't know	5	5	4

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

## C.2.7 Marital status and children

Table C.25 displays the marital status and Table C.26 the presence of children for claimants in the three groups.

**Table C.25 Marital status**

	Criminal record %	Drug or alcohol dependency %	Homeless %
Single (or engaged but not living with partner as a couple)	76	74	90
Married, civil partnership or living with partner	11	9	-
Widowed	*	1	-
Divorced	7	8	4
Separated	5	6	6

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

**Table C.26 Number of children**

	Criminal record %	Drug or alcohol dependency %	Homeless %
No children	89	91	99
1 Child	8	5	1
2 Children	1	3	-
3 Children	1	1	-
More than 3 Children	*	1	-

*Base: Claimants with a criminal record (228); claimants with a drug or alcohol dependency (182); homeless claimants (68)*

## C.3 Lone parents on IS

This section provides an overview of the demographic profile of lone parents on IS with a youngest child aged three or four. These claimants were interviewed as part of the boost survey.

### C.3.1 Marital status and children

All lone parents included in the boost sample had a youngest child aged three or four. More than one in three (39 per cent) had just one child living with them, while 30 per cent had two children, 19 per cent had three and 11 per cent had four or more.

By the time of the interview, five per cent were married or living with a partner, but the majority (62 per cent) described themselves as single, with five per cent divorced and 28 per cent separated.

### C.3.2 Health

One in five lone parents reported having a long-term health problem or disability (20 per cent). This is similar to the proportion of lone parents claiming JSA (19 per cent).

Overall, 15 per cent said they had a **limiting** health problem or disability, and nine per cent said their health problem or disability made it difficult for them to find work.

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of those with a long-term health problem or disability said they had a mental health condition, while 31 per cent had a mobility impairment, 26 per cent had a condition related to stamina, breathing or fatigue, and 23 per cent had a dexterity impairment.

### C.3.3 Sex and age

Most lone parents were female (94 per cent) and were mostly aged between 25 and 34 (52 per cent) or between 35 and 44 (29 per cent).

### C.3.4 Caring responsibilities

One in seven lone parents (14 per cent) said that they cared for someone sick, disabled or elderly. This is the same as the proportion of lone parents claiming JSA (also 14 per cent).

### C.3.5 Highest qualification

One in six lone parents (16 per cent) had no qualifications, while just eight per cent had a first degree or higher qualification. These figures are similar to those observed for lone parents claiming JSA, who are less well qualified than JSA claimants as a whole (for example, just eight per cent of JSA clients had no qualifications). Full details of lone parents' highest qualifications are included in Table C.27.

**Table C.27 Highest qualification**

	IS %
No qualifications	16
Entry level qualifications	3
GCSEs D-G, Vocational Level 1 qualifications and equivalent	14
GCSEs A*-C, Vocational Level 2 qualifications and equivalent	30
A-levels, Vocational Level 3 qualifications and equivalent	17
Certificates of Higher Education or equivalent	1
Higher National Certificates (HNC), Diplomas (HND) or equivalent	6
First degree or higher	8
Don't know	5
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS</i>	341

### C.3.6 Length of time since last worked

Table C.28 shows the length of time since lone parents were last in employment. This group of lone parents had typically spent longer away from work than lone parents on JSA.

**Table C.28 Length of time since last worked**

	<b>IS</b>
	<b>%</b>
Less than 6 months	5
6-12 months	24
1-3 years	19
3-5 years	21
Over 5 years	25
Never worked	5
<i>Base: All lone parents on IS</i>	<b>341</b>

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Research report

# Lone Parent Obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work

by Nick Coleman and Timothy Riley

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 818

# **Lone Parent Obligations: following lone parents' journeys from benefits to work**

Nick Coleman and Timothy Riley

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# Abbreviations and glossary of terms

Anticipation effect	These include any effects a policy has on individuals' actions (in particular, likelihood to claim benefits) prior to the policy directly affecting them.
Child (for Income Support eligibility)	A person aged under 16 for whom an adult claims Child Benefit.
Child (for Child Benefit payments)	A person aged up to 16, or up to 20 and in full-time non-advanced education or certain forms of training, for whom Child Benefit can be claimed.
Child Benefit	A universal benefit available to all families with children under the age of 16 or up to 20 if in full-time non-advanced education or certain types of training. The level of payment depends only on the number of children in the family, with a higher payment for the eldest child. It is not income-based.
Child poverty	<p>There is no single, universally accepted definition of poverty. In the UK, three measures of poverty are used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• absolute low income: this indicator measures whether the poorest families are seeing their income rise in real terms;</li><li>• relative low income: this measures whether the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole. It measures the number of children living in households below 60 per cent of contemporary median equivalised household income; and</li><li>• material deprivation and low income combined: this indicator provides a wider measure of people's living standards. The government monitors child poverty against all three measures with a target attached to the relative low-income measure.</li></ul>
Children's centre	Children's centres provide easy access to a range of services, including: integrated early learning and childcare; family support; health services; and advice and information for parents, including signposting to employment and training opportunities.
Child Tax Credit	A payment made by the government for bringing up children. Families with children will normally be eligible if their household income is no greater than £58,000.
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions

<b>Employees</b>	Those who are in employment and paid a wage by an employer for the work that they do.
<b>Employment</b>	The number of people with jobs: people aged 16 or over who do paid work (as employees or the self-employed); those who had a job they are temporarily away from; those on government-supported training and employment; and those doing unpaid family work (working in a family business).
<b>Employment full-time</b>	A job of 30 hours or more of work per week.
<b>Employment part-time</b>	A job of 16 to 29 hours of work per week.
<b>Employment part-time – mini-job</b>	A job of fewer than 16 hours of work per week.
<b>Employment and Support Allowance</b>	From 27 October 2008, Employment and Support Allowance replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers. Employment and Support Allowance provides financial assistance as well as personalised support for people with limited capability for work to help them move into suitable work.
<b>Employment Zones</b>	Employment Zones aimed to help people who had been out of work for a long time to find and stay in work. There were four Employment Zones across the country, in areas that had the highest rate of long-term unemployment. In April 2009, Employment Zones were replaced by the Flexible New Deal programme in phase 1 districts. Flexible New Deal was replaced by the Work Programme in summer 2011.
<b>ESA</b>	Employment and Support Allowance
<b>FACS</b>	Families and Children Study
<b>Final year quarterly work focused interview</b>	In November 2008, final year quarterly Work-Focused Interviews were introduced for lone parents in the last year before their child reached the relevant age where they may lose entitlement to Income Support under the Lone Parent Obligations. The interviews enable advisers to provide advance notice of the changes and explain the differences in benefits and responsibilities when claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. They also allow advisers to offer an intensified service, helping the customer identify and tackle barriers to work, understand the help available to them from Jobcentre Plus and partner organisations, and move towards work.
<b>Flexible New Deal</b>	Flexible New Deal was a compulsory programme for all those who were unemployed and eligible to receive Jobseeker's Allowance, which ran between autumn 2009 and summer 2011, after which it was replaced by the Work Programme. Those who had been unemployed and on Jobseeker's Allowance for 12 months were required to join the Flexible New Deal. The Flexible New Deal programme was the fourth

and final stage of the ‘Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal’. While the first three stages relate to claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance with Jobcentre Plus, Flexible New Deal was an employment programme delivered by a private or third-sector provider.

<b>FND</b>	Flexible New Deal
<b>Formal childcare</b>	Ofsted-registered childcare, including: day nurseries, out-of-school clubs, pre-school play groups and child minders; as well as formal providers not registered by Ofsted: nannies or childcarers in the home, and babysitters.
<b>HBAI</b>	Households Below Average Income
<b>Income Support</b>	Income Support is a means-tested benefit for those who do not have to sign-on as unemployed. This includes some lone parents, who are not subject to Lone Parent Obligations or are exempt from them.
<b>Informal childcare</b>	Childcare not defined as ‘formal’ (see above), including: friends, neighbours and family members providing childcare.
<b>In Work Credit</b>	In Work Credit is a payment of £40 per week (£60 in London) for lone parents who have been receiving out of work benefits for at least 52 weeks, and who are starting a job of at least 16 hours per week.
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>Jobcentre Plus Offer</b>	The Jobcentre Plus Offer is part of Get Britain Working Measures. The offer aims to give Jobcentre Plus Advisers more discretion than they previously had to draw down a range of services to achieve outcomes for claimants, rather than focusing on completing specified activities and processes. The aim is to provide a more flexible, effective and personalised service for Jobcentre Plus customers to help them move into, or closer to, work.
<b>Jobseeker’s Allowance</b>	Jobseeker’s Allowance is the main benefit for people of working age who are out of work, work fewer than 16 hours per week on average and are available for and actively seeking work.
<b>Jobseeker’s Allowance Agreement</b>	An agreement that sets out the customer’s availability to work and the ways in which they will search for a job. The Jobseeker’s Allowance agreement usually include details on area and hours that customers are available for employment, as well as any restrictions, a description of the type of work that is being sought, and planned action.
<b>JRFND</b>	Jobseeker’s Regime and Flexible New Deal
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker’s Allowance

JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
LLSI	Limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits activities.
Lone parent – generic definition	Parent or guardian with a dependent child under 16 who is not in a co-habiting relationship.
Lone Parent Obligations	Changes to entitlement conditions for lone parents claiming Income Support started in November 2008. Most lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over were no longer eligible for Income Support if they made a new claim for benefit only because they were a lone parent, subject to certain exemptions and conditions. Instead those able to work could claim Jobseeker's Allowance and were expected to look for suitable work in return for personalised help and support. Lone parents with limited capability for work could claim ESA. The change has been introduced in four phases: a youngest child aged 12 and over from 24 November 2008; a youngest child aged ten and over from 26 October 2009; a youngest child aged seven or over from 25 October 2010; and a youngest child aged 5 and over from 21 May 2012. Changes for existing lone parents and their entitlement to Income Support were also phased in, in line with the above timescales.
LPO flexibilities	Additional flexibilities have been incorporated in the Jobseeker's Allowance regime for parents (most are for all parents, not just lone parents). These are available to those with caring responsibilities for a child or children. These flexibilities include the hours that parents are available to work and whether appropriate/affordable childcare is available. Other flexibilities involve Jobcentre Plus staff following up parents if they fail to attend interviews before benefit entitlement becomes affected.
LPO	Lone Parent Obligations
LSI	Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
ONS	Office for National Statistics
Sanction	This is a penalty imposed by a decision-maker. It is the removal of all or a proportion of benefit payment owing to a customer's non-compliance with conditions placed on benefit receipt.
Self-employed	Those who work on their own account, whether or not they have employees, in their main job.
SEN	Special Educational Need
SOC	Standard Occupation Classification

Unemployed	<p>Unemployed people are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 those who are without a job, want a job and have actively sought work in the past four weeks, and are available to start work in the next two weeks;</li><li>2 those out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start in the next two weeks.</li></ol>
Universal Credit	<p>In an effort to simplify the benefit system and improve work incentives, Universal Credit is set to replace the present benefit structure, from 2013. Universal Credit will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment.</p>
WCA	<p>Work Capability Assessment</p>
WFI	<p>Work Focused Interview</p>
Work Programme	<p>In summer 2011 the existing welfare to work provision, including FND and Pathways to Work, was replaced by a single integrated Work Programme. The Work Programme assumes the task of supporting workless lone parents into employment, alongside other workless people, using an outcome-based, staged entry point model.</p>
Working Tax Credit	<p>Working Tax Credit provides financial support on top of earnings. This is payable on top of Child Benefit. Child support maintenance is wholly disregarded when calculating Working Tax Credit.</p>
WRAG	<p>Work Related Activity Group</p>
WTC	<p>Working Tax Credit</p>

# Summary

## Introduction

Changes to the benefits system for lone parents have been introduced in recent years, with an increasing focus on work preparation and obligations to look for work. As part of the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) changes, from November 2008 lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over were no longer entitled to receive Income Support (IS) solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. Since then, in October 2010, the age of the youngest child was reduced to seven and over, and as part of the Welfare Reform Act in March 2012, these obligations were extended to lone parents with a youngest child aged five and over. Lone parents who are no longer eligible for IS have been able to move to other benefits as appropriate, including Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The JSA regime has been amended to include flexibilities for lone parents, for example, in the hours of work they are required to seek.

This report presents findings from a national, quantitative survey of lone parents affected by LPO, specifically those with a youngest child of seven or eight when they leave IS. The survey is longitudinal. The first wave of the survey was conducted in 2010 while lone parents were still on IS. The second wave took place in 2012 after lone parents' eligibility for IS had ended, and tracks lone parents' destinations and experiences over time. These findings cover the survey as a whole, with a particular focus on the Wave 2 findings.

The survey is one element of a wider evaluation, whose aim is to explore whether and how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents, to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment.

The main aim of the quantitative survey is to understand customers' decision-making around returning to work, and the relationship between decision-making and characteristics, attitudes, values and beliefs; destinations and behaviours; and progress through, and experience of, the LPO 'journey'.

## Destinations after ending of IS eligibility

The lone parents covered by the survey were all due to end their eligibility for IS between January and March 2011, approximately one year before they were interviewed in the second wave of the survey. As a result, we are able to examine the destinations of these lone parents immediately after their eligibility for IS ended, as well as longer-term destinations in the subsequent year or so.

The analysis in this report excludes lone parents who were known to have remained on IS, and focuses on the destinations of those who became ineligible for IS. This shows that, immediately after leaving IS, lone parents were most likely to say that they moved on to JSA (55 per cent), while 12 per cent claimed Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and 24 per cent got a job. Around half (48 per cent) of those that got a job did so before their eligibility for IS was scheduled to end.

Longer-term destinations (in the year or so since the ending of IS eligibility) showed that 45 per cent of lone parents had worked at some point since their IS claim ended, including six per cent who had worked (fewer than 16 hours per week) and claimed benefits at the same time.

Lone parents were more likely to have worked at some point since leaving IS if they had recent work experience or were actively looking for work while on IS. Movement into work was also more common among lone parents with higher qualifications, those with access to a vehicle and those who lived in a rural area. In addition, those who had used informal childcare while they were not working were also more likely to have moved into work. This suggests that having informal childcare networks in place can help the transition into work.

Lone parents with a limiting long-standing illness or disability (LLSI), especially those with mental-health problems, were less likely to move into work. There were also differences in terms of attitudes to work: those who were more family focused in their attitudes and less concerned about the stigma of being on benefits were less likely than other respondents to have worked at all.

As a whole, these findings confirm that a wide range of factors affect the likelihood of lone parents moving into work, including characteristics and circumstances, working history, access to childcare and attitudes to work.

The majority of respondents (68 per cent) had claimed JSA at some point since they left IS, and 31 per cent had only claimed JSA – they had not worked at all or claimed another benefit during this time. In total, 12 per cent of respondents had been on the Work Programme, mostly as part of a JSA claim. Longer spells on JSA were more common among lone parents without qualifications and whose first language was not English, as well as those without vehicle access. Those who had not worked in recent years were also more likely to have had a prolonged spell on JSA.

Around one in four respondents (23 per cent) had claimed ESA since leaving IS, including 12 per cent who had claimed both JSA and ESA. There was a range of experiences on ESA, including equal proportions who were in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), the Support Group and found fit for work. In addition, some respondents who had made a claim for ESA had not yet had a Work Capability Assessment or were awaiting a decision or the outcome of a tribunal. The findings indicate that many lone parents who claimed ESA may have had a more complex journey and may not have moved directly from IS to ESA.

Lone parents who had claimed ESA included a high proportion who had a child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI), as well as those with an LLSI themselves. Those with responsibilities for caring for adults, as well as those with literacy or numeracy problems, were also more likely to have claimed ESA.

Five per cent of lone parents had neither worked nor claimed a benefit at all since they left IS, and at the time of the Wave 2 interview, nine per cent were neither working nor claiming a benefit; many of these respondents (52 per cent) had re-partnered.

The profile of JSA and ESA claimants (as observed at Wave 2) was similar to the original cohort of lone parents on IS (at Wave 1), although those on ESA were more likely to have an LLSI and to have a dependent child with an LSI, while those on JSA were older and with fewer dependent children.

### Is work sustained?

Almost half of lone parents (45 per cent) had worked at some point since the end of their IS claim. In the majority of cases, these respondents were still in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview (84 per cent), and most of these respondents had been in their job for at least six months. One in six (16 per cent) had stopped working, most commonly because they had been in a temporary or fixed term job, or because of redundancy.

The survey is not able to assess whether lone parents will remain in work in the longer term, but the findings indicate that most respondents who had entered work had managed to stay in their job beyond the transitional stage from benefits to work, and that many had already been in work for a year or more (46 per cent of those in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview).

Respondents were less likely to have stayed in work if they had an LLSI, particularly if they had a mental-health problem, and if they were less well qualified. The same groups were also less likely to have moved into work (at all). Those working fewer than 16 hours per week were also less likely to have stayed in work.

## Job characteristics

In most cases, those who had worked since the end of their IS claim were working as employees, while nine per cent were self-employed. Most respondents (86 per cent) were in permanent jobs. The work that lone parents were doing at the time of the survey, or had done since leaving IS, was generally low-skilled work (40 per cent in elementary occupations and 23 per cent personal service occupations). Around one in three of those in work (33 per cent) said that they were paid less than £6 per hour (the National Minimum Wage at the time of the survey was £6.08 per hour).

One in eight respondents (13 per cent) were working 30 hours or more per week, while 29 per cent were working between 17 and 29 hours, and 37 per cent exactly 16 hours per week. One in five (22 per cent) were working fewer than 16 hours per week. More skilled jobs were more likely to involve a greater number of hours per week. Two in five respondents (41 per cent) worked during school hours only.

One in six respondents (17 per cent) who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview said they had increased their hours since they started the job. This was particularly common among lone parents who had started their job while they were still claiming IS (and were, therefore, originally working fewer than 16 hours per week). In fact, 17 per cent of those who started their job while on IS said that they had either increased their hours or had taken a second job in order to move off benefits.

Respondents who were working more than 16 hours or more per week had greater problems balancing work and family: 60 per cent said that sometimes their job prevented them from giving their children the time they wanted to. At the same time, some respondents said that they had tried to increase their working hours (27 per cent of current employees), and the number of hours worked was often lower than respondents had previously indicated as their preference or the number that they were prepared to work. This suggests that there is a group of lone parents who are able, or would like, to work more hours per week than they are working at present.

In addition to part-time working, 38 per cent of lone parents said that some kind of flexible working was part of their job, such as working only in term-time (18 per cent) or flexi-time (14 per cent). However, around one-quarter (23 per cent) said that they would prefer a different working arrangement, most commonly flexi-time. Other findings from the survey show that existing working arrangements could make it difficult for lone parents to stay in work: 13 per cent of those in work said that a big barrier to staying in work was the pressure in their job to work longer hours, stay late or do overtime, while nine per cent said that a big barrier was that their employer was not very family friendly.

One in three lone parents in work said they wanted to get on and improve their pay and terms as quickly as possible (34 per cent), while the remainder wanted to stay as they were.

The majority of those in work said that it was very or fairly easy for them to stay in their job (71 per cent), while a smaller proportion (51 per cent) said that it was at least fairly likely that they would be able to get another job if their current one fell through.

### Childcare

Wave 2 of the survey examined the childcare arrangements of lone parents while they were working. Around three in four lone parents (73 per cent) said that they used some form of childcare during their time at work. Use of childcare increased with hours worked: from 51 per cent of those working fewer than 16 hours per week, to 83 per cent of those working more than 16 hours per week. Those who did not use childcare mostly said that they only worked during school hours.

Lone parents were more likely to use informal (63 per cent) than formal childcare (30 per cent) when they were working. Those working more hours per week were more likely to use a combination of both formal and informal childcare.

Grandparents were the most commonly used type of childcare (used by 52 per cent of all childcare users), and accounted for a large proportion of the total childcare hours. Formal childcare was most likely to be breakfast or after-school clubs (21 per cent on school site, six per cent off site). This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary school age children, with very few pre-school children.

Over half (60 per cent) paid for formal childcare, while eight per cent paid for informal childcare. More than half (62 per cent) of those using informal childcare said they did something in return for at least part of the childcare they received. This was most common when respondents had help with childcare from other relatives (outside the immediately family) or friends and neighbours. This suggests that this type of reciprocal arrangement is an important element of childcare for working lone parents.

Around one in four lone parents said that their childcare arrangements broke down often or sometimes (26 per cent), and 43 per cent of these respondents said that this made it very or fairly difficult for them to stay in their job.

Among respondents who were not currently working but who planned to work in the future, there was a strong interest in using after-school or holiday clubs when they moved into work (among 45 per cent). This suggests the potential for a high level of take-up of these services in the future.

The majority of respondents (who did not already use them) were aware of breakfast or after school clubs (71 per cent), although awareness of holiday clubs was lower (23 per cent of non-users).

The survey also explored lone parents' recollections of discussions they had had about childcare at Jobcentre Plus. Around half of lone parents who had been on JSA said that they had discussed childcare during their claim (47 per cent), but this was much lower among those that had claimed ESA. Of those that had received childcare advice, 57 per cent said it was very or fairly useful, while 43 per cent said it was not useful.

### Work attitudes and the future

On average, lone parents were closer to the labour market in Wave 2, after having gone through LPO, than in Wave 1, when they were claiming IS. At Wave 1, 59 per cent of respondents were either in work or looking for work, but this had risen to 81 per cent by Wave 2.

In total, 50 per cent of lone parents were looking for work. This included 68 per cent of those not in work (and 92 per cent of JSA claimants), and 25 per cent of those in work (who tended to be those working for jobs of fewer than 16 hours a week).

In line with other research, the amount of jobsearch lone parents had conducted at Wave 2 (mostly on JSA) was significantly higher than at Wave 1 (when claiming IS). Over 50 per cent of lone parents looking for work had applied for 11 or more jobs in the previous year, compared to only 20 per cent at Wave 1. In addition, lone parents were doing more to find jobs, such as putting their name on the books of private recruitment agencies, than they were at Wave 1.

Lone parents had a strong preference for part-time work. When asked about their most recent job application, 69 per cent of respondents had applied for part-time work, including 34 per cent who had applied for a job of 16 hours exactly (the minimum number of hours to be eligible for working tax credits). This broadly matched lone parents' preferences for working hours.

Moreover, lone parents had a strong preference for jobs that fit around their childcare responsibilities. Lone parents looking for work were often unwilling to work outside school hours; 56 per cent said they would be unwilling to work outside school hours, and 31 per cent said they would only work during term-time (with 29 per cent reporting that they would only be willing to work if their job was both during school hours and term-time only). Furthermore, 88 per cent said that flexible working arrangements were important, and around four in ten reported that they would not take a job that did not have flexible working.

On average, the time lone parents were willing to travel to work was longer than the average commute in the UK, again demonstrating a willingness to work. However, seven in ten UK commuters used a car to go to work, but only 34 per cent of LPO lone parents had permanent access to a motor vehicle.

## Attitudes and constraints to work

Lone parents expressed a strong work focus in their attitudes, alongside a strong focus on parental childcare. In broad terms, attitudes towards work, parenting and childcare remained similar between Wave 1 (when lone parents were claiming IS) and Wave 2 (after the move off IS on to other destinations). However, at Wave 2, respondents were less likely to agree with some parental childcare focused statements (such as 'children do best if their mum stays at home to look after them'), and were more likely to agree with employment focused statements (such as 'having almost any job is better than being unemployed').

Lone parents who were in work were more likely than those claiming JSA or ESA to agree with employment-focused statements and statements suggesting motivation to combine work and childcare (such as 'working mothers have the best of both worlds'). However, there were less strong differences in opinion in relation to attitudes towards 'parental childcare' (such as 'children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents') and the social stigma of benefits (such as 'stay-at-home mums are not valued by society').

When respondents out of work were asked about their barriers to work, the most commonly mentioned barriers related to jobsearch constraints, such as there not being enough suitable job opportunities in the local area, or needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after children. The least commonly mentioned barriers to work related to peer pressure. On average, respondents noted 4.9 big barriers to entering employment (out of a possible 19). Those claiming ESA were more likely than those claiming JSA to cite 'personal' barriers to entering employment, such as having a health condition, or having personal troubles that needed to be sorted out. ESA claimants were also more likely to cite low confidence as a barrier to work.

When compared to responses in Wave 1, there was not a large shift in the likelihood of lone parents reporting different types of barriers. Nevertheless, there was a small shift in that barriers to work were less likely to be because of negative opinions about work but slightly more likely to reflect practical problems. Therefore, a higher proportion of lone parents reported that a lack of suitable job opportunities in the local area, or their health condition or disability were big barriers to work in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. Conversely, smaller proportions said needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren), being concerned about leaving the security of benefits, and not being sure they would be financially better off in work were big barriers in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1.

Respondents in work were less likely to perceive barriers to staying in work than those out of work were to entering work. In total, only two (out of 18) big barriers to staying in work were mentioned by a quarter of respondents or more. These were: not being sure about being financially better off in work (mentioned by 27 per cent) and a lack of suitable, affordable childcare (mentioned by 25 per cent of respondents). In total, respondents on average mentioned only 2.3 big barriers to staying in work.

### Wellbeing and material deprivation

Around half of lone parents (52 per cent) had a weekly income of less than £200, with a further 25 per cent with a weekly income of £200 to £299. Lone parents in work had higher average incomes than those out of work: while 10 per cent of those out of work had an income of £300 or more a week, this applied to 30 per cent of those in work. Linked to this, given the increased proportion of lone parents in work at Wave 2, the average total household income of respondents at Wave 2 was higher than for the same lone parents at Wave 1.

Respondents who had worked since Wave 1 were less likely to experience a range of financial problems. Twenty-six per cent found it quite or very hard to manage financially (down from 40 per cent when the same lone parents were interviewed in Wave 1), 29 per cent never had money left over at the end of the week (down from 47 per cent) and 16 per cent had trouble with debt almost all of the time (down from 23 per cent).

When asked about whether respondents would like but could not afford a range of goods and services, lone parents were more likely to lack adult or household items, such as replacing worn out furniture and electrical goods, rather than items for children, such as having friends over for tea or a snack, or having leisure equipment, such as sports equipment or a bike.

Levels of material deprivation and low income among the cohort of all lone parents interviewed at Wave 1 were very high. In total, 67 per cent were in material deprivation and had a low income. This compares to 28 per cent of all lone parent families in the UK, as reported in the DWP's Households Below Average Income series. Material deprivation was particularly high among lone parents with lower qualification levels, among those without access to a vehicle, and those with fewer children.

Lone parents who had entered work or increased their hours between Wave 1 and Wave 2 were less likely to be in material deprivation. While 65 per cent of these lone parents had been in material deprivation and had a low income at Wave 1, this had fallen to 39 per cent by Wave 2. Nevertheless, this means that two in five households in which a lone parent had entered work were still living in material deprivation and with a low income, suggesting that in work poverty still remains a problem for these lone parents.

## Relationship with Jobcentre Plus

Lone parents who had been on JSA were much more likely than those who had been on ESA to have received various types of advice and support from Jobcentre Plus, such as looking at job vacancies or looking at the sort of work they might do.

The same pattern applied to the support options available under the Jobcentre Plus Offer. Three in four JSA claimants (76 per cent on JSA only and 79 per cent who had been on both JSA and ESA) had discussed support options such as regular adviser meetings or training courses, compared with 38 per cent of those that had been on ESA (but not JSA). Actual attendance on these support options was also higher among JSA claimants.

The majority of respondents who had taken the various support options said that they had been helpful (ranging from 66 per cent to 81 per cent for the various activities).

Around one in seven lone parents who had been on JSA said they had received financial help from Jobcentre Plus towards expenses, most commonly travel costs. The proportion who had received financial help while on ESA was lower (six per cent).

In total, 12 per cent of respondents had been on the Work Programme and a further 17 per cent had discussed it with an adviser while on JSA or ESA.

A quarter (27 per cent) of those who had started work since Wave 1, or had increased their hours, said they had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus staff while they were working. An additional 13 per cent said they were offered this support.

Most JSA claimants (74 per cent) said that advisers had explained the conditions of claiming JSA very or quite well, and nearly all (87 per cent) said that they had been told that their benefit might be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions.

Around one in four said that their benefit had been stopped (21 per cent) or reduced (seven per cent) for any reason while on JSA or ESA, although this may over-estimate the number who have actually been sanctioned; for example, respondents may have included issues with benefit payments in their transition from IS on to other benefits.

Most JSA claimants said they found it at least fairly easy to comply with the conditions for claiming JSA: signing on every two weeks (63 per cent), attending meetings (63 per cent) and actively looking for work (62 per cent). However, between 17 per cent and 21 per cent found each of these things difficult.

One in three (35 per cent) said that they were told there were things they were allowed to do or did not have to do, as part of the parent flexibilities on JSA. Two in three (64 per cent) said that at least one of the flexibilities applied to them, most frequently only having to look for part-time work (47 per cent) or only having to look for work that was during school hours (40 per cent).<sup>1</sup>

Less than half of respondents said that they felt their individual circumstances were taken into account on JSA or ESA (45 per cent of those who had been on JSA only, 45 per cent on ESA only and 41 per cent on both JSA and ESA). These proportions were considerably lower than the corresponding figures in relation to IS (as stated at Wave 1). One in four (24 per cent) would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff.

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<sup>1</sup> The flexibility to look for work only during school hours applies during term-time only, and only to lone parents whose youngest child is aged under 13.

There were negative attitudes to the JSA and ESA regimes, and these were more negative than corresponding attitudes to the IS regime that were expressed at Wave 1. Many respondents did not feel that they had received help or advice while on JSA (37 per cent) or ESA (74 per cent), and respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that on JSA/ESA people were pushed into things they did not want to do. There were also mixed views on whether lone parents' needs are taken into account on JSA/ESA and whether they were given the right amount of support. Respondents were less positive towards JSA, and the extent to which their individual circumstances were taken into account, if they had an LLSI. However, in the JSA sample, some respondents did feel that JSA had made them more aware of job opportunities (41 per cent).

### Conclusions

Nearly half of the lone parents in the survey had found work by the time of the Wave 2 interview, with a wide range of factors affecting movement into work. A move into work was not always accompanied by a move away from material deprivation, with many lone parents working in poorly paid jobs and/or working a small number of hours per week.

Wave 2 also saw most lone parents moving closer to the labour market, alongside more intensive jobsearch activity on JSA than was the case on IS. The survey also indicated an increased commitment to work at Wave 2, although respondents continued to express a need to prioritise children and family alongside work.

# 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background to the research, an overview of the survey aims and methodological approach, and details of the report structure.

## 1.1 Background and policy context

### 1.1.1 Lone parents in the UK

There are an estimated two million lone parents in the UK who care for 2.6 million children (Labour Force Survey Household Datasets, Q2, 2012). Lone parents now make up one-quarter of all households with dependent children, and the UK has proportionately more lone parents than most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The median age for a lone parent is 38 and only 1.4 per cent of lone parents are teenagers. Thirteen per cent of lone parents come from ethnic minority communities and nine per cent of lone parents are fathers (Labour Force Survey Household Datasets, Q2, 2012).

The social composition of lone parent families has changed over the past 30 years. Hasluck and Green (2007) noted a diversity of circumstances among lone parents (including those who had never had a permanent partner and those who were separated, divorced or widowed), as well as differences in the age and number of children. These changes are the consequence of a number of factors, including: a trend for people to marry less frequently and later in life; and an increase in the rate of divorce and births outside marriage. Being a lone parent is often a transition stage. Marsh and Vegeris' (2004) analysis of a ten-year study of lone parents found a prevalence of re-partnering over time (a high proportion of which resulted in marriage).

### 1.1.2 Lone parents and employment

The employment rate for lone parents is currently 59.2 per cent (Labour Force Survey, Q2, 2012) and well over one million lone parents are in work. This rate increased steadily over a number of years owing to a combination of policy initiatives, changes in the characteristics of lone parents over time and more general improvements in employment rates in the UK. Since then the rate has levelled off.

Lone parents' experiences of employment are varied. Wave 1 of this survey, which focused on lone parents receiving Income Support (IS) whose youngest child was seven or eight when they were due to lose eligibility to IS, found that lone parents had either not worked since the birth of their oldest child (28 per cent), had worked since having children but were not working at the time of the survey (37 per cent), had never worked (24 per cent) or were currently working (ten per cent) (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011).

### 1.1.3 Child poverty in lone parent households

Children of lone parents are more likely to live in poverty than children in a two-parent family. In the UK, 14 per cent of all children and 28 per cent of children in lone parent families were in material deprivation with a low income in 2010/11.<sup>2</sup> Analysis of the Families and Children Study by Philo *et al.* (2009) found lone parent families were more than three times as likely as couple families to belong to the lowest income quintile (37 per cent and ten per cent, respectively). A child of a lone parent that works part time is almost three times less likely to be living in poverty than a child of a lone parent who is not working, and a child of a lone parent that works full time is five times less likely to

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<sup>2</sup> Households Below Average Income 2010/11.

be living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Further to this, lone parent families, along with couple families where no parent worked, were more likely to experience material deprivation.

### 1.1.4 Employment support for lone parents

Given that worklessness is a large determining factor of child poverty, increasing parental employment is one of the key means of reducing child poverty. A series of welfare to work policies and programmes have been implemented over recent years to increase parental employment. Specific measures include: the introduction of mandatory Work Focused Interviews (WFI) for lone parents claiming IS; voluntary employment support for lone parents to help with a move from benefits into work<sup>4</sup> and Lone Parent Obligations (LPO).

Since April 2011, Jobcentre Plus districts can offer lone parents who are not yet required to take part in the Work Programme (see below) access to support through the Jobcentre Plus Offer, which includes adviser support and a menu of flexible support options. Lone parents may have access to Jobcentre Plus provision or approved activities (contracted and non-contracted), financial incentives, the range of 'Get Britain Working'<sup>5</sup> measures and help with expenses (for example, childcare, replacement care, travel or course costs) through a delegated flexible support fund, which reflects district priorities and needs.

With some exceptions (primarily specialist disability programmes), all Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) funded welfare to work provision, including Flexible New Deal, was replaced by a single integrated Work Programme from June 2011. The Work Programme assumed the task of supporting workless lone parents into employment, alongside other workless people. Lone parents who move on to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) will generally be able to access the Work Programme 12 months after their claim starts.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.1.5 LPO

LPO was introduced from November 2008 and meant that lone parent claimants with a youngest child aged 12 or over would no longer be entitled to IS solely on the grounds of being a lone parent and that, by autumn 2010, those with a youngest child aged seven and over would lose entitlement. From 2012, as part of the Welfare Reform Act introduced in March 2012, these obligations were extended to lone parents with a youngest child aged five and over. It is estimated that this change will result in 20,000 to 25,000 extra lone parents in work, which in turn could help reduce child poverty.<sup>7</sup>

When IS eligibility on the grounds of being a lone parent ends, those able to work can claim JSA and are required to be available for and actively seeking employment. Lone parents with health problems or disabilities may, if eligible, claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Until April 2011, this was provided through the New Deal for Lone Parents and since then through the Jobcentre Plus Offer and work-preparation support.

<sup>5</sup> These include Work Clubs, Work Together, Work Experience (for those aged 16–24), New Enterprise Allowance, Enterprise Clubs and sector-based work academies.

<sup>6</sup> Lone parents aged under 25 will be referred to the Work Programme from nine months after the start of their JSA claim. Lone parents claiming IS in England can enter the Work Programme voluntarily.

<sup>7</sup> *Conditionality Measures in the 2011 Welfare Reform Bill*, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/conditionality-wr2011-ia.pdf>

Some lone parent claimants who have another reason for being entitled to IS, such as foster carers or those in receipt of Carer's Allowance, are exempt from LPO and continue to be eligible to claim IS. In addition, some groups of lone parent claimants are offered transitional protection and are entitled to continue to receive IS for a limited period of time. These groups include: lone parents on IS who are in full-time study or following a full-time course on an approved training scheme. This transitional protection applies only to the course of study or training that the lone parent is undertaking at the point the IS entitlement changes come into force. Transitional protection applies until the end of the course or the date the child reaches the relevant age in force at the start of the course, whichever comes first.

The LPO changes are being implemented for both existing and new lone parent claimants. They were anticipated to affect around 300,000 existing lone parent claimants (those with a youngest child aged seven or over) who claim IS because they are lone parents. The Welfare Reform Bill Impact Assessment estimates that around 75,000 lone parents per year in steady state will be affected now the age is reduced to five.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2011, there were 123,805 lone parents in receipt of JSA, of which 50,715 had a youngest child aged between seven and nine.<sup>9</sup>

The findings from this stage of the LPO research are relevant to the ongoing changes. The concluding chapter of this report (Chapter 9) considers what implications the findings may have for the government's future plans for welfare to work policy.

### **1.1.6 Universal Credit**

The Welfare Reform Act 2012 also sets out reforms to the welfare system through the introduction of a Universal Credit. Universal Credit will provide a new system of means-tested support for working age people who are in or out of work. Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs will be integrated in the new benefit. It will also provide additions for disabled people and carers. Existing means-tested benefits that will be replaced by Universal Credit include income-based JSA, income-related ESA, IS, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit. Universal Credit is to be rolled out from 2013.

## **1.2 Evaluating Lone Parent Obligations**

The evaluation of LPO has been ongoing as the policy has rolled out. A series of qualitative studies has been conducted. The first study focused on the first roll-out group, which was lone parents who had a youngest child aged between 12 and 15 years old. It also examined the IS regime for lone parents with a youngest child aged between one and six years. The study focused on claimants' experience of IS eligibility ending, before they had moved to another benefit or status (Gloster *et al.*, 2010).

The second qualitative study focused on a variety of destinations that lone parents moved to after losing eligibility to IS (including claiming JSA, claiming ESA, unknown destinations, being exempt from LPO and moving into work). The lone parents in the study had a youngest child aged between 12 and 15 (the first roll-out group) (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

The final piece of qualitative research evaluated the effect of LPO on lone parents whose youngest child is aged seven or eight. It also informed the delivery of the roll-out of LPO to lone parents with

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> The figures are for Great Britain.

a youngest child aged five or six. The research examined the work readiness of lone parents, their experience of childcare, reflections on when their youngest child started school, how they looked for work, experiences of JSA and of moving into work (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

This report presents findings from a national, quantitative survey of lone parents affected by LPO, specifically those with a youngest child of seven or eight when they leave IS (the third roll-out group). The survey is longitudinal. The first wave of the survey was conducted in 2010 while lone parents were still on IS. The second wave took place in 2012 after lone parents' eligibility for IS had ended, and tracks lone parents' destinations and experiences over time.

The report on the Wave 1 findings was published in May 2011 (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011). This report covers the survey as a whole, with a particular focus on the Wave 2 findings.

### 1.2.1 Research aims and objectives

The primary aim of the evaluation of LPO is to explore whether and how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment.

In addition, the quantitative survey aims to understand customers' decision-making around returning to work. Specifically, the survey explores the relationship between customers' decision-making and:

- characteristics, attitudes, values and beliefs;
- destinations and behaviours;
- progress through, and experience of, the LPO 'journey'.

This allows an increased understanding of lone parents affected by LPO, and highlights important issues for supporting these customers in the future.

### 1.2.2 Scope of the quantitative survey

The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey with a nationally representative sample of lone parents in the third roll-out group (with eligibility ending when their youngest child was seven or eight).

This particular cohort gives a good indication of the issues facing the full range of lone parents affected by LPO. Respondents were selected as having a youngest child aged six or seven, but often also had children older than this, and therefore were relevant to other roll-out groups. At the same time, this group is most similar to the group newly affected by LPO: those with a youngest child aged five or six. The survey can, therefore, inform the roll-out of LPO to this group. In addition, the sample covered by the survey includes a wide range of customers in relation to work-readiness and distance from the labour market. As a result, the survey contains findings that have wider relevance for the provision of support for JSA/ESA claimants under the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the Work Programme, which will need to accommodate an increasingly greater range of customers.

More generally, this survey allows a detailed examination of lone parents on benefit who have school-age children. Most previous studies of lone parents have either covered all ages of children, or have focused on those with younger (pre-school age) children. As many issues are different for school-age children (for example in relation to childcare), the survey allows an opportunity to look at this group's needs and circumstances more clearly.

In addition, previous quantitative studies of lone parents on IS (the survey of IS customers conducted as part of the New Deal for Lone Parents evaluation<sup>10</sup> and the survey of customers experiencing lone parent WFIs<sup>11</sup>) were conducted some time ago, and had a specific focus. This survey updates our understanding of this customer group, and also has a deliberately broad coverage. As well as providing insight into their destinations as part of LPO, the survey gives a comprehensive insight into lone parents' characteristics, behaviour and attitudes, as well as detailed information on childcare arrangements and preferences.

## 1.3 Methodology

The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey with a representative sample of lone parents in the third roll-out group of LPO across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales).

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) were responsible for sampling, fieldwork, weighting and data processing. Further details on these technical aspects of the survey are provided in Appendix B.

### 1.3.1 Sample

The sample population for the Wave 1 survey comprised lone parents who were claiming IS in April 2010, and whose eligibility for IS was due to end between January and March 2011, when their youngest child was aged seven or eight. The sample population excluded known exemptions: those in receipt of Carer's Allowance. However, when interviewed, 12 per cent of Wave 1 respondents said that they had a youngest child aged under six; these lone parents would, therefore, also be exempt and entitled to continue their IS claim. In total, 2,779 lone parents were interviewed in the Wave 1 survey.

For Wave 2, it was decided to focus only on lone parents who were eligible for the LPO changes. As a result, respondents who were exempt, and therefore able to continue their claim for IS, were excluded from the Wave 2 survey. In practice, this meant excluding the following Wave 1 respondents from the Wave 2 survey:

- those who were identified as exempt on the basis of their answers at Wave 1, by having a child aged under six;
- those who were recorded in the administrative data as remaining on IS after their scheduled IS end date, either because they had another child or were receiving Carer's Allowance.

These lone parents were excluded, as well as respondents who did not agree to be re-contacted when interviewed at Wave 1. From the remainder, a random sample of Wave 1 respondents was drawn, in order to achieve a total of around 1,000 Wave 2 interviews.

Despite the removal of these exempt lone parents, the Wave 2 interviewed sample still included a proportion of lone parents who were exempt. This is discussed further in Section 1.4.

### 1.3.2 Fieldwork

At Wave 1, all selected cases were sent a letter giving them an opportunity to opt out of the survey. This is a standard procedure used when a sample is drawn from benefit records, and means that only the addresses of sample members who have not opted out are issued to interviewers to

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<sup>10</sup> Lessof *et al.*, 2001; fieldwork conducted in 2000/01.

<sup>11</sup> Coleman *et al.*, 2003; fieldwork conducted in 2002/03.

contact. Prior to Wave 2, a pre-notification letter was sent to all selected cases to inform them about the second survey. In addition, an advance letter was sent to selected cases shortly before the start of fieldwork. At both waves, the advance letter stressed that any information provided by respondents would be treated in strict confidence. A Welsh translation was provided for respondents living in Wales.

At Wave 1, eight interviewer briefing sessions were held between 17 May and 25 May 2010. Eight Wave 2 briefings were conducted between 15 and 23 February 2011. NatCen researchers conducted the briefings. In total, 127 interviewers were briefed and worked on the study. All were trained members of NatCen's interviewing panel.

At both waves, interviews were conducted face to face in respondents' homes. Only the named customer could be interviewed (no proxies were allowed) and, where this person had moved, interviewers attempted to trace the person to their new address.

Wave 1 interviews were conducted between 27 May and 25 August 2010. This meant that interviews took place between five and ten months before interviewees' IS eligibility was estimated to end. In total, 2,779 interviews were conducted.

At Wave 2, 1,088 interviews were conducted. The response rate was 75 per cent (see detailed response figures in Table A2.1). Wave 2 interviews were conducted in February to April 2012, between 11 and 15 months after respondents' IS eligibility was scheduled to end.

At each wave, lone parents who took part in the survey received £10 by way of thanks (in the form of a gift voucher) for their participation in the survey. This was given in recognition of the time the respondent had devoted to helping with the study.

Prior to each wave of fieldwork, a pilot survey was conducted. As part of the pilot, 84 interviews were conducted at Wave 1 and 36 interviews at Wave 2 (these interviews are not included in the survey findings presented in this report). Findings from the pilot informed the development of the final questionnaire.

The final questionnaire covered a similar set of topics at each wave:

- classification and demographics;
- current status and employment details;
- past employment;
- benefits;
- choices and constraints with regard to work and family;
- jobsearch;
- experience of Jobcentre Plus;
- childcare arrangements;
- income;
- health and other characteristics.

### 1.3.3 Weighting and data processing

An experienced data processing team carried out coding and editing of questionnaires at NatCen's Brentwood offices. Researchers at NatCen were continuously involved in all complex editing decisions.

At each wave, data were weighted to reflect the actual profile of the cohort, using both selection and non-response weighting. The Wave 2 weights reflected the revised sample population (excluding those who were known to be exempt).

## 1.4 Interpretation of the data

In total, 1,088 interviews were conducted. However, as noted above, the Wave 2 interviewed sample included a proportion of lone parents who were exempt from the LPO changes. Specifically:

- There were 79 respondents who had remained on IS, and these respondents are excluded from the analysis of destinations; this leaves a total of 1,009 respondents included in this analysis.
- A further 37 respondents were also exempt, as they either had no dependent children living with them or had moved into the Support Group as part of a claim for ESA. These 37 respondents, along with the 79 who remained on IS, are excluded from the rest of the survey analysis.

The bulk of the analysis on which this report is based, therefore, focuses on a sample of 972 lone parents who were affected by the LPO changes.

When interpreting the findings for this survey, it should be borne in mind that the survey is based on a **sample** of customers (not the total population). This means that all findings are subject to sampling tolerances. Differences highlighted in the report are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

Some of the sub-groups included the analysis are quite small; for example, the different groups banded by working hours, and current ESA recipients. As a general rule, we have focused the analysis on sub-groups that have at least 100 respondents, except where analysis of smaller sub-groups is integral to the findings. Where sub-groups sample sizes are less than 100, findings should be treated with a degree of caution.

A large number of tables appear in this report. The following conventions have been used:

- 0 = a 'true zero' (i.e. no responses in that category);
- \* = less than 0.5 per cent, but more than zero responses.

## 1.5 Report structure

This report provides an examination of lone parents' destinations, experiences and attitudes. Specifically:

- Chapter 2 examines the destinations of lone parents affected by LPO – both their immediate destinations and their longer-term experiences in the year or so since their eligibility for IS ended.
- Chapter 3 looks at respondents' current experiences of work. As well as identifying the type of work done by lone parents, it also looks at whether work was sustained, and also lone parents' experience of family-friendly employment.

- Chapter 4 focuses on childcare, exploring the childcare arrangements of working lone parents, as well as possible future arrangements. This chapter also looks at advice and support on childcare provided by Jobcentre Plus.
- Chapter 5 examines work aspirations. It covers lone parents' preferences and flexibility in considering work, as well as their approach to looking for work. It also looks at recent training activities.
- Chapter 6 examines lone parents' attitudes to work and family, as well as the constraints to work that they face.
- Chapter 7 examines well-being and material deprivation – firstly for the full sample of lone parents interviewed at Wave 1, and then for those who were working at Wave 2. It also looks at household income and financial problems.
- Chapter 8 looks at lone parents' relationship with Jobcentre Plus while on JSA or ESA, including the types of support they received. It also includes general attitudes to Jobcentre Plus and the JSA and ESA regimes.
- Finally, Chapter 9 draws out the conclusions from the survey, and highlights key lessons from the evaluation as well as issues for the future.

## 2 Lone parent destinations

This chapter examines the destinations and journeys of lone parents after their eligibility for Income Support (IS) ended, and the characteristics of lone parents on different destinations. This helps to show which lone parents have been able to make the transition from benefits to work, as well as those who have remained on benefits or moved to other destinations.

The lone parents covered by the survey were all due to lose their eligibility for IS between January and March 2011, approximately one year before they were interviewed in the second wave of the survey. As a result, we were able to examine the destinations of these lone parents immediately after their eligibility for IS ended, as well as longer-term destinations in the subsequent year or so.

Section 2.1 looks at the immediate destinations of lone parents after leaving IS, while Section 2.2 examines longer-term destinations. In Section 2.3, we look at the characteristics of lone parents on different destinations.

### 2.1 Immediate destinations

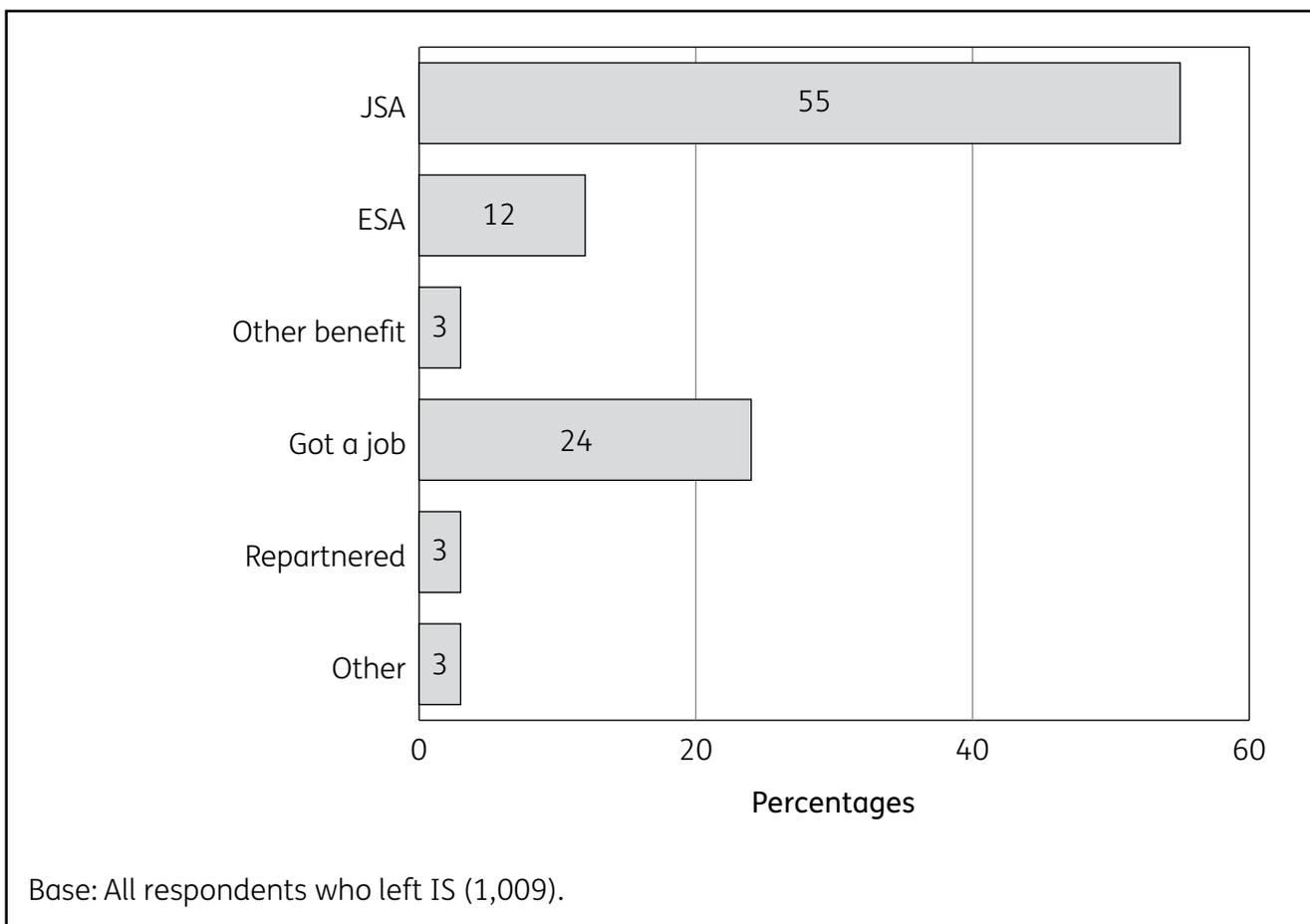
A proportion of lone parents covered by the survey remained on IS, as they were exempt from the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) changes. This was either because they had another child, or because they were receiving Carer's Allowance or were foster carers.

The Wave 2 survey excluded respondents who were known to be exempt from the LPO changes, according to administrative data. In addition, 79 respondents (seven per cent of the total sample) were identified during the interview as still being on IS.

The analysis in this chapter excludes lone parents who remained on IS, and focuses on the destinations of those who became ineligible for IS.<sup>12</sup> Figure 2.1 shows the destinations of these respondents immediately after leaving IS. The findings are based on respondents' own answers, rather than administrative data. Lone parents were most likely to say that they moved on to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) (55 per cent), while 12 per cent moved on to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and three per cent moved on to another benefit. Around one in four (24 per cent) said they got a job, while three per cent re-partnered and three per cent had an 'other' destination.

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<sup>12</sup> The qualitative research noted that some lone parents who were exempt from LPO nevertheless moved on to another benefit. The research cited evidence of some potentially unnecessary journeys by customers who had been advised to claim another benefit. In practice, this means that a small number of respondents included in this chapter – who moved off IS – may have been exempt from LPO.

**Figure 2.1 Immediate destination after leaving IS**

Not all lone parents moved off IS at the same time that their eligibility ended. In particular, those moving into work left IS at different times. Analysis of those who got a job immediately after claiming IS shows that:

- 48 per cent moved off IS into work before their IS eligibility was due to end. In some cases, this may indicate an ‘anticipation effect’, in which lone parents moved off benefits before being required to move to JSA. However, some respondents may have found work and moved off IS at this time anyway, irrespective of the LPO changes, and this is confirmed in Section 3.1, which describes how movement into work can often be related to life changes or opportunities;
- 23 per cent moved into work at around the time their IS eligibility was due to end<sup>13</sup>;
- 29 per cent started work after their scheduled IS end date. This suggests that these respondents had a short gap between leaving IS and starting work, where they did not claim another benefit.

<sup>13</sup> The second category (moved into work at around the time their IS eligibility ended) included respondents who said they started work between January and March 2011. It would be possible to analyse this group more precisely, by comparing the job start date with the scheduled IS end date for each individual. However, this level of precision is not warranted, due to possible inaccuracy in the dates given by respondents, and the possibility that eligibility for IS did not actually end at exactly the same time as the scheduled date.

## 2.2 Longer-term destinations

In this section, we look at the longer-term destinations of lone parents after moving off IS.

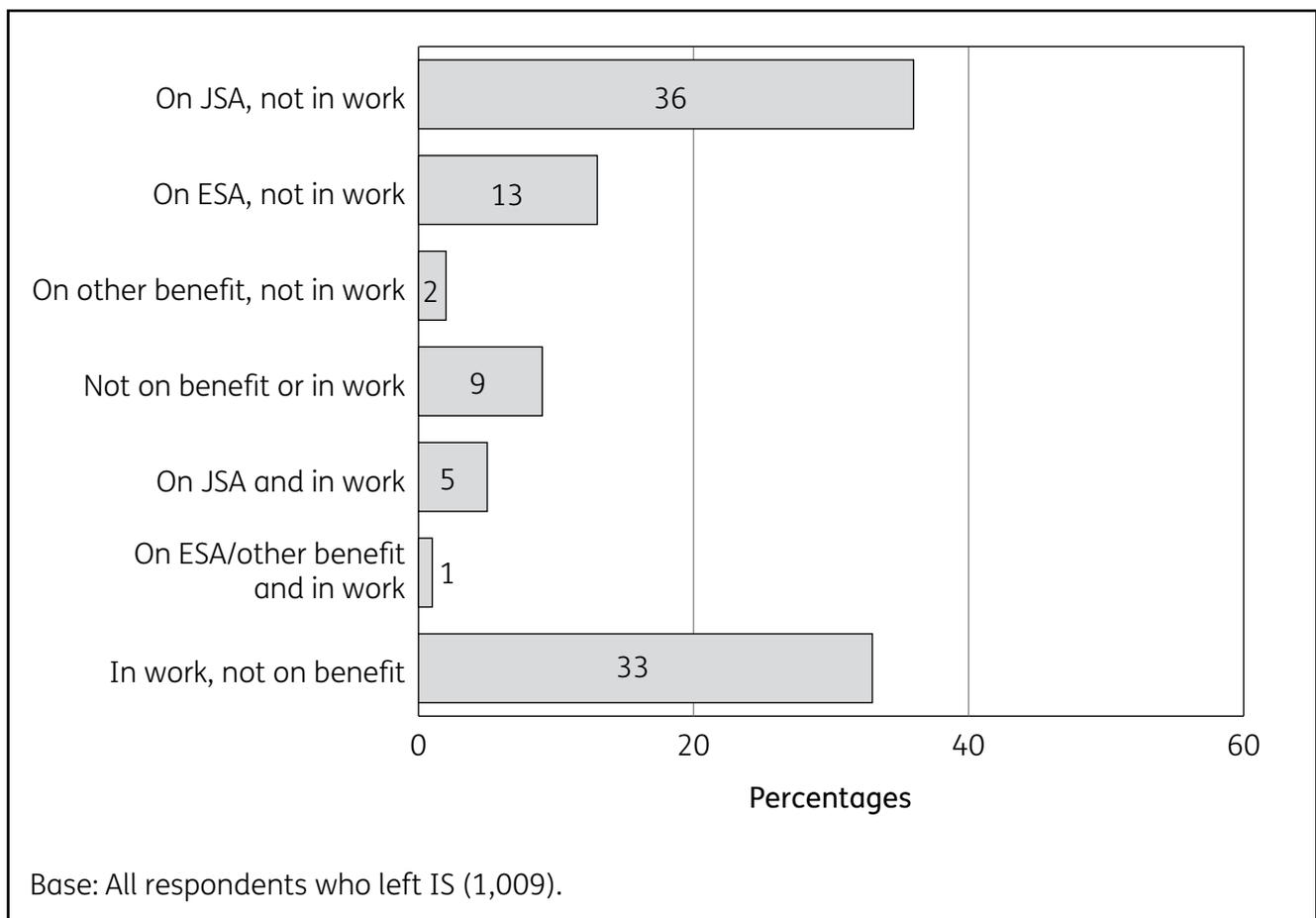
### 2.2.1 Status at the time of the Wave 2 interview

Firstly, we can see the status of lone parents at the time of the Wave 2 interview, approximately one year after their eligibility for IS was scheduled to end.

When interviewed at Wave 2, over one-third of respondents (36 per cent) were receiving JSA and were not working, while 13 per cent were on ESA. In total, 51 per cent of respondents were on a benefit and were not in work. A further nine per cent were neither working nor on benefits.

In total, 39 per cent of lone parents were in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview, including six per cent who were working (under 16 hours per week) while claiming benefits, most commonly JSA.

**Figure 2.2 Status at the time of the Wave 2 interview**



### 2.2.2 Lone parent journeys after Income Support ends

We can now look in more detail at the journeys that lone parents made between losing eligibility for IS and the Wave 2 interview. As already established in the qualitative research, the journeys that lone parents experience on LPO are 'wide-ranging and disparate' (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010). There are various permutations of possible journeys, involving spells of work and various benefits, so we have summarised the journeys into eight categories. These are shown in Figure 2.3 and described below.

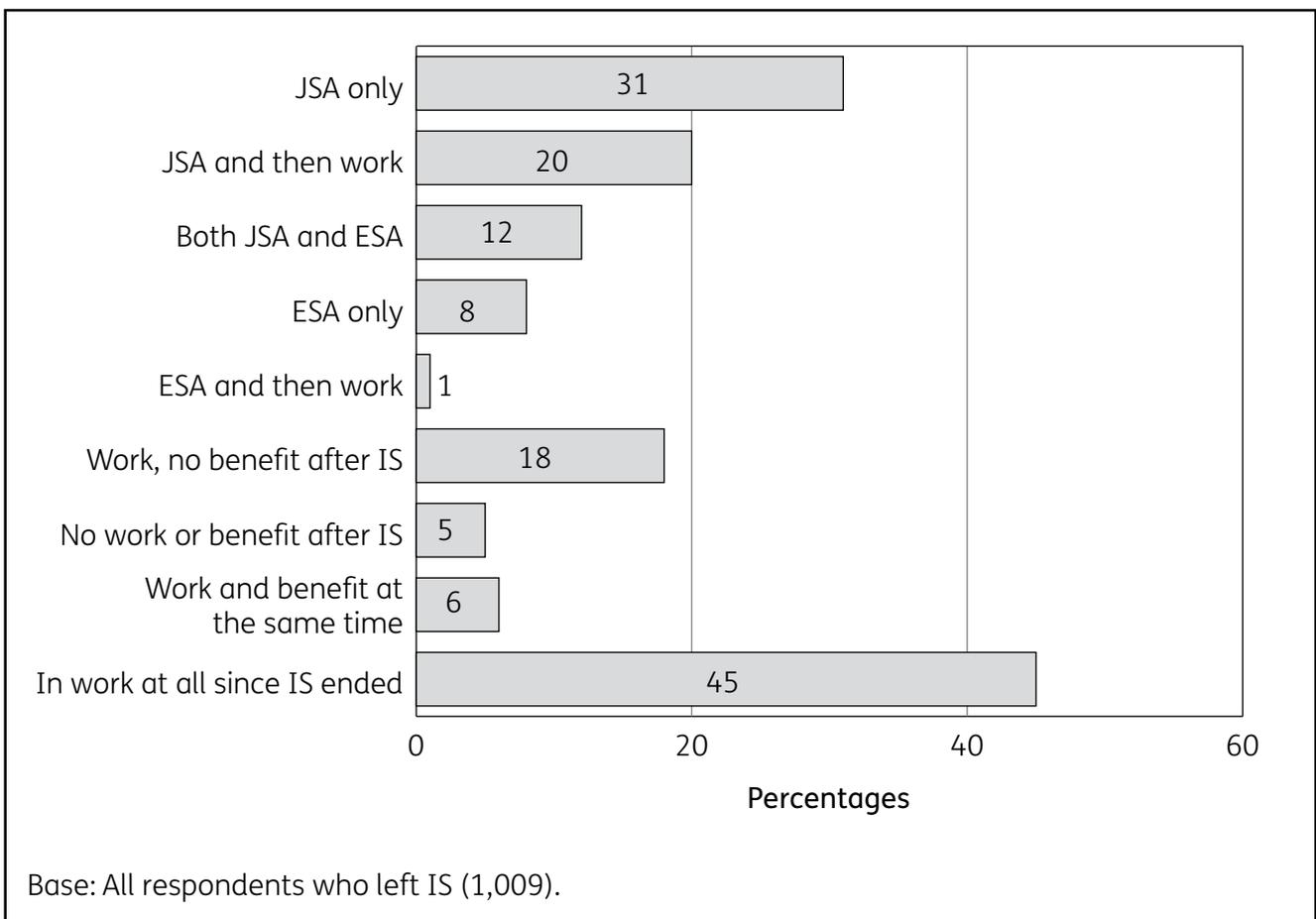
A total of 45 per cent of respondents had been in work at some point after leaving IS. This includes respondents who were initially on JSA or ESA, who then moved into work (20 per cent and one per cent respectively), as well as 18 per cent who had worked but had not been on any other benefit since leaving IS. A further six per cent had been in work while claiming a benefit at the same time (most commonly JSA).

Almost one in three lone parents (31 per cent) had only claimed JSA since their IS eligibility ended; they had not worked and had not claimed another out of work benefit. Most of these respondents had claimed JSA continuously since moving off IS, while the remainder had breaks in their JSA claim or did not start their JSA claim immediately after leaving IS.

Eight per cent of lone parents had only claimed ESA since moving off IS. In addition, 12 per cent of respondents had claimed both JSA and ESA at some point since leaving IS. Most of these respondents were initially on JSA and then had a subsequent ESA claim (65 per cent), while the others moved from ESA to JSA (e.g. when found fit for work in their Work Capability Assessment (WCA)).

Combining the various categories, a total of 68 per cent of respondents had claimed JSA at some point since their IS eligibility ended, while 23 per cent had claimed ESA at some point. A final group of respondents (five per cent) had not worked or claimed benefit at all since leaving IS.

**Figure 2.3 Lone parent journeys after IS ends**



### 2.2.3 Outcome of Employment and Support Allowance claim

If respondents had received ESA at all since leaving IS, they were asked what the outcome was of their ESA claim.

As shown in Table 2.1, lone parents were equally likely to go on to the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) (15 per cent of all of those who had claimed ESA) as the Support Group (14 per cent), while a similar proportion had also been found fit for work (16 per cent). These figures confirm the diversity of this lone parent cohort in terms of distance from the labour market. In addition, some respondents said that they were not required to have a WCA (five per cent), while others said that they had either withdrawn their claim (five per cent) or that the claim had been closed (seven per cent).

Many of those with an existing ESA claim had not yet had a WCA (19 per cent of all those with an ESA claim), or were awaiting the decision (four per cent) or the outcome of a tribunal (three per cent).

Overall, these findings show that those who claimed ESA had a range of outcomes and experiences, including many where the outcome had not been resolved by the time of the Wave 2 interview. In addition, Section 2.2.2 indicated that many ESA claimants had also claimed JSA (either before or after their ESA claim). As a whole, the findings, therefore, show that many lone parents moving on to ESA had a complex journey and may not have had a smooth transition from IS to ESA. This confirms the findings of the qualitative research, which found that *'complex and difficult journeys were most likely to be experienced by lone parent customers who had moved from IS to ESA'* (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

**Table 2.1 Outcome of ESA claim**

<b>All who have claimed ESA since leaving IS</b>	
	<b>%</b>
WRAG	15
Support group	14
Fit for work	16
Not required to have WCA	5
Withdrew claim	5
Claim was closed	7
Have not yet had WCA	19
Awaiting tribunal	3
Awaiting decision	4
Other	8
Don't know	4
<i>Base: All currently on ESA/on ESA at all</i>	225

### 2.2.4 Participation on the Work Programme

Given that respondents' eligibility for IS ended around a year before they were interviewed, many will have become eligible for transfer to the Work Programme; specifically, those with JSA claims lasting 12 months (nine months if aged under 25) and those who had been in the ESA WRAG. In addition, some lone parents may have moved on to the Work Programme early, either by volunteering or at the discretion of Jobcentre Plus advisers.

In total, 12 per cent of respondents said that they had been on the Work Programme at some point.<sup>14</sup> Almost all of these respondents went on to the Work Programme as part of a JSA claim, although a small proportion had been on ESA (one per cent of respondents overall).

### 2.3 Analysis of destinations

In this section, we provide more detailed analysis of the different destinations taken by lone parents. Firstly, we provide a brief summary of the characteristics of lone parents in the main destinations groups (e.g. JSA, ESA, work). We then look more systematically at lone parent characteristics, work orientation and childcare arrangements. As a result, this analysis will provide a thorough understanding of the key characteristics and circumstances that affect lone parent destinations.

Throughout the chapter, destinations are analysed by respondents' characteristics and circumstances as observed at Wave 1, as this shows the features that are associated with a movement on to different destinations.

When considering the destinations of lone parents in this survey, it is important to bear in mind that the sample is very diverse in terms of characteristics, circumstances and barriers to work. The Wave 1 report noted considerable diversity in terms of work experience, health and disability, qualifications and other characteristics. It also found that, overall, lone parents in this survey showed greater levels of need or deprivation than lone parents in the population and in turn, that lone parents in the population show greater levels of need than mothers with partners. As a result, many lone parents in the survey faced considerable challenges in moving into work.

#### 2.3.1 Summary of key characteristics

This section summarises the key characteristics of lone parents according to the main destinations. These characteristics are examined in more detail in the next section (Section 2.3.2).

Lone parents were more likely to have **worked at all since leaving IS** if they had recent work experience or were actively looking for work while on IS. There was also a link between movement into work and access to informal childcare. Movement into work was also more common among lone parents with higher qualifications, those with access to a vehicle and those who lived in a rural area.

Lone parents with a limiting long-standing illness or disability (LLSI), especially those with mental-health problems, were less likely to move into work. Analysis also shows that those who were more family-focused in their attitudes and less concerned about the stigma of being on benefits were less likely than other respondents to have worked at all.

The majority of lone parents **claimed JSA** after their IS eligibility ended. Longer spells on JSA were more common among lone parents without qualifications and whose first language was not English, as well as those without vehicle access. Those who had spent longer out of work before transferring to JSA were also more likely to have had a prolonged spell on JSA.

Lone parents who had **claimed ESA** include a high proportion who had a child with an LSI, as well as those with an LLSI themselves. Those with responsibilities for caring for adults, as well as those with literacy or numeracy problems, were also more likely to have claimed ESA. It is worth noting that lone parents with a child entitled to the middle or higher rate of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are exempt from the LPO changes, and so were likely to be excluded from this sample.

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<sup>14</sup> As is the case throughout this section, analysis focuses on respondents who left IS (i.e. it excludes the small number of survey respondents who continued their IS claim and were exempt from LPO changes).

Some respondents **had not been in work or on benefits** at all since their IS eligibility ended. At the time of the Wave 2 interview, nine per cent were neither in work nor receiving benefits, and five per cent had not been in work or on benefits at all since the end of their IS claim. Looking in more detail at those who were not in work or on benefit at the time of the Wave 2 survey, many of these had re-partnered since their IS claim (48 per cent). This group was also younger than average, often with a large number of children (21 per cent of those with four or more children were neither in work nor on benefits at the time of the Wave 2 interview). Few respondents in this group had worked since leaving IS (nine per cent), and most were not looking for work (70 per cent). The income of these respondents was similar to others in the survey, often because of the presence of a partner or someone else in the household who was in work.

In total, nine per cent of lone parents had **re-partnered** by the time of the Wave 2 interview. As noted above, many of these were neither working nor claiming benefits at the time of the Wave 2 survey, while 23 per cent were in work and 28 per cent were claiming JSA. Those who re-partnered tended to be younger than average.

Lone parents were more likely to have been on the **Work Programme** if they had just one child (16 per cent) or if they had a child with special educational needs (16 per cent). The proportion who had been on the Work Programme was also higher among those with other adults in the household (excluding a partner) (16 per cent). However, overall there was very little variation in the proportion who had been on the Work Programme, according to different sub-groups.

Some of the lone parents who had been on the Work Programme were working fewer than 16 hours per week at the same time: eight per cent of those who had been on the Work Programme, and one per cent of respondents overall. This includes a group of lone parents who were originally working while claiming IS, and who continued to work fewer than 16 hours per week, firstly in the transition from IS to JSA, and then when moving on to the Work Programme.

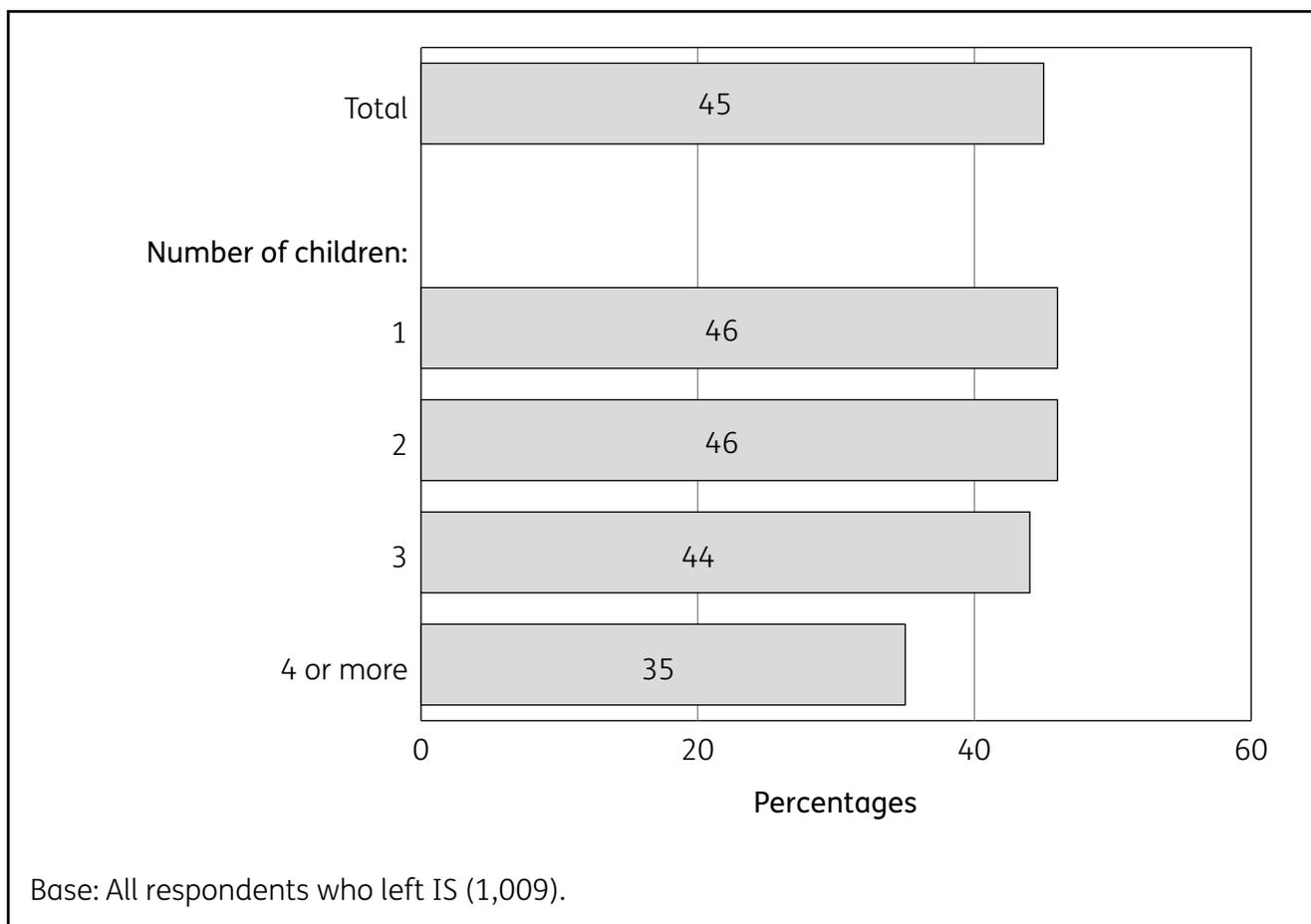
### 2.3.2 Characteristics of lone parents on different destinations

In this section, we look in more detail at lone parent destinations, according to key characteristics. This analysis focuses on characteristics that have been found to be important in determining entry to work or other destinations, and which were found to be distinctive or important in the Wave 1 analysis.

#### *Children*

Lone parents were less likely to have worked since leaving IS if they had four or more children (35 per cent). When looking at immediate destinations after leaving IS, the proportion that moved into work ranged from 28 per cent of those with one child, to 14 per cent of those with four or more children. Those with four or more children were also more likely than other respondents to have neither been in work nor on benefits since leaving IS.

There were no differences in destinations according to the age of children. Previous research has indicated that mothers of children with larger age gaps tend to return to employment more quickly (Brewer and Paull, 2006), but there is no evidence of this pattern for this group of lone parents.

**Figure 2.4 Proportion in work at all since IS ended, by number of children**

As shown in Table 2.2, lone parents with a dependent child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) were less likely to have been in work since the end of their IS claim (39 per cent). They were also more likely than other respondents to have been on ESA since their eligibility for IS ended – either just ESA (13 per cent) or both ESA and JSA (17 per cent). This reflects the fact that lone parents were more likely to have a child with an LSI if they themselves also had an LSI, as reported at Wave 1.

**Table 2.2 Destinations by whether dependent child has LSI**

	Any dependent child has an LSI		
	Yes %	No %	Total %
Long-term destinations			
JSA only	26	33	31
JSA and then work	17	21	20
Both JSA and ESA	17	10	12
ESA only	13	6	8
ESA and then work	1	1	1
Work, no benefit after IS	12	20	18
No work or benefit after IS	6	4	5
Work and benefit at the same time	8	5	6
In work at all since IS ended	39	47	45
<i>Base: All who left IS</i>	286	723	1,009

### Illness and disability

Around one in five lone parents in the sample (21 per cent) said that they had an LLSI. The destinations for these lone parents were different from other respondents, with a much lower proportion going into work (31 per cent), while a large proportion had been on ESA (50 per cent). Despite having an LLSI, many of these respondents had also been on JSA, including 22 per cent who had claimed both JSA and ESA. The qualitative research noted that '*lone parent customers with medical conditions experienced the most disparate range of destinations*' (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

The lower entry into work among lone parents with an LLSI reflects findings from previous research. For example, health status was the only factor that was always independently significant to achieving work entry or benefit exits in analysis of destinations in the evaluation of lone parent Work Focused Interviews (WFI) (Thomas, 2007).

**Table 2.3 Destinations by limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Any dependent child has an LSI</b>		
	<b>Yes %</b>	<b>No %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Long-term destinations			
JSA only	22	33	31
JSA and then work	15	22	20
Both JSA and ESA	22	9	12
ESA only	24	3	8
ESA and then work	1	1	1
Work, no benefit after IS	10	20	18
No work or benefit after IS	2	6	5
Work and benefit at the same time	5	6	6
In work at all since IS ended	31	49	45
<i>Base: All who left IS</i>	<i>219</i>	<i>790</i>	<i>1,009</i>

We can analyse respondents with an LSI further, in terms of whether they had a physical and/or mental-health condition. This analysis shows that those with a mental-health condition were less likely to have been in work at all since their IS claim ended (27 per cent compared with 37 per cent of those with a physical condition). Those with a mental-health condition were also more likely to have claimed ESA (53 per cent compared with 45 per cent of those with a physical condition).

### Qualifications

There is a broad distinction between those with high level qualifications, who were more likely to move into work, and those on lower qualifications, who were more likely to remain on JSA. This pattern is illustrated in Table 2.4. Previous research has also found lone parents' work entry to be associated with higher qualifications, and this increases if the lone parent improves their educational attainment while out of work (Marsh and Vegeris, 2004).

Specifically, the proportion who moved into work after their IS eligibility ended – and had not been on benefits at all – ranges from ten per cent of those without any qualifications to 27 per cent of those qualified to level 4 or above. The proportion who had only been on JSA since their IS eligibility ended (i.e. they had not been in work or on any other benefits) was highest among those without any qualifications (37 per cent).

**Table 2.4 Destinations by qualification level**

	<i>Column percentages</i>					
	<b>Highest qualification level</b>					<b>Total</b>
	<b>None</b>	<b>Entry level/ level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4 or above</b>	
%	%	%	%	%		
Long-term destinations						
JSA only	37	29	29	30	27	31
JSA and then work	17	21	23	22	15	20
Both JSA and ESA	13	10	13	10	11	12
ESA only	13	9	6	3	6	8
ESA and then work	1	1	0	1	3	1
Work, no benefit after IS	10	15	19	22	27	18
No work or benefit after IS	4	8	4	7	5	5
Work and benefit at the same time	5	7	6	5	4	6
In work at all since IS ended	34	45	49	50	50	45
<i>Base: All who left IS</i>	<i>271</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>306</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>155</i>	<i>1,009</i>

### *Language and literacy*

Respondents who reported literacy or numeracy problems at Wave 1 were less likely to have moved into work by the time of the Wave 2 interview (35 per cent), and work was less likely to be their immediate destination after leaving IS. A relatively large proportion of respondents with literacy or numeracy problems moved on to ESA (in total, 32 per cent had been on ESA at some point). This confirms the overlap between literacy/numeracy problems and illness or disability, which was noted in the Wave 1 report. The lower proportion moving into work is consistent with previous research, such as the evaluation of lone parent WFIs (Thomas and Griffiths, 2004).

Lone parents whose first language was not English were also less likely than other respondents to have moved into work after their IS eligibility ended (37 per cent). A relatively high proportion had stayed on JSA without moving into work (39 per cent). Previous evidence suggests that language skills could be a barrier to work for these lone parents, as could cultural beliefs about the role of women in the workplace (Tackey *et al.*, 2006).

The findings for these and other sub-groups are summarised in Figure 2.5.

### *Other characteristics*

Respondents with caring responsibilities for adults were less likely to have been in work since their eligibility for IS ended (38 per cent). A relatively large proportion of those with caring responsibilities had been on ESA (31 per cent) – often in the Support Group – and this includes a large proportion who had been on both JSA and ESA.

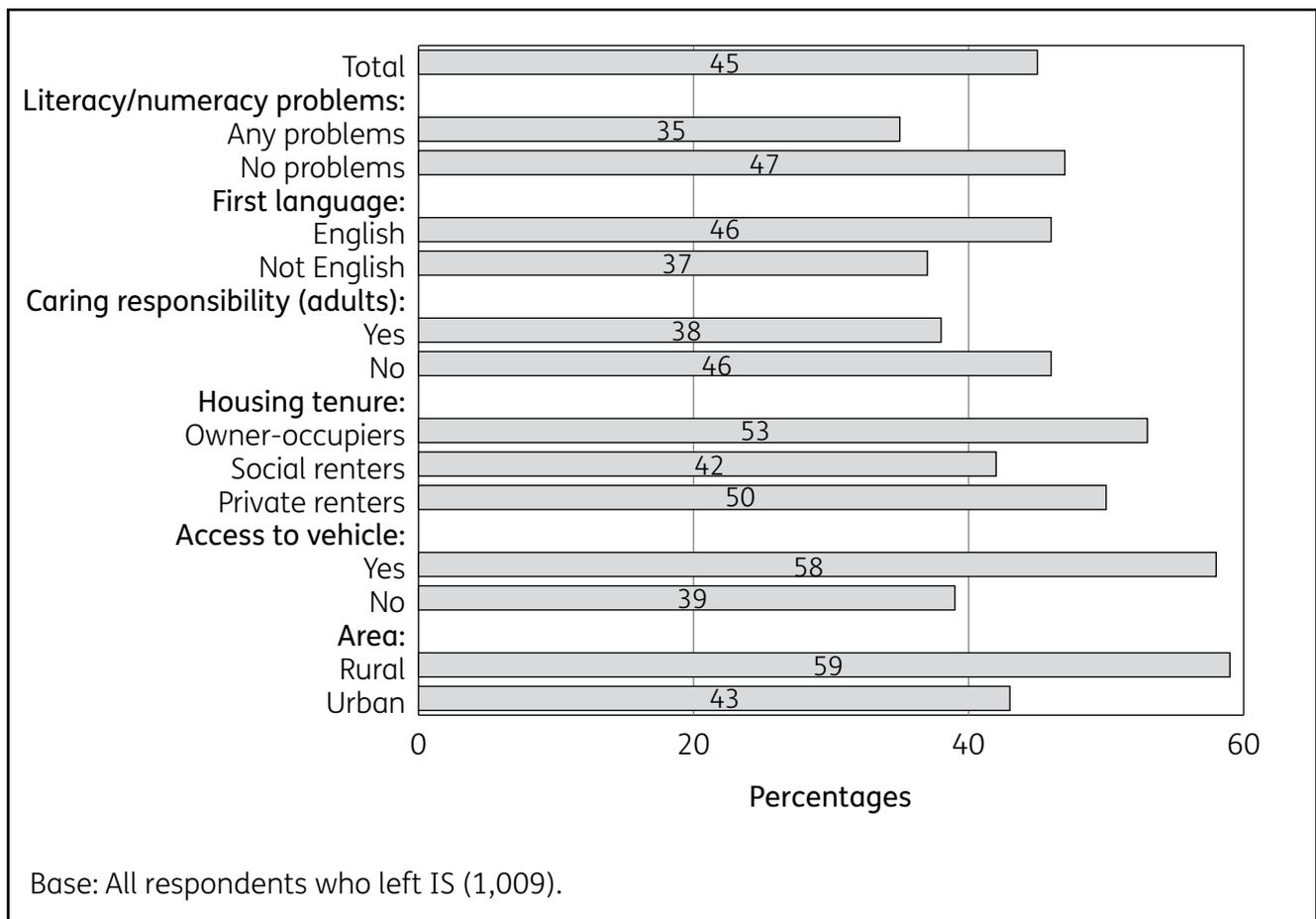
Owner-occupiers and private renters were more likely than social renters to have been in work at any time since their IS claim ended (53 per cent, 50 per cent and 42 per cent respectively). Previous evidence suggests that this may be related to the characteristics of respondents in different tenures, rather than aspects of their housing per se (Fletcher *et al.*, 2008).

There were large differences in the proportion who moved into work, according to vehicle access.

Over half (58 per cent) of those with access to a vehicle had worked since leaving IS, compared with 39 per cent of those without vehicle access. Correspondingly, the proportion that stayed on JSA (without moving into work or any other benefit) was much higher among those without vehicle access (36 per cent, compared with 21 per cent of those with vehicle access). Evans *et al.*, (2004) also found access to a car to be positively associated with movement into work among lone parents, and it has also been found to be an important driver of work entry for other benefit claimants. This is both because of its practical benefits, in providing greater access to workplaces and jobsearch opportunities, and because possession of a driving licence can be viewed as a type of ‘qualification’ or credential (Hales *et al.*, 2003).

Lone parents living in rural areas were much more likely than those in urban areas to have been in work since their IS eligibility ended (59 per cent compared with 43 per cent). Reflecting this pattern, Evans *et al.*, (2004) found the probability of entering work to be lower among lone parents living in London, the South East and North West regions (all more urban areas).

**Figure 2.5 Proportion in work at all since IS ended, by various characteristics**



### 2.3.3 Destinations by work orientation

This section looks at destinations according to respondents’ work orientation: their working background, their attitudes and expectations regarding work, and their barriers to work. The analysis focuses on work orientation as observed at Wave 1; this allows us to examine the way future destinations varied according to this orientation.

### Looking for work

As might be expected, respondents who were looking for work at the time of the Wave 1 survey were more likely than those who were not looking for work to have found a job after their IS claim ended (48 per cent compared with 30 per cent).

A relatively high proportion of those who were not looking for work moved on to ESA (29 per cent). Table 2.5 provides details.

**Table 2.5 Destinations by whether looking for work**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Looking for work at Wave 1</b>	<b>Not looking for work at Wave 1</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Long-term destinations</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
JSA only	34	34	31
JSA and then work	24	18	20
Both JSA and ESA	11	15	12
ESA only	4	13	8
ESA and then work	1	1	1
Work, no benefit after IS	19	8	18
No work or benefit after IS	4	7	5
Work and benefit at the same time	4	4	6
In work at all since IS ended	48	30	45
<i>Base: All who left IS</i>	439	419	1,009

### Barriers and attitudes to work

Analysis of destinations in relation to barriers to work (as observed in the Wave 1 survey) confirms some of the sub-group patterns highlighted above. In particular, lone parents who said that they had difficulties owing to a health condition or disability were less likely to have moved into work, as were those who cared for someone with a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties. In addition, respondents who said at Wave 1 that they had personal or family troubles that needed to be sorted out were less likely to have worked since their IS claim ended.

Lone parents' attitudes to work also had a bearing on destinations. When looking at the various attitudes to work covered in the 'Choices and Constraints' module, the 'family focused' statements are correlated with a lower probability of moving into work. In particular, lone parents who said (at Wave 1) that their children wouldn't like them to work, and those who agreed at Wave 1 that they 'might get a job one day but looking after my children is what I want to do now' were less likely to have been in work.

The perceived 'status' of being in work or on benefits also has a bearing on destinations. Respondents who said at Wave 1 that 'no-one should ever feel badly about claiming social security benefits' were less likely to have moved into work after their IS claim ended. By contrast statements expressing a strong commitment to work, such as 'I have always thought I would work' and 'a person must have a job to feel a full member of society' are positively related to job entry. This reflects previous research which found that the desire to work was the single factor consistently significant to achieving work entry and benefit exit among lone parents (Thomas, 2007).

As a whole, these findings confirm that attitudes and motivations, as well as characteristics and circumstances, are important factors in whether lone parents move into work.

### 2.3.4 Childcare arrangements

This section looks at destinations in relation to the childcare arrangements that respondents had in place at Wave 1. This shows the extent to which those who already had access to childcare support while they were not working were more likely to move into work.

As shown in Table 2.6, respondents who were using formal childcare while they were not working at Wave 1 were no more likely to move in to work than respondents who were not using any childcare. However, if lone parents were using informal childcare while they were not working, they were more likely than other respondents to move into work after the end of their IS claim.

This suggests that having access to informal childcare can be important in helping lone parents to make the transition into work. As noted in Chapter 4, informal childcare is also associated with longer working hours, because lone parents tend to use informal childcare for a greater number of hours than formal childcare. The qualitative research also noted that strong social networks were a potential asset in moving into work, particularly where family members could help with childcare at short notice.

**Table 2.6 Destinations by childcare arrangements at Wave 1**

	Childcare arrangements at Wave 1			Total
	No childcare arrangements	Used formal childcare	Used informal childcare	
Long-term destinations	%	%	%	%
JSA only	37	30	29	34
JSA and then work	22	21	20	21
Both JSA and ESA	14	12	9	13
ESA only	9	9	8	9
ESA and then work	1	2	1	1
Work, no benefit after IS	10	15	22	13
No work or benefit after IS	4	10	8	5
Work and benefit at the same time	5	2	3	4
In work at all since IS ended	37	39	47	39
<i>Base: All who left IS and who were not in work at Wave 1</i>	501	122	283	866

### 2.3.5 Regression analysis

As seen above, a number of different characteristics were associated with being in work. In order to identify the most influential factors affecting lone parents being in work after the end of their IS claim, binary logistic regression analysis was carried out. This analysis showed that the most influential characteristics in a move into work were whether respondents had recent work experience, whether they had an LLSI and whether they had access to a vehicle. Also important were whether they had any formal qualifications, whether they lived in an urban or rural area, and whether they had used informal childcare while they were not working.

## 2.4 Changing profile of lone parent cohort

The literature review for this evaluation noted the international evidence on the changing composition of the benefit population, as the implementation of work-related regimes (such as LPO) affects the caseload over time (Finn and Gloster, 2010). Essentially, the evidence indicates that over time the ‘welfare population’ comprises a higher proportion of those who have greater barriers to employment.

We can examine this issue in relation to LPO, by looking at the profile of the lone parent cohort when on IS at Wave 1, and comparing this with the profile of the lone parents who were on JSA or ESA at Wave 2. It is worth noting that this analysis excludes those who remained on IS (who were exempt from LPO).

This comparison shows that in many respects, the profile of lone parents on the different benefits was similar (see Table 2.7). The main differences were that (as expected) lone parents on ESA were more likely to have an LLSI, and that lone parents on ESA were also more likely to have a dependent child with an LSI. Those on JSA tended to be older and had fewer dependent children, compared with the original IS cohort.

**Table 2.7 Comparison of profile of lone parents on benefits: Wave 1 versus Wave 2**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Profile of lone parent cohort:</b>		
	<b>on IS (Wave 1)</b>	<b>on JSA (Wave 2)</b>	<b>on ESA (Wave 2)</b>
Highest qualification level:			
No qualifications	31	32	36
Entry level/level 1	13	12	15
Level 2	30	31	27
Level 3	10	10	8
Level 4 or above	14	13	12
Lone parent has LLSI	22	19	52
Mental-health condition	12	11	35
Physical condition	19	18	42
Lone parent has child with LSI	30	26	45
English not main language	13	13	9
Access to vehicle	28	24	25
Literacy/numeracy problems	18	18	22
Caring responsibilities for adults	9	8	14
Number of children			
1	32	38	27
2	38	35	49
3	20	19	17
4 or more	10	8	8
Age			
Under 25	6	3	2
25–34	50	43	49
35–44	37	46	39
45 or over	7	8	10
<i>Base: Respondents on various benefits at Wave 1/2</i>	<i>2,602</i>	<i>418</i>	<i>138</i>

## 2.5 Summary

- This chapter has examined the destinations of lone parents after leaving IS. The analysis excludes those who were exempt from the LPO changes and remained on IS. Immediately after leaving IS, lone parents were most likely to say that they moved on to JSA (55 per cent), while 12 per cent claimed ESA, and 24 per cent got a job.
- Longer-term destinations (in the year or so after IS eligibility ended) showed that 45 per cent of lone parents had worked at some point since their IS claim ended, including six per cent who had worked (fewer than 16 hours per week) and claimed benefits at the same time.
- The majority of respondents (68 per cent) had claimed JSA at some point since they left IS, and 31 per cent had only claimed JSA – they had not worked at all or claimed another benefit during this time.
- Around one in four (23 per cent) had claimed ESA since leaving IS, including 12 per cent who had claimed both JSA and ESA. There was a range of outcomes on ESA, including equal proportions who were in the WRAG, the Support Group and found fit for work.
- In total, 12 per cent of respondents had been on the Work Programme, mostly as part of a JSA claim.
- Five per cent of lone parents had neither worked nor claimed a benefit at all since they left IS; many of these respondents had re-partnered.
- Lone parents were more likely to have worked at any time since leaving IS if they had recent work experience or were actively looking for work while on IS. Those who had used informal childcare while they were not working were also more likely to have moved into work. Movement into work was also more common among lone parents with higher qualifications, those with access to a vehicle and those who lived in a rural area.
- Lone parents with an LLSI, especially those with mental-health problems, were less likely to have moved into work. Those who were more family-focused in their attitudes and less concerned about the stigma of being on benefits were less likely than other respondents to have worked at all.
- Longer spells on JSA were more common among lone parents without qualifications and whose first language was not English, as well as those without vehicle access. Those who had spent longer out of work were also more likely to have had a prolonged spell on JSA.
- Lone parents who had claimed ESA included a high proportion who had a child with an LSI, as well as those with an LLSI themselves. Those with responsibilities for caring for adults, as well as those with literacy or numeracy problems, were also more likely to have claimed ESA.
- The profile of JSA and ESA claimants (as observed at Wave 2) was similar to the original cohort of lone parents on IS (at Wave 1), although those on ESA were more likely to have an LLSI and to have a dependent child with an LSI, while those on JSA were older and with fewer dependent children.

## 3 Experience of work

This chapter looks in more detail at respondents who had been in work since they left Income Support (IS). It examines whether they were able to remain in work over time, and also looks at the characteristics of the jobs, including hours worked. It also looks at the availability of flexible working arrangements.

### 3.1 Entry into work

In total, 45 per cent of lone parents who left IS had worked at some point since their IS claim ended. The characteristics of these lone parents have been discussed in the previous chapter.

These respondents can be broken down as follows, in terms of their timing of entry into work:

- 17 per cent had started work while they were still on IS;
- 45 per cent started work immediately after they left IS;
- 35 per cent initially moved on to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) after their IS eligibility ended, before subsequently moving into work.

Previous research has shown that it is often a life event or change of circumstances that enables lone parents to enter work, such as their children getting older (Sims *et al.*, 2010). Respondents who had started a new job since Wave 1 were asked whether something had changed that made it possible for them to start work at that time, and 37 per cent said that something had changed. This included:

- a suitable job coming up (for 28 per cent of those in work as a result of circumstances changing);
- children getting older (14 per cent);
- children starting school (for 13 per cent);
- finishing training or an educational course (ten per cent).

Other research has identified the financial security offered by employment to be an important trigger for lone parents starting work (see, for example, Ridge and Millar 2008).

### 3.2 Is work sustained?

The sustainability of work has been identified as a crucial factor in reducing worklessness among the population of benefit claimants. Research on lone parents has also found that more sustained work could make a substantial impact on the total number of lone parents in employment (Evans *et al.*, 2004).

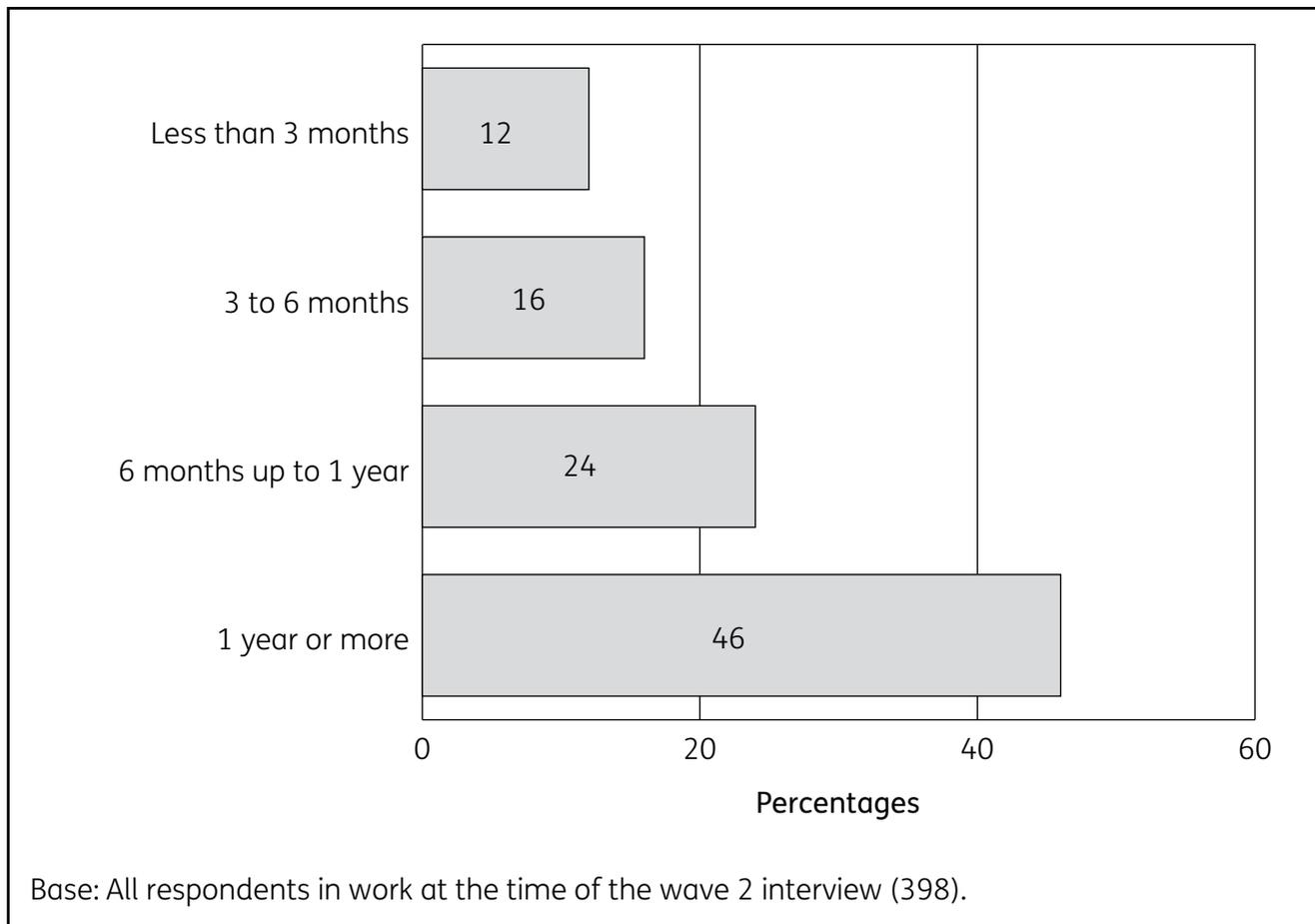
When interviewed at Wave 2 (around a year after the ending of IS eligibility), most respondents who had been in work had worked in just one job (82 per cent), while 16 per cent had been in two jobs and two per cent had worked in three or more different jobs.

The majority of respondents (84 per cent) were still in work and, as shown in Figure 3.1, many of these had been in their job for some time. Those that had been in a job for a year or more included the lone parents who had already started their job while on IS.

Only a small number of respondents (73) had left a job that they had been in since leaving IS.

Around one in three had stayed in the job for less than three months, but others had stayed in the job for a longer period of time (one in three were in the job for six months or more).

**Figure 3.1 Length of time in current job**



Overall, this analysis shows that most lone parents had managed to stay in work beyond the transitional stage from benefits to work, which can be difficult for lone parents to manage, and that many had already been in work for a year or more. However, because most respondents started work only recently, it is not possible to assess the extent to which jobs were sustained in the longer term. Previous research found that lone parents were almost twice as likely to leave their job as non-lone parents (Evans *et al.*, 2004). However, this survey is not able to assess the impact of LPO on lone parents' ability to stay in work in the longer-term.

### 3.2.1 Characteristics of lone parents in unsustained work

We now examine respondent characteristics according to whether they were still in work at Wave 2, in order to identify the characteristics associated with leaving work at an early stage.

As shown in Table 3.1, there were differences in terms of hours worked: those working longer hours were more likely to stay in work than those working fewer than 16 hours per week. In addition, those who started work after a spell on JSA or ESA were less likely to stay in work (24 per cent) than those who started the job immediately after leaving IS and those who had started working while they were still on IS.

Respondents were also less likely to stay in work if they had a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (30 per cent), particularly those with a mental-health problem, while those who were less well qualified were also less likely to remain in work (20 per cent of those who were qualified to no higher than level 1). As well as having more difficulty in sustaining work, the previous chapter showed that these sub-groups were also less likely to move into work (at all).

**Table 3.1 Profile of sustained and unsustained work**

	<i>Row percentages</i>	
	Still in work	No longer in work
	%	%
Total	84	16
Hours worked		
Fewer than 16 hours per week	75	25
16 hours per week	84	16
More than 16 hours per week	89	11
When started job		
While still on IS	85	15
Immediately after leaving IS	88	12
After spell on JSA or ESA	76	24

*Base: All respondents who had worked since end of IS claim (483)*

The main reasons why respondents left their job were that it was a fixed term or temporary job or because of redundancy (the number of respondents that left a job is too small for any further analysis).

### 3.3 Two or more jobs at the same time

Nine per cent of those who had worked since the end of their IS claim said they had worked in more than one job at the same time. This proportion was higher among those respondents who had started work while on IS (18 per cent). Among the small number of respondents that worked in more than one job at the same time, the main reasons were that they needed more money or to increase their hours so that they would move off benefits.

Although numbers are small, these findings indicate that a group of lone parents who were working fewer than 16 hours per week while claiming IS subsequently increased their hours by taking on another job, in order to move off JSA. This is discussed further below in relation to increasing hours in the same job (see Section 3.4.2).

### 3.4 Job characteristics

The majority (91 per cent) of those who had worked since the end of their IS claim worked as employees, while nine per cent were self-employed.

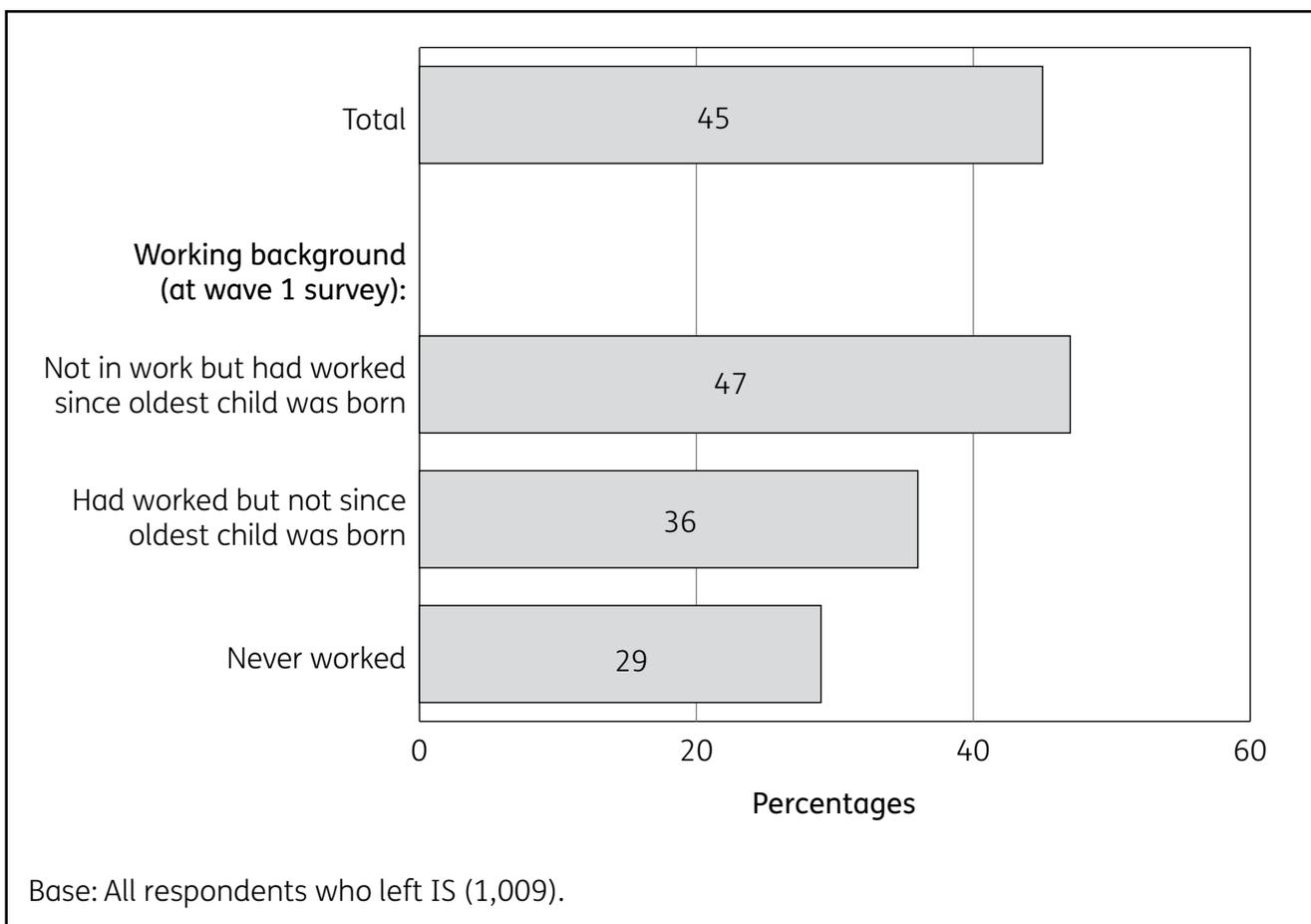
#### 3.4.1 Hours

One in five respondents who had worked since the end of their IS claim were working fewer than 16 hours per week (22 per cent), while 37 per cent were working exactly 16 hours. Around one in eight worked 30 or more hours per week (13 per cent). Around half (46 per cent) of those working fewer than 16 hours per week were claiming benefit (mostly JSA) at the same time.

### Work experience

Those with recent experience of work (as observed at the Wave 1 interview) were more likely to have gone on to work after their IS claim ended. As shown in Figure 2.6, 29 per cent of those who had never worked (at Wave 1) subsequently went into work, compared with 36 per cent who had worked but not since the birth of their oldest child, and 47 per cent of those who had worked since their oldest child was born. Those who had never worked were also more likely to have a sustained spell on JSA (41 per cent), compared with those who had not worked since the birth of their oldest child (37 per cent) and those who had worked since their oldest child was born (28 per cent).

**Figure 2.6 Proportion in work at all since IS ended, by working background**

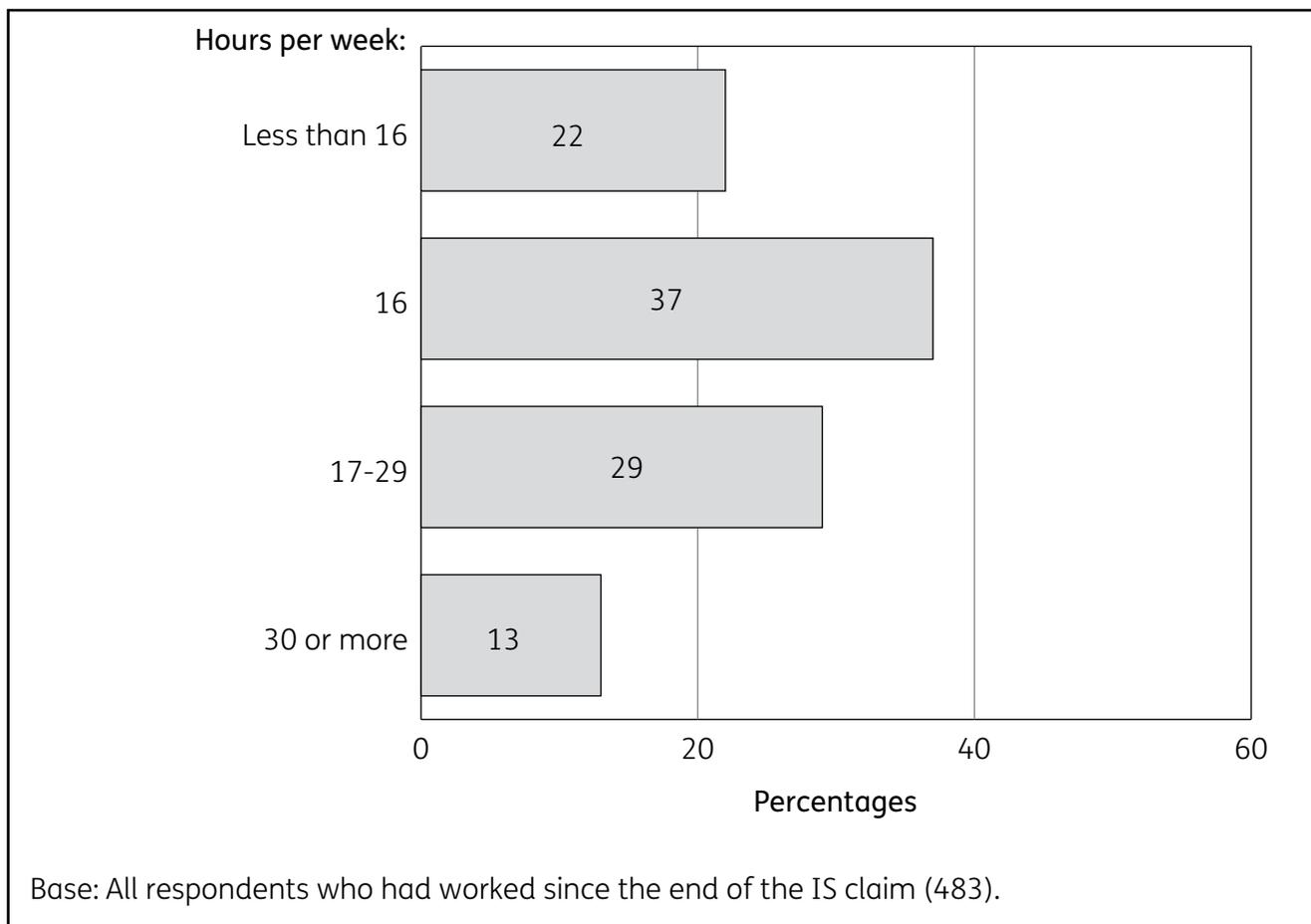


### Those in work while on IS

The Wave 1 sample included a group of respondents who were working (fewer than 16 hours per week) while claiming IS. Most of these respondents were still working at the time of the Wave 2 interview: 24 per cent had continued working while moving to JSA, while 59 per cent had stayed in work but moved off benefits. The remainder were either claiming JSA without working (11 per cent) or were not in work or on benefits (five per cent).

In total, 12 per cent of these respondents had been on the Work Programme, and eight per cent said they continued to work (fewer than 16 hours per week) while on the Work Programme.

This group of respondents is discussed further in Chapter 3 in relation to working hours.

**Figure 3.2 Hours worked**

Respondents with a dependent child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) were more likely to work fewer than 16 hours per week (32 per cent). There was also a link between hours worked and occupation, as discussed in Section 3.4.6.

If we compare the hours of these jobs with jobs that lone parents had done in the past<sup>15</sup>, we can see that they were less likely to be working 30 hours per week than in the past (15 per cent compared with 36 per cent) and more likely to be working between 16 and 29 hours (71 per cent compared with 46 per cent). The proportion working fewer than 16 hours per week was similar (13 per cent compared with 19 per cent). This corresponds with the findings from the Wave 1 report, which showed that lone parents tended to work fewer hours when they returned to work, compared with jobs they had done previously.

### 3.4.2 Increasing hours

One in six respondents (17 per cent) who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey said that they had increased their hours since they started the job.

The main reasons for increasing hours were that their employer asked them to do so or it was part of the job, to move off benefits, or because they needed more money.

<sup>15</sup> These comparisons are based on those who had worked since they left IS, and who also had a previous job since the birth of their oldest child (as described at Wave 1).

Most of the respondents who had increased their hours said that it was very or fairly easy for them to do so (73 per cent), while 27 per cent said it was very or fairly difficult. These findings (and those in the previous paragraph on reasons for increasing hours) should be treated with caution due to the small number of respondents (59).

Table 3.2 examines the lone parents who had started a job while they were still claiming IS (and therefore were working fewer than 16 hours per week at that time), and who were still in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview. This analysis is based on fewer than 100 interviews, and, as such, caution should be exercised when interpreting these data. Some of these respondents (39 per cent) were still working fewer than 16 hours per week, while the majority were working 16 hours or more per week. Previous research has considered the extent to which lone parents working fewer than 16 hours per week can use this as a stepping stone to working more hours. Iacovou and Berthoud (2000) identified a pattern in which mothers moved from not working at all, through a transitional period in a mini-job, to working 16 or more hours per week. They suggested that a gradual transition might suit some people who found it difficult to move directly from not working to a 'full-time' job. However, Hales *et al.*, (2007) found no evidence for this when analysing Families and Children Study data, and Bell *et al.*, (2007) found quantitative evidence 'inconclusive' for the role of mini-jobs as a 'stepping stone' into work of longer hours. The evidence here suggests that a reasonable proportion of lone parents who were working in mini-jobs had increased their hours, although they tended to do so by only a small amount (as shown by the large proportion working exactly 16 hours per week).

One in six of these respondents (17 per cent) said that they had either increased the hours in their job, or taken on another job, in order to work more than 16 hours per week and, therefore, move off benefits. Although this is not necessarily linked to the LPO changes, it is likely that at least some of these lone parents increased their hours in order to avoid the change to claiming JSA. Moreover, other lone parents may have been influenced by the different conditionality regimes of IS (which does not strongly encourage claimants to work for 16 hours or more) and JSA (which does).

**Table 3.2 Working hours of those who started job while on IS and still in work at Wave 2**

	%
Fewer than 16 hours per week	39
16 hours per week	34
17–29 hours per week	22
30 or more hours per week	6
Increased hours or took on second job in order to move off benefits	17
<i>Base: All who started job while on IS and still in work at Wave 2</i>	82

### 3.4.3 Hours worked compared with preferences

We can compare the hours that respondents were working (as reported at Wave 2) with their preferences before they started work (at Wave 1). This shows that respondents who said they wanted to work 30 hours or more per week were often working fewer hours than this (in 67 per cent of cases – note that this analysis is based on fewer than 100 interviews, and as such caution should be exercised when interpreting this). By contrast, those who wanted to work exactly 16 hours per week were often (in 31 per cent of cases) working a greater number of hours. There was a spread of hours worked by those who had wanted to work between 17 and 29 hours per week.

**Table 3.3 Hours worked, analysed by hours would like to work**

Working hours in job:	Hours would like to work (as stated at Wave 1)		
	30 hours or more	17–29 hours	16 hours
	%	%	%
30 hours or more per week	34	9	4
17–29 hours per week	32	38	27
16 hours per week	21	35	49
Fewer than 16 hours per week	14	18	19
<i>Base: All who worked after IS claim ended, and who were not working at Wave 1</i>	73	103	172

Note: Respondents who said that they would like to work fewer than 16 hours per week are excluded from the table, because of the small number of cases.

We can also look at the maximum number of hours that respondents said they would be prepared to work, when interviewed at Wave 1. Again, many of those who were prepared to work 30 hours or more per week had actually moved into a job with fewer hours, and the same also applied to those who were prepared to work between 17 and 29 hours. In addition, a reasonable proportion (29 per cent) of those who said they would not be prepared to work more than 16 hours per week had actually moved into a job where they were working more than 16 hours per week.

Overall, this analysis suggests that many lone parents were working fewer hours than they would like or would be prepared to work, and therefore that there is scope (at least in theory) for these lone parents to increase their working hours. In this respect, the weak labour market at the time of the interview, in early 2012, may have hampered lone parents' attempts to increase their hours. At the same time, some lone parents had managed to work longer hours than they previously said they would be prepared to do, suggesting that some lone parents were more flexible in their hours than they had initially expected.

#### 3.4.4 Working outside school hours

Among those who had worked since leaving IS, two in five respondents (41 per cent) worked during school hours only. The majority of those working fewer than 16 hours per week only worked during school hours (61 per cent), while the proportion was lower among those working 16 or more hours per week (36 per cent).

Once again, we can analyse these findings in relation to respondents' preferences before they started work (as stated at Wave 1). Most of those who said they would be prepared to work outside of school hours were doing this in their job – just 18 per cent of these respondents were only working during school hours. However, many of those who had said they would only work during school hours were actually in a job which involved working outside school hours (46 per cent). As with the analysis above on hours, this suggests that many lone parents were more flexible when taking up a job than they had previously anticipated. Note that the sub-groups used in the analysis are small (fewer than 100 respondents), so some caution should be used in interpretation.

**Table 3.4 Working hours, analysed by hours prepared to work**

Working hours in job:	When prepared to work (as stated at Wave 1)		
	Before or after school hours	School hours only	It depends
	%	%	%
In school hours only	18	52	35
Outside school hours only	42	23	29
Both in and outside school hours	37	23	35
It varies	1	3	1
<i>Base: All who worked after IS claim ended, and who were not working at Wave 1</i>	88	211	81

Column percentages

### 3.4.5 Industry sector

Respondents who had worked since the end of their IS claim were most likely to be working in the following industry sectors: wholesale, retail or repair (22 per cent), human health and social work activities (19 per cent), education (17 per cent), and accommodation and food service activities (16 per cent).

Respondents working fewer than 16 hours per week were particularly likely to be working in education (35 per cent), while those working 30 hours or more per week were more likely than other respondents to be working in human health and social work activities (29 per cent).

Comparing these jobs with work that lone parents had done in the past, the industry profile was similar, although respondents were more likely to have moved into jobs in education and in human health and social work, compared with the jobs they had done in the past.

### 3.4.6 Occupation

Previous research has shown the lone parent working population to be associated with lower-skilled occupations (see for example Maplethorpe *et al.*, 2010), and the analysis at Wave 1 showed that the jobs done by lone parents in this cohort were more likely to be in unskilled ('elementary') occupations, compared with the wider lone parent population.

Looking at the jobs that lone parents had done since leaving IS, respondents were most likely to work in elementary occupations (40 per cent), while the other common occupational groups were personal service occupations (23 per cent), and sales and customer-service occupations (19 per cent).

Compared to jobs that they had done in the past, lone parents were less likely to be in managerial positions (one per cent compared with six per cent) and were more likely to be working either in personal service occupations (23 per cent compared with 15 per cent) or in elementary occupations (36 per cent compared with 29 per cent).

There was a link between hours worked and occupation. Jobs in higher Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) groups, such as associate professional and technical occupations or personal service occupations, were more likely to be full-time jobs, while those in lower SOC groups were more likely to be for fewer than 16 hours per week. For example, 26 per cent of those working in elementary occupations worked for fewer than 16 hours per week, as did 25 per cent of those working in sales and customer-service jobs.

Related to this, the proportion working in elementary occupations was highest among those who had started their job while they were still on IS (56 per cent); this group was more likely than other respondents to work fewer than 16 hours per week.

There was also a link between SOC groups and level of qualification. Those qualified to level 4 or above were more likely to be in associate professional and technical occupations and in administrative and secretarial occupations, while the proportion working in elementary occupations ranged from 57 per cent among those qualified to no more than level 1, 42 per cent qualified to level 2, 26 per cent qualified to level 3, and just 11 per cent qualified to level 4 or above.

The findings on occupational level and hours worked reflect previous research, which has found that there are fewer part-time jobs available in higher level occupations (Grant *et al.*, 2005). A recent report also found a dearth of well-paid, part-time roles, alongside large numbers of women able to fill higher paid roles (Stewart *et al.*, 2012).

### 3.4.7 Permanent and temporary jobs

The vast majority (86 per cent) of respondents worked in permanent jobs, while nine per cent were in temporary jobs and five per cent had fixed term contracts. Lone parents were more likely to be in permanent jobs than they had been in the past (79 per cent in previous jobs), despite the fact that previous jobs were often in higher occupations.

### 3.4.8 Pay

One in three respondents (33 per cent) said that their gross pay was less than £6 per hour, while around one in four (24 per cent) said that their gross pay was around the amount of the National Minimum Wage<sup>16</sup>, which was £6.08 per hour at the time of the survey. Details on hourly pay are shown in Figure 3.3.

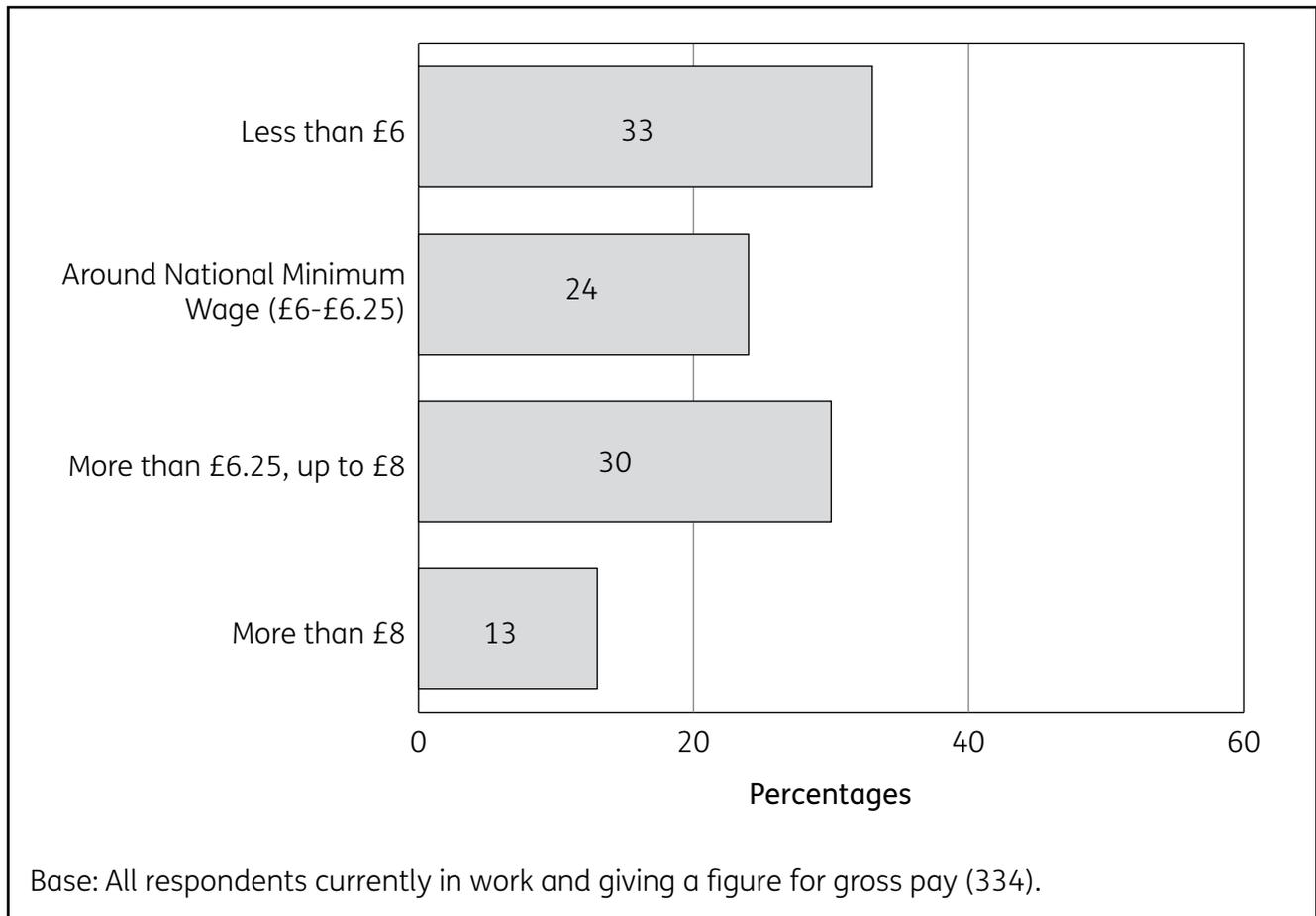
As well as confirming that many lone parents were working in poorly paid jobs, this analysis suggests that a large proportion were being paid less than the National Minimum Wage. The precise figures should be treated with a degree of caution, because survey respondents can be inaccurate in providing financial details. It is also possible that, despite the question wording, some respondents gave a figure for 'net' pay rather than 'gross' pay.

Those working in elementary occupations were most likely to be earning less than £6 per hour (44 per cent), as were those who only worked during school hours (42 per cent).

In total, 40 per cent of respondents were earning less than £100 per week in their job, while 40 per cent were earning between £100 and £150. The remaining 20 per cent were earning more than £150 per week.

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<sup>16</sup> Respondents were categorised as having gross pay at around the amount of the National Minimum Wage if they gave a figure of between £6 and £6.25; this allows some margin around the exact figure of £6.08.

**Figure 3.3 Hourly pay**

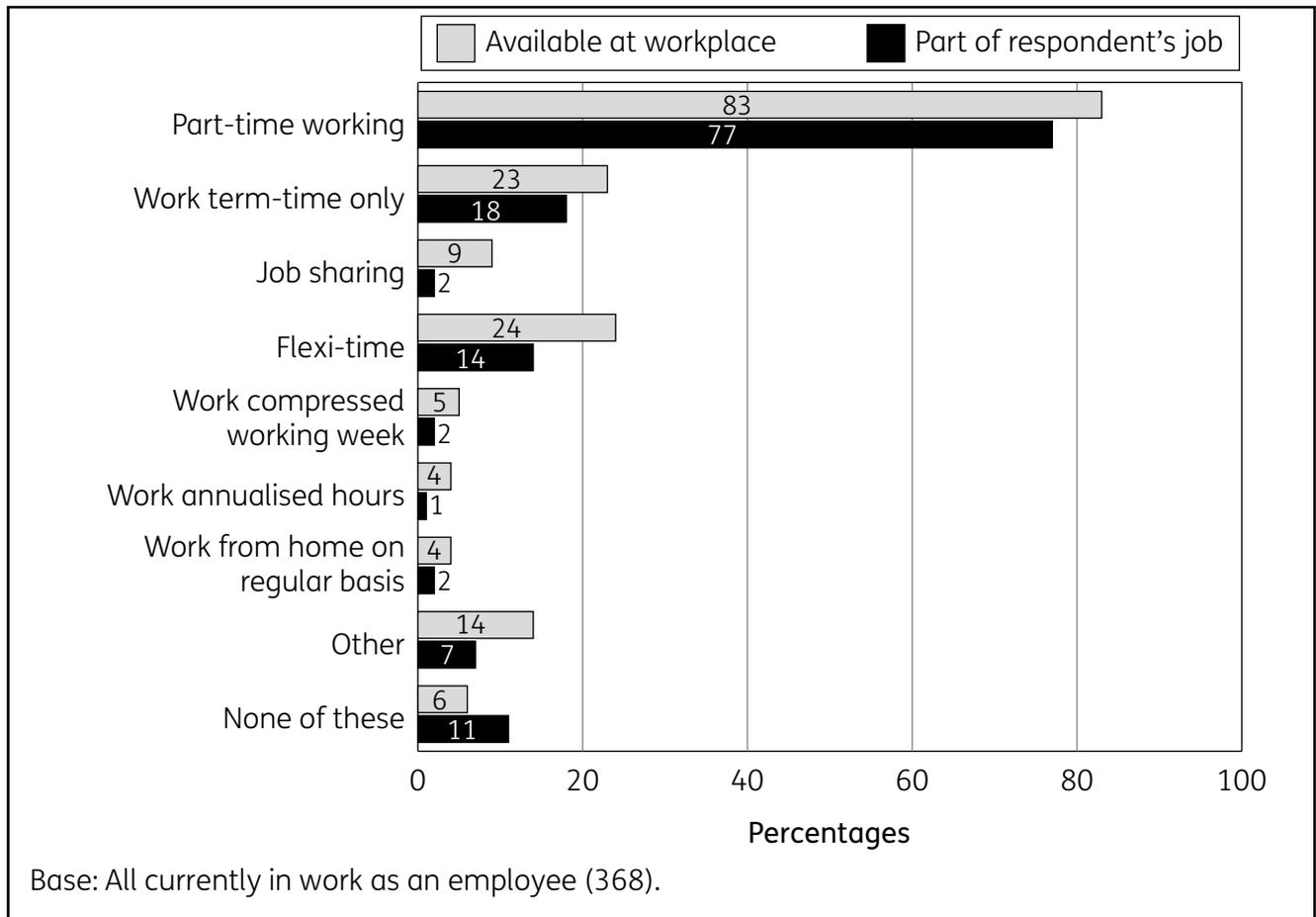
### 3.4.9 Working arrangements

Flexible working arrangements have become more prevalent in recent years, and this has also been an important area of policy focus. Recent estimates suggest that 91 per cent of employees have access to at least one form of flexible working – most commonly part-time hours, flexi-time and job-sharing (Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), 2010b). It is also clear from previous research that lone parents' decisions about work can also be influenced by employers' flexibility (Bell *et al.*, 2005). In addition, the availability of flexible and family-friendly working arrangements can be a key element in lone parents' ability to balance work and care successfully, and therefore sustain employment (see for example, Ridge and Millar, 2008; Griffiths and Durkin, 2007).

Respondents who were working as an employee at the time of the Wave 2 interview were asked about the flexible working arrangements that were available at their workplace. In addition to part-time working, around one in four said that job-sharing was available, and a similar proportion said that it was possible to work in the term-time only.

The proportion of respondents who actually took advantage of these arrangements was smaller, although 38 per cent said that their job involved at least one of these types of flexible working (excluding part-time work).

**Figure 3.4 Availability of flexible working arrangements, and whether part of job**



Of those currently working as an employee, 23 per cent said that they would prefer a different working arrangement. The most common reason why respondents did not already work like this was because their current job did not allow this arrangement or suit it.<sup>17</sup>

The preference for a different working arrangement was higher among those working more hours (the proportion starts to increase once respondents work more than 24 hours per week). The most popular arrangement was flexi-time (mentioned by 41 per cent of those wanting a different arrangement).

Around three-quarters of current employees (74 per cent) said that their job included paid holidays, but only half (48 per cent) had sick pay and around one-third (36 per cent) said their employer offered a pension. It was very uncommon for employers to have a crèche or nursery at the workplace (just one per cent).

<sup>17</sup> Under the Right to Request flexible working legislation, employees are entitled to request a different working arrangement, although employers are under no obligation to grant permission.

**Table 3.5 Whether current employer offers any of the following benefits for any employees**

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	<b>%</b>
Pension	36
Paid holidays	74
Sick pay	48
A car or van for your own private use	1
Creche or nursery at your workplace	1
Trade union membership	17
None of these	15
Don't know	4
<i>Base: All currently in work as an employee</i>	<i>368</i>

In the qualitative research (Lane *et al.*, 2011), lone parents who had moved into work felt that working had a positive effect on their lives, although they sometimes found it stressful combining work and family responsibilities. In the survey, around half of respondents who were currently working said that their job prevented them from giving the time they wanted to their children – at least some of the time (47 per cent). Findings vary according to the number of hours worked. Only 26 per cent of those working fewer than 16 hours per week said that that their job prevents them from giving the time they wanted to their children at least sometimes (note the small sample size of 80 respondents for this group), compared with 46 per cent of those working 16 hours per week and 60 per cent of those working more than 16 hours or more per week. At the same time, a proportion of those working more than 16 hours per week said that their job never prevented them from giving the time they wanted to their children (24 per cent), similar to the proportion who said that this happened all the time or often (27 per cent).

As was the case at Wave 1, the findings suggest that lone parents tend to find the balance between work and family life to be better when they work fewer than 16 hours per week rather than 16 hours or more. Given the importance of balancing work and family, this suggests that lone parents will often need encouragement and support to start work of 16 hours or more per week, and to stay in that work. This has implications for the introduction of Universal Credit, as discussed in the conclusions section (Chapter 9).

**Table 3.6 Does a job prevent lone parents giving the time they want to their children?**

	<i>Column percentages</i>			
	<b>Working more than 16 hours per week</b>	<b>Working 16 hours per week</b>	<b>Working fewer than 16 hours per week</b>	<b>Total</b>
	%	%	%	%
Always	14	9	6	10
Often	13	8	4	9
Sometimes	33	29	16	28
Hardly ever	16	21	8	16
Never	24	34	66	36
Don't know	1	0	0	*
<i>Base: All currently in work</i>	178	149	80	407

Current employees were also asked whether they had taken any steps to change their work situation or earnings since they started their job. Just over half said they had done something, such as trying to increase their hours (27 per cent), keep the same hours but work them in a more flexible way (19 per cent) and trying to get a better job with a different employer (15 per cent).

**Table 3.7 Whether tried to change work situation or earnings**

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	%
Tried to increase hours worked	27
Tried to reduce hours worked	6
Tried to keep hours the same but work in a more flexible way	19
Tried to get a pay rise	6
Tried to change to a different sort of work with the same employer	7
Tried to get a better job with a different employer	15
Tried to negotiate better benefits	6
None of these	45
<i>Base: All currently in work as an employee</i>	368

Those currently working fewer than 16 hours per week were particularly likely to say they had tried to increase the hours they worked (53 per cent). This finding, as well as the overall proportion who said they had tried to increase their hours, confirms that many respondents were working fewer hours per week than they would prefer. In addition, most of the respondents who said they had tried to increase their hours had not actually managed to do so (58 per cent). This indicates that it is not always possible for lone parents to work longer hours, even when they want to. This is likely to have been in part affected by the challenging labour market in the period leading up to interviews in early 2012. Again, this has implications for the introduction of Universal Credit, which will aim to increase the financial incentives for people to work longer hours. These findings suggest that there may be practical obstacles to lone parents being able to do this, irrespective of the financial incentives.

Overall, the findings on working arrangements indicate that some employers are offering flexible working arrangements to lone parents. However, other findings from the survey show that current working arrangements can make it difficult for lone parents to stay in work: 13 per cent of those in work said that a big barrier to staying in work was the pressure in their job to work longer hours, stay late or do overtime, while nine per cent said that a big barrier was that their employer was not very family friendly (discussed further in Chapter 6).

### **3.4.10 Advancement**

A third of lone parents who were working as an employee at the time of the survey said that they wanted to 'get on and improve their pay and terms as quickly as possible' (34 per cent), while the majority (66 per cent) said they wanted to 'stay as they are for now'. The desire to get on and improve pay and terms increased with the number of hours worked: 65 per cent of those working 30 hours or more per week said they wanted to do this. The proportion also increased with qualification level, from 25 per cent of those qualified to level 1 or below, to 35 per cent of those qualified to level 2, and 43 per cent of those qualified to level 3 or above.

As noted in the Wave 1 report, the desire to progress in a job can be constrained by caring responsibilities (affecting the hours that lone parents can work) and the age of children; the employment retention and advancement evaluation found that lone parents were likely to be more interested in advancement as their children got older (Hoggart *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the possibility of advancement depends on the nature of the job. Ridge and Millar (2008) found that opportunities for advancement 'were restricted by the nature of employment which often had little scope for wage enhancement and/or advancement of any kind'. As seen above, many lone parents in this survey were working in elementary occupations.

### **3.4.11 Staying in work or getting another job**

The majority of respondents who were working at the time of the Wave 2 survey said that it was very or fairly easy (71 per cent) for them to stay in their job, while just 11 per cent said that it was difficult. There were no differences in relation to hours worked.

However, respondents were less optimistic about the possibility of getting another job if their current one fell through. Half (51 per cent) said it was very or fairly likely that they would be able to get another job, but 43 per cent said it was unlikely or very unlikely. Again, there were no differences in the findings in relation to hours worked. However, respondents were more likely to say they would be able to get another job if they used childcare at all when they were working (55 per cent very/fairly likely compared with 38 per cent of those who did not use childcare). This suggests that access to childcare can increase lone parents' confidence in getting another job. This seems to confirm the finding noted in Chapter 1 on destinations, that lone parents who already had childcare arrangements in place were more likely to move into work.

Those with higher qualifications were also more inclined to say that they would be able to get another job; this is particularly pronounced in terms of those who said they would be very likely to get another job: 28 per cent of those qualified to level 3, falling to 16 per cent among those qualified to level 2 and just nine per cent of those qualified to level 1 or below.

### 3.5 Summary

- Almost half of lone parents (45 per cent) had worked at some point since the end of their IS claim. In some cases (17 per cent), this work had started while they were still claiming IS.
- Most respondents were still in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview (84 per cent), and the majority of these had been in their job for at least six months. One in six (16 per cent) had stopped working, most commonly because they had been in a temporary or fixed term job, or because of redundancy.
- In most cases, those who had worked since the end of their IS claim were working as employees, while nine per cent were self-employed. Most respondents (86 per cent) were in permanent jobs.
- One in eight respondents (13 per cent) were working 30 hours or more per week, while 29 per cent were working between 17 and 29 hours, and 37 per cent exactly 16 hours per week. One in five (22 per cent) were working fewer than 16 hours per week. One in six respondents (17 per cent) who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview said they had increased their hours since they started the job.
- Where respondents had started a job while they were on IS, and were still working at the time of the Wave 2 interview, 39 per cent were still working fewer than 16 hours per week, while 34 per cent were working exactly 16 hours per week. Around one in four (28 per cent) were now working more than 16 hours per week. In 17 per cent of cases, these respondents had either increased their hours or taken on a second job in order to move off benefits.
- Those who had worked since leaving IS were mainly in low-skilled occupations (40 per cent in elementary occupations and 23 per cent personal service occupations). More skilled jobs were more likely to involve a greater number of hours per week. Around one in three of those in work (33 per cent) said that they were paid less than £6 per hour (the National Minimum Wage at the time of the survey was £6.08 per hour).
- In addition to part-time working, 38 per cent of lone parents said that some kind of flexible working was part of their job, such as working only in term-time (18 per cent) or flexi-time (14 per cent). However, one-quarter (23 per cent) said that they would prefer a different working arrangement, most commonly flexi-time.
- Those working more than 16 hours or more per week had greater problems balancing work and family: 60 per cent said that sometimes their job prevented them from giving their children the time they wanted to.
- However, around one in four employees (27 per cent) said that they had tried to increase the hours they worked, and this was higher (53 per cent) among those who were working fewer than 16 hours per week. Where respondents had tried to increase their hours, 42 per cent had managed to do so.
- One in three said they wanted to get on and improve their pay and terms as quickly as possible (34 per cent), while the remainder wanted to stay as they were.
- The majority of those in work said that it was very or fairly easy for them to stay in their job (71 per cent), while a smaller proportion (51 per cent) said that it was at least fairly likely that they would be able to get another job if their current one fell through.

## 4 Childcare

The availability of good quality, reliable, accessible and affordable childcare has typically been construed as a cornerstone of a welfare system that would make work possible for lone parents. Reviews of the effectiveness of active labour market interventions in increasing the rate of lone parents' employment have typically indicated that provision of childcare is a vital part of these programmes (Harker, 2006; Freud, 2007).

The survey, therefore, includes a comprehensive examination of childcare for lone parents affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO). The Wave 1 report looked at the childcare arrangements of all lone parents in the survey. It found a high level of use of informal childcare, particularly grandparents, among those both in and out of work. This is similar to the wider population of lone parents and parents generally.

The Wave 2 survey focuses on lone parents who were in work, in order to examine their childcare arrangements in more detail. In this chapter, we look at the childcare arrangements that working lone parents use. The chapter also covers lone parents' future expectations for childcare in relation to work, and their awareness of childcare provided by schools. Chapter 6 places attitudes towards childcare in a more general context, by considering lone parents' attitudes to work and barriers to work, with childcare issues included alongside other attitudes and constraints.

The issues relating to childcare differ greatly according to children's ages, particularly in relation to formal childcare. It is, therefore, important to stress that the respondents included in this survey mostly had school-age children only. Therefore, while the findings provide a clear assessment of childcare issues for the lone parents affected by LPO, these issues differ from many previous studies of lone parents (which often focus on childcare for under fives).

### 4.1 Current arrangements: overall use of childcare

The findings on current childcare arrangements are limited to those respondents who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey. Questions asked respondents about their childcare arrangements while they were working. This is in contrast to the Wave 1 survey, which asked all respondents about their childcare arrangements, and included childcare used at any time.

Respondents who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey were firstly asked about their current use of childcare while in work. As part of the interview, respondents were read a definition of childcare: *'By childcare, I mean care carried out by anyone other than yourself or your partner (if any partner in household)'*. At the same time, respondents were handed a card listing the different types of childcare that could be considered part of this definition (the list corresponds to the items shown in Table 4.2).

Overall, 73 per cent of working lone parents said they used childcare of some kind during their time at work. Where respondents did not use any childcare, they were asked what they did instead. Most said they only worked during school hours (75 per cent).

Use of childcare steadily increased with hours worked (see Table 4.1). Only around half (51 per cent) of those working fewer than 16 hours per week used any form of childcare while they were in work (note the small sample size for this group), compared with 83 per cent of those working more than 16 hours per week. Related to this, only 53 per cent of respondents who worked during school hours only used childcare, compared with 87 per cent of those who worked outside school hours.

### 4.1.1 Formal and informal childcare

Different types of childcare can be classified as ‘formal’ or ‘informal’; a breakdown of the types of formal and informal childcare can be seen in Table 4.2. Overall, respondents were more likely to use informal than formal childcare while they were working (63 per cent compared with 30 per cent). This pattern was also seen at Wave 1 for all lone parents (whether working or not), and the same overall pattern applies to the wider population of lone parents and parents in couples. In other words, the greater use of informal rather than formal childcare is common to all parents, and is not particular to the group covered by this survey.

The main difference between those working more than 16 hours per week and those working fewer hours was the larger proportion using both formal and informal childcare: 28 per cent of those working more than 16 hours or more per week, compared with 14 per cent of those working 16 hours per week and nine per cent working fewer than 16 hours (again, note the small sample size for this last group). This suggests that, as hours increase, a package of childcare needs to be in place for many lone parents.

Related to this pattern by hours, use of both formal and informal childcare was higher among lone parents who were qualified to level 4 or above (41 per cent) and also those working in higher Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) groups. Both of these sub-groups were working a relatively large number of hours per week.

Use of formal childcare was also higher among those who only had primary school aged children; this was most commonly breakfast or after-school clubs.

There was no evidence of different childcare patterns among those that had increased their working hours while in their current job, or among those who had flexible working arrangements.

**Table 4.1 Summary of childcare use**

	<i>Column percentages</i>			
	<b>All in work</b>	<b>Working more than 16 hours/ week</b>	<b>Working 16 hours/week</b>	<b>Working fewer than 16 hours/ week</b>
	%	%	%	%
Use any childcare:	73	83	73	51
Any formal childcare	30	38	26	17
Any informal childcare	63	73	61	43
Formal childcare only	10	10	12	8
Informal childcare only	44	45	47	33
Both formal and informal childcare	19	28	14	9
<i>Base: All respondents in work at time of Wave 2 interview</i>	407	178	149	80

### 4.1.2 Types of childcare used

Table 4.2 shows the individual types of childcare used by respondents while they were working. The figures are based on those who used childcare at all. Grandparents were the most frequently used type of childcare, with ex-partners, older siblings, other relatives and friends/neighbours all being used by at least one in six respondents. The proportions using different types of informal childcare were broadly similar according to the number of hours worked.

These findings on the use of informal childcare confirm the importance of family and close friends to this group of lone parents. When considering barriers to work, many non-working respondents said they were only prepared to leave their children with family or close friends when they were working (34 per cent), and where family and friends were not available for childcare this was seen as one of their biggest barriers to work (33 per cent); see Chapter 6 for more details.

In particular, previous research confirms the prominent role played by grandparents. The Families and Children Study (2008) data show grandparents as the most common type of childcare across all age groups and different types of family. Other research has found that, for lone parents, *'grandparents played a key role in providing support across a range of areas including childcare, financial and emotional support'* (Ridge and Millar, 2008).

Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were the most commonly used type of formal childcare. This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary school age children, with virtually no pre-school children.<sup>18</sup> The use of breakfast and after-school clubs was very similar by working hours. However, those working more hours were much more likely to use holiday clubs (16 per cent of those working more than 16 hours per week).

Some types of informal childcare were used more by those who had been in their job for less than six months: the ex-partner (23 per cent), other relatives (28 per cent) and friends or neighbours (31 per cent). This suggests that these informal networks are particularly important for lone parents in the early stages of a new job.

The use of grandparents was particularly high where respondents had a child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) (68 per cent) and those who had only one dependent child (59 per cent).

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<sup>18</sup> Eight respondents (two per cent of those in work) had a new child aged one or under at the time of the wave 2 survey.

**Table 4.2** Types of childcare used, among childcare users

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>		
	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Working more than 16 hours/ week %</b>	<b>Working 16 hours/week or less %</b>	<b>Total %</b>
<b>Formal childcare</b>			
Nanny or au pair or childcarer in the home	1	2	1
Baby-sitter who came to home	2	1	2
Breakfast club or after-school club, on school/nursery school site	23	19	21
Breakfast club or after-school club, not on school/nursery school site	6	6	6
Holiday club/scheme	16	6	11
Other childcare provider	8	6	7
<b>Informal childcare</b>			
My ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's non resident parent	19	12	16
The child's grandparent(s)	53	51	52
The child's older brother/sister	16	20	18
Another relative	26	19	22
A friend or neighbour	26	24	25
<i>Base: All working respondents using childcare</i>	<i>153</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>309</i>

In addition to the types of childcare shown above, six per cent of working lone parents said that their employer provided childcare of some kind or offered to help to pay for the cost of childcare.

### 4.1.3 Hours of childcare

The survey asked about the amount of time spent in childcare per child per week, both during term-time and school holidays. As with other questions, this focused on childcare while the respondent was actually working.

Table 4.3 shows the mean number of hours spent on childcare per week – both overall and for individual types of childcare. Figures show the mean number of hours for **all** respondents using childcare (of any type). This shows how the total childcare package was typically made up. It is not possible to analyse hours based on users of each individual type of childcare, as the numbers of respondents are too small. In general, users of each type of childcare typically used them for around five to ten hours per week.

The figures indicate that, overall, users of childcare used around 11 hours of childcare per week in term-time and nearly 17 in school holidays, and that this was made up predominantly of informal childcare. This was due to the greater overall use of informal rather than formal childcare (as discussed previously). In particular, childcare provided by grandparents accounted for a large proportion of childcare hours overall.

The Wave 1 survey (covering all respondents, including those not in work) observed a large number of hours of childcare provided by the ex-partner. However, this was less true at Wave 2, which focused on childcare during working time. The average number of hours provided by the ex-partner was no higher than for other types of informal childcare. At Wave 1, the question was posed about

the role of the ex-partner in helping lone parents to work or work more hours. This wave suggests that the ex-partner plays no bigger a role than other types of childcare, and is less important than the role of grandparents.

**Table 4.3 Mean number of hours per week of childcare**

Mean number of hours per child	All respondents using childcare	
	Term-time	School holidays
Formal childcare	2.20	2.95
Nanny, au pair or childcarer in the home	0.05	0.04
Babysitter who came to home	0.06	0.08
Breakfast club or after-school club, on school/nursery school site	1.29	0.70
Breakfast club or after-school club, not on school/nursery school site	0.50	0.11
Holiday club/scheme	0.30	2.02
<b>Informal childcare</b>	<b>9.37</b>	<b>13.96</b>
My ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's non resident parent	1.04	1.21
The child's grandparent(s)	4.73	7.94
The child's older brother/sister	1.24	1.68
Another relative	1.24	1.88
A friend or neighbour	1.12	1.25
<b>All childcare</b>	<b>11.57</b>	<b>16.92</b>

*Base: All respondents using any childcare (309)*

Note: the hours given for breakfast or after-school clubs in school holidays are likely to be an over-estimate. Some respondents said that their childcare arrangements were the same in school term-time and in school holidays, including hours of breakfast or after-school clubs; however, it is likely that these hours relate only to term-time.

#### 4.1.4 Payment for childcare

There has been a strong policy emphasis on providing help with the affordability of childcare, particularly for those on low incomes. This includes tax credits: Child Tax Credit, a means tested annual amount paid directly to parents, and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, which parents can apply for if they are using registered childcare (so excluding informal help from family/friends).

In this survey, around one in three lone parents that used childcare while they were working said they had to pay for at least some of it (31 per cent). While payment for informal childcare was unusual (eight per cent of those using informal childcare paid for it), more than half had paid for formal childcare (60 per cent of those using formal childcare). These figures are broadly similar to those obtained at Wave 1 for all lone parents (whether in work or not), and therefore (as reported at Wave 1) they are similar to the figures for the wider population of parents.

**Table 4.4 Whether childcare users paid for each type of childcare**

	<b>%</b>	<i>Base: All using each type of childcare</i>
Formal childcare	60	122
Informal childcare	8	259
All childcare	31	300

*Base: All using each type of childcare*

As well as payment for childcare, the survey asked whether lone parents did anything else in return for the informal childcare they received. Overall, 62 per cent of those using informal childcare while at work said they did something in return for at least part of the childcare they received. This was most likely to happen when respondents had help with childcare from another relative or friends and neighbours; specifically, 45 per cent of those using friends or neighbours for childcare said they looked after their children in return, as did 37 per cent using other relatives for childcare. Given the fairly high proportion of lone parents using these types of childcare, this suggests that reciprocal arrangements with friends and neighbours form an important part of the overall childcare package for many lone parents in the survey. A similar pattern was observed at Wave 1 for all lone parents (including those who were not in work).

## 4.2 Previous childcare arrangements

Respondents who were not in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey, but had worked since leaving Income Support (IS), were asked about the childcare arrangements in their most recent job. Because only 55 respondents were asked this question, it is not possible to conduct detailed analysis. However, it would appear that the proportion who used some form of childcare in their job was similar to those who were still in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey. In other words, there is no evidence from the survey that childcare arrangements (or a lack of them) had any impact on lone parents' leaving work.

## 4.3 Whether childcare arrangements break down

Respondents who were either in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey, or had worked since they left IS, were asked how often their childcare arrangements broke down. The majority said that they rarely broke down (74 per cent), although four per cent said they often broke down and 22 per cent said they sometimes did.

There were no discernible differences by hours or type of childcare, although those with just one dependent child were less likely to say that their arrangements broke down, compared with respondents with two or more children.

Among respondents who said that their childcare arrangements broke down often or sometimes, nine per cent said that it made it very difficult for them to stay in their job, while 36 per cent said it made it fairly difficult.

## 4.4 Future childcare arrangements

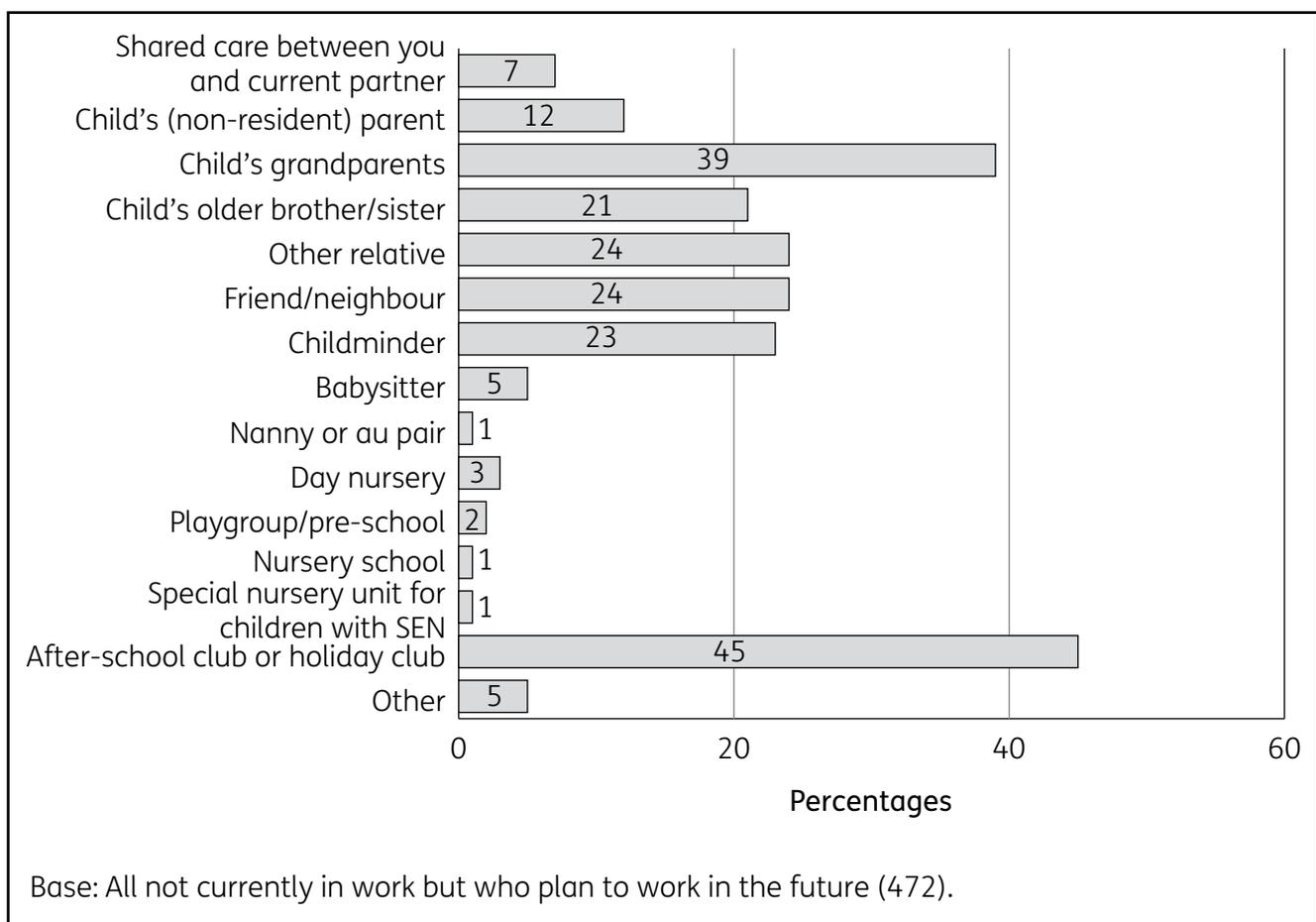
If respondents were not currently working but planned to work in the future, they were asked what types of arrangement they thought they would use when they moved into work.

Respondents expressed a strong interest in after-school or holiday clubs (see Figure 4.1). As was the case at Wave 1, interest in using after-school or holiday clubs was strongest among more highly qualified respondents (50 per cent of those qualified to Level 2 or above).

Taken at face value, the findings suggest a large potential take-up of after-school or holiday clubs. However, this is a hypothetical question, and may reflect an interest in the principle of after-school or holiday clubs, rather than a firm intention to use them.

Nevertheless, the survey findings suggest that there may be scope for encouraging more lone parents to use this type of childcare in the future, particularly if awareness can be increased (see below for findings on awareness of after-school and holiday clubs).

**Figure 4.1 Intentions for future childcare**



### 4.5 Awareness of childcare provided by schools

All respondents in the survey, other than those who were currently using breakfast/after-school clubs while at work, were asked if they were aware of these types of childcare. The majority (71 per cent) said they were aware of them, with awareness lower among:

- lone parents whose first language was not English (52 per cent);
- those in rural areas (60 per cent);
- respondents that had never worked (62 per cent).

Among those in work, awareness of breakfast or after-school clubs was lower among those working fewer than 16 hours per week than those working a greater number of hours.

Awareness of breakfast or after-school clubs was higher among those who had been on the Work Programme, although it is not clear whether this was owing to information received as part of their time on the Work Programme.

All respondents who did not currently use a holiday club while at work were also asked if they were aware of this type of childcare. Just 23 per cent said they were aware of it, and this was very similar across different sub-groups.

These findings suggest that an increase in awareness (particularly for holiday clubs, where awareness is relatively low) may encourage lone parents to make more use of them in the future. This is confirmed by the interest expressed by lone parents for using these types of childcare in the future (as noted in Section 4.4), and findings from the LPO qualitative research, which reported positive experiences and attitudes towards breakfast and after-school clubs, and a general softening in lone parents' attitudes towards formal childcare, in comparison to the more negative views observed previously (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

As noted at Wave 1, the role of holiday clubs is also important, as the LPO qualitative research identified a lack of school holiday childcare, describing this as a '*key gap in provision that could limit parents' job prospects*' (Gloster *et al.*, 2010).

### 4.6 Childcare advice from Jobcentre Plus

The survey explored lone parents' recollections of discussions they had had about childcare at Jobcentre Plus.

Around half of lone parents who had been on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) (47 per cent) said they had discussed childcare during their claim. This was most likely to be discussion about the availability of different types of formal childcare in the area, or financial help with childcare costs that might be available if they started work or training. These figures were similar for lone parents who had been on the Work Programme.

Respondents who had been on Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) were much less likely to have discussed childcare during their claim (11 per cent), although this analysis should be treated with caution owing to the small number of respondents (72). Among lone parents had been on both JSA and ESA since leaving IS, 31 per cent discussed childcare while on one or other of the benefits.

The evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus Offer has found that there generally tends to be very limited discussion of childcare support by Jobcentre Plus advisers, but that lone parents were more likely than other parents to have discussed childcare with staff (Coulter *et al.*, 2012).

**Table 4.6 Discussion of childcare support**

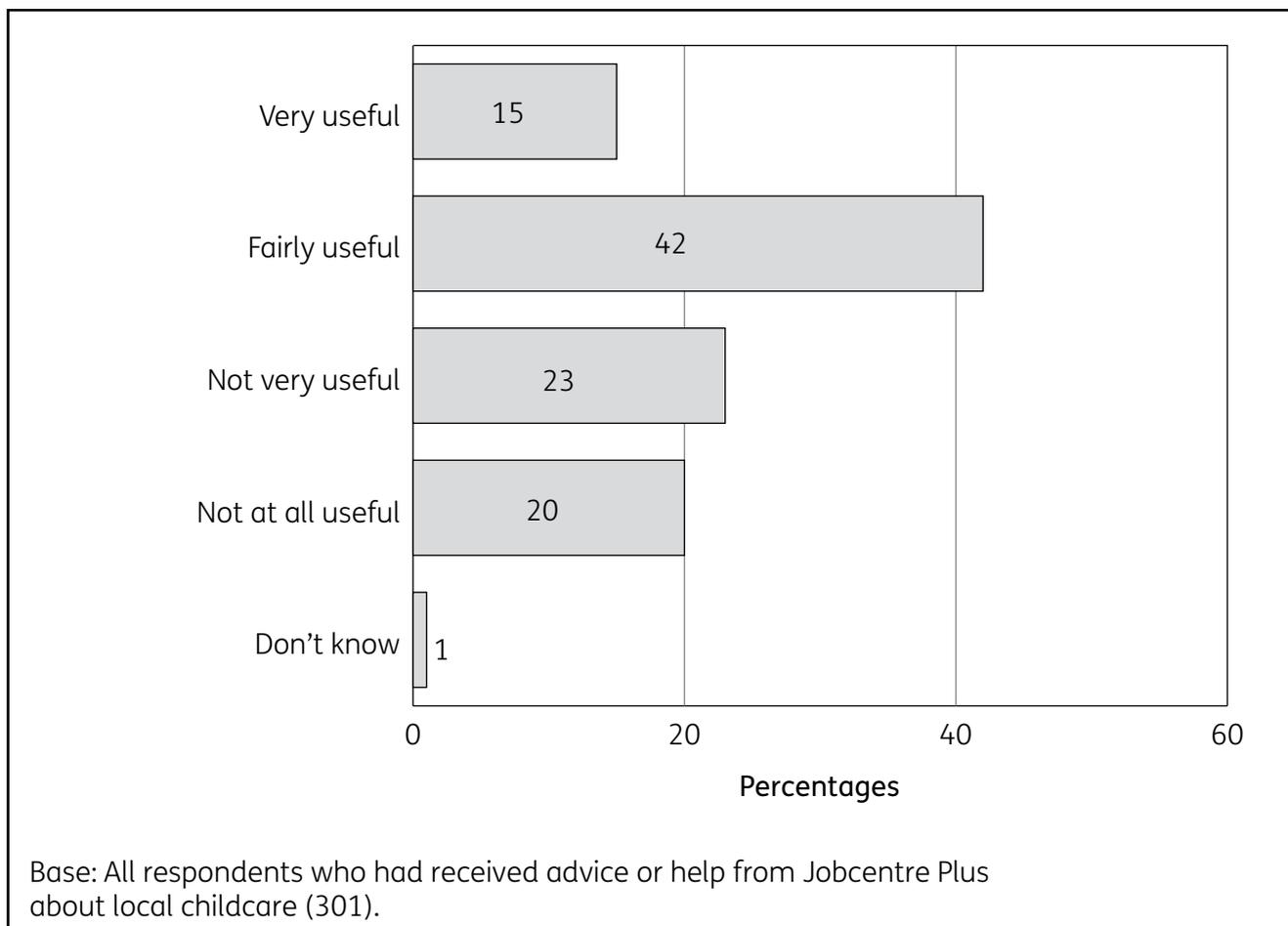
	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Benefit</b>		
	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>	<b>Both JSA and ESA %</b>
Availability of different types of formal childcare in your area	33	7	21
The advantages of using formal childcare	7	1	6
Financial help with childcare costs that may be available if/when you start work or training	29	7	20
Where to go for further information about childcare in your local area	13	3	9
Any	47	11	31
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>

Of those that had received childcare advice, 57 per cent said it was very or fairly useful, while 43 per cent said it was not useful (see Figure 4.1).

Respondents were less positive about the advice they received if they had an LSI (51 per cent of whom did not find the advice useful). Respondents who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 survey (i.e. those who had moved off JSA or ESA into work) were also less positive (50 per cent said the advice was not useful, compared with 38 per cent of those not in work).

The qualitative research found that lone parents who had spoken to staff about childcare had often been given a leaflet about local childcare, which they found helpful. Where information was not helpful, this tended to be a reflection of a problem with childcare locally rather than the information from Jobcentre Plus (Lane *et al.*, 2011). However, previous research on the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and related policies for couple parents noted that ‘*good quality information and advice about the availability of local childcare and any help towards paying for it, was said to be limited*’ (Griffiths, 2011).

If respondents had not discussed childcare during their claim, they were asked whether they would like to get childcare advice from Jobcentre Plus. Over one-third of lone parents who had been on JSA said that they would like to get childcare advice (39 per cent if JSA only and 36 per cent if they had been on JSA and ESA). This proportion was lower among respondents who had been on ESA but not JSA (17 per cent).

**Figure 4.2 Perception of advice or help from Jobcentre Plus about local childcare**

Respondents who had received childcare advice were asked how much they knew about various issues. The findings are shown in Table 4.7. In general, respondents were approximately evenly split between those that knew a lot or a fair amount about the issues, and those who said they knew just a little or nothing about them. This suggests that the advice given by Jobcentre Plus varied in the amount of detail it contained.

**Table 4.7 Knowledge of childcare help and support**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Where to get advice about availability of different types of childcare</b>	<b>Financial support that is available through tax credits for formal childcare</b>	<b>Help with childcare costs from Jobcentre Plus</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Know a lot	13	11	8
Know a fair amount	39	33	25
Know just a little	37	36	38
Know nothing about it	11	20	28

Base: All who have had childcare advice while on JSA or ESA (301)

## 4.7 Summary

- Around three in four lone parents (73 per cent) said that they used some form of childcare during their time at work. This was higher among those working more hours, ranging from 51 per cent of those working fewer than 16 hours per week, to 83 per cent of those working more than 16 hours per week.
- An increase in working hours also saw a greater likelihood of using both formal and informal childcare. Overall, 63 per cent of respondents used informal childcare while they were working, and 30 per cent used formal childcare.
- Grandparents were the most commonly used type of childcare (used by 52 per cent of all childcare users), and accounted for a large proportion of the total childcare hours. Formal childcare was most likely to be breakfast or after-school clubs (21 per cent on school site, six per cent off site).
- Over half (60 per cent) paid for formal childcare, while eight per cent paid for informal childcare. Reciprocal arrangements – looking after children in return – were also common in informal childcare, particularly among other relatives (outside the immediately family) or friends and neighbours.
- Around one in four lone parents said that their childcare arrangements broke down often or sometimes (26 per cent), and 43 per cent of these respondents said that this made it very or fairly difficult for them to stay in their job.
- Where respondents were not currently working but planned to work in the future, there was a strong interest in using after-school or holiday clubs when they moved into work (among 45 per cent). The majority of respondents (who did not already use them) were aware of breakfast or after school clubs (71 per cent), although awareness of holiday clubs was lower (23 per cent of non-users).
- Around half of lone parents who had been on JSA said that they had discussed childcare during their claim (47 per cent), but this was much lower among those that had claimed ESA (11 per cent of those that had claimed ESA but not JSA).
- Of those that had received childcare advice, 57 per cent said it was very or fairly useful, while 43 per cent said it was not useful.

# 5 Work aspirations and the future

Recent qualitative research with lone parents who were going through Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) and had moved on to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) found that their jobsearch activities were often focused on finding work that fitted around parenting responsibilities. Moreover, lone parents, including those who had worked recently, reported that finding work was much more difficult than anticipated, and felt frustration about having to apply for large numbers of jobs (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.37).

This chapter begins by examining respondents' distance from the labour market, before moving on to look at the nature and amount of their jobsearch activities, and preferences for the type of work they would like to do. The chapter concludes by examining training conducted by lone parents since Wave 1.

## 5.1 Distance from the labour market

Respondents were grouped according to their proximity to the labour market, based on their work and jobsearch status. Responses are shown in Figure 5.1, giving their positions at Wave 1 and at Wave 2.

Figure 5.1 shows that many lone parents moved closer to the labour market between Wave 1 and Wave 2. At Wave 2, most respondents were either in work or looking for work (81 per cent), and only a minority (19 per cent) were not looking for work. This is in contrast to Wave 1, when 41 per cent were not looking for work.

**Figure 5.1 Distance from the labour market**

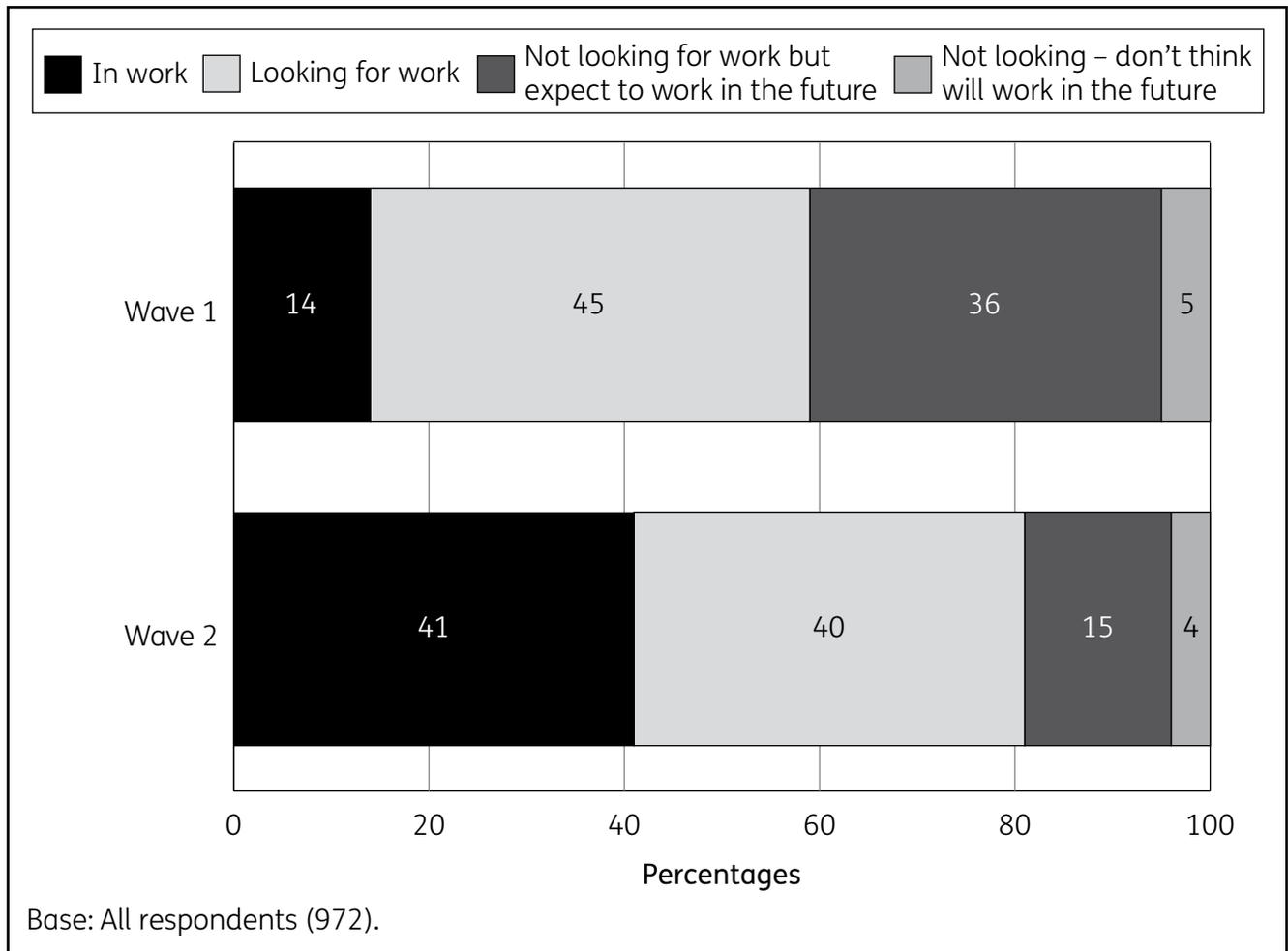


Table 5.1 indicates the movement between Wave 1 and Wave 2 in more detail, by showing distance from the labour market for respondents in Wave 2 split by their distance from the labour market in Wave 1. In addition, this also shows analysis by certain groups who were further from the labour market.

Results show that those further from the labour market at Wave 1 were still on average further from the labour market at Wave 2: the proportion who were not looking for work at Wave 2 was higher among those who were also not looking for work at Wave 1 (29 per cent). Nevertheless, over one-quarter (27 per cent) of those who were not looking but expected to work in the future in Wave 1 were in work by Wave 2, and 44 per cent were looking for work.

**Table 5.1 Distance from the labour market at Wave 2, by sub-groups**

	Distance from labour market at Wave 2				Row percentages
	In work %	Looking for work %	Not looking but think will look for work in future %	Not looking – don't think will work in future %	Base: All respondents
<b>Proximity to the labour market in Wave 1</b>					
In work	83	12	5	1	142
Looking for work	42	45	10	3	431
Not looking but think will work in the future	27	44	24	5	346
<b>Whether made any Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claim</b>					
Yes	10	35	41	13	194
No	48	41	9	2	778
<b>Whether work restricted by caring for disabled child or disabled adult</b>					
Yes	21	41	33	6	108
No	43	40	13	4	864

The sub-groups who were less likely to be in work or looking for work at Wave 2 were those who had made an ESA claim or had a disability, and those who cared for a disabled child or adult.

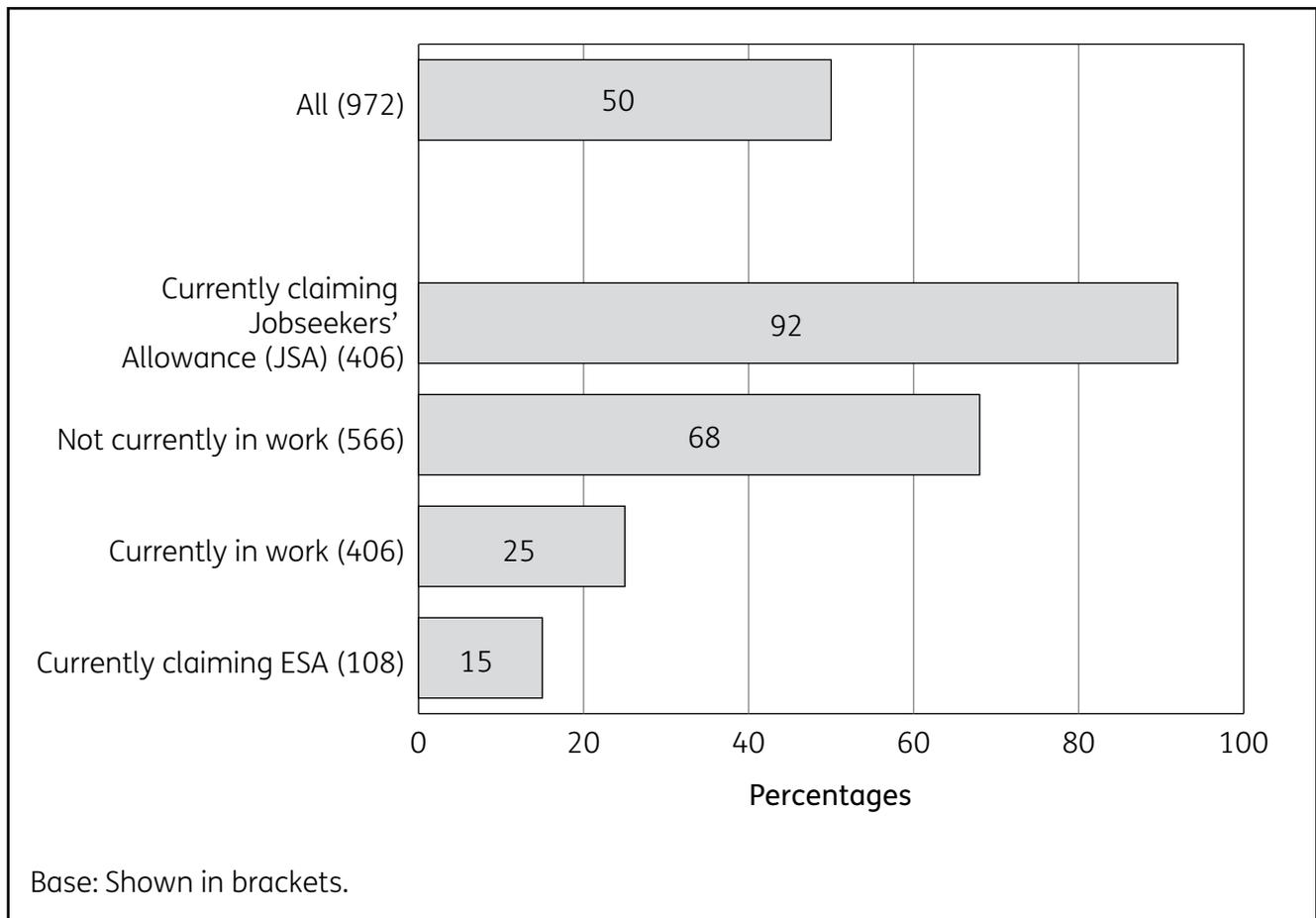
## 5.2 Looking for work

We now look in more detail at whether respondents were looking for work at Wave 2. Nearly all of those who were claiming JSA at the time of the Wave 2 interview said they were looking for work (92 per cent). By contrast, only 15 per cent of those claiming ESA were doing so (see Figure 5.2).

In addition, 25 per cent of those in work said that they were looking for another job. Those working fewer than 16 hours<sup>19</sup> were more likely to be looking for work compared to those working 16 hours or more (58 per cent compared to 17 per cent). We have seen previously (see Section 3.4.9) that those working fewer than 16 hours per week were also more likely than other respondents to have tried to increase their hours.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Seventy-seven respondents asked this question were working fewer than 16 hours. As such, caution should be used when interpreting this finding.

<sup>20</sup> In addition, Table 5.5 shows that of those were looking for work or expected to look for work in the future, over 90 per cent of those currently working fewer than 16 hours, or who worked fewer than 16 hours in their last job, ideally wanted to work for 16 hours or more.

**Figure 5.2 Respondents looking for work**

Of those not in work at the time of the interview, a number of groups were more likely to be looking for work than others:

- Those respondents without a limiting disability were more likely to be looking for work than those with one (78 per cent compared to 42 per cent), reflecting the low proportion of ESA claimants who were looking for work.
- Those with one child were more likely to be looking for work than those with two or more children (77 per cent compared to 63 per cent).
- Those with a total household income of less than £200 per week were more likely to be looking for work than those with an income of £200 or more (73 per cent compared to 56 per cent). Those with higher incomes had often re-partnered and had a partner/spouse in work, and/or to have more dependent children than those with lower incomes, both of which could discourage them from looking for work.<sup>21</sup>

### 5.3 Jobsearch activities

A series of questions were asked about the jobsearch activities of respondents who were not in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview or who were working fewer than 16 hours per week, and

<sup>21</sup> Moreover, as shown in Chapter 6, those with more children were more likely to agree with statements focusing on the importance of looking after their own children.

who were looking for work.<sup>22</sup> Of those respondents, 74 per cent were looking for work of 16 hours or more per week, 19 per cent for work of fewer than 16 hours, and seven per cent either looking for any work, regardless of hours, or were not sure of how many hours they were looking to work for. In total, 93 per cent of these respondents had made a JSA claim since coming off Income Support (IS).

### 5.3.1 Number of job applications

Of those looking for work of 16 hours or more, 73 per cent had already made at least one job application in the previous 12 months, with 72 per cent reporting that they had found at least one of these vacancies through Jobcentre Plus. Supporting previous research, Table 5.2 demonstrates that those who had made at least one job application were likely to have made many. Over half had applied for more than ten jobs in the previous year, with 43 per cent having applied for 20 or more. Moreover, the intensity of jobsearch had increased when compared with figures from Wave 1: lone parent respondents in Wave 1 (when they were claiming IS) were on average making fewer applications than those who had applied for jobs in Wave 2 (most of whom were by then claiming JSA). This may show the effect of JSA of encouraging lone parents to look for work more intensely – this echoes previous research, which suggests that lone parents' jobsearch while on JSA was more intense than when they were on IS (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.33).

**Table 5.2 Number of job applications made in previous 12 months**

	<i>Column percentages</i>	
	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 1<sup>1</sup></b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
1 or 2	10	35
3 – 5	16	27
6 – 10	19	18
11 – 19	11	8
20 or more	43	12
<i>Base: All looking for work in previous 12 months</i>	270	1,067

<sup>1</sup> Unlike most other longitudinal comparisons in this report, these figures are based on all Wave 1 responses to these questions, rather than just the same respondents as were asked the question in Wave 2. This is because most of those looking for work in Wave 1 were no longer doing so in Wave 2, meaning the base is small. Nevertheless, analysis shows that the Wave 1 responses of those who were looking for work in Wave 1 and Wave 2 follow the same pattern as that of all Wave 1 respondents.

The large number of job applications made by respondents may reflect the high levels of competition for suitable work. Previous research conducted with lone parents who had moved from IS to JSA found that they '*reported finding that their jobsearch was much more difficult than they anticipated. This included those who had been in work recently and those who hadn't worked for many years. Lone parents reported feeling frustrated at having applied for a large number of jobs and not been invited to interviews, or being invited to very few interviews*' (Lane *et al.*, 2011, pp.4–5). In part, 'the limited availability of part-time and schools hours jobs, and the strong preference for these jobs among lone parents, mean that there is potentially stiff competition for these roles' (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.36).

<sup>22</sup> This section does not include 47 respondents who were on a government scheme to help them enter employment.

### 5.3.2 Job application details

Respondents were asked to think about the job which they applied for (or intended to apply for, if they did not actually submit an application) most recently. Respondents showed a strong preference for part-time work: nearly seven in ten respondents had applied for a part-time job of between 16 and 29 hours per week (see Table 5.3). This includes a substantial proportion (half of those applying for part-time jobs and 34 per cent of all respondents) who had applied for a job of exactly 16 hours per week. In addition, 12 per cent of respondents applied for a job of fewer than 16 hours per week, with 19 per cent applying for a full-time job, of 30 hours or more a week. As seen in Table 5.3, these hours are very similar to those in jobs which lone parents were applying for at Wave 1, while they were still on IS. This suggests that the JSA regime has not affected the types of jobs that lone parents are applying for, in terms of hours.

The majority of these jobs were permanent jobs (73 per cent), with 22 per cent applying for temporary jobs lasting less than 12 months, and five per cent applying for fixed term jobs lasting between one and three years. The proportion of permanent jobs that lone parents had actually done since leaving IS (see Section 3.4.7) was higher (86 per cent). This indicates that lone parents who were looking for work were having to consider temporary work to a greater extent than those who had already found work since leaving IS.

**Table 5.3 Number of hours of last job applied for**

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>	
	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Fewer than 16 hours	12	13
16 hours exactly	34	34
17 to 29 hours	35	30
30 hours or more	19	22
<i>Base: All applying or intending to apply for a job</i>	261	710 <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unlike most other longitudinal comparisons in this report, these figures are based on all Wave 1 responses to these questions, rather than just the same respondents as were asked the question in Wave 2. This is because most of those looking for work in Wave 1 were no longer doing so in Wave 2, meaning the base is small.

Around half (52 per cent) of those who had made a job application had been for a job interview. Of those who had attended an interview, 41 per cent had attended only one interview, with 28 per cent having been to two, 13 per cent having been to three or four, and 17 per cent to five or more.

Those who were not in work, but looking for work, were asked what they had done in the past 12 months to help them find a job. As well as looking for work on their own, which nine in ten respondents had done, at least one in five had put their name on the books of a private recruitment agency, done voluntary work, been to a careers office or careers advice department, or attended an education or training course. Again, when comparisons are made against all Wave 1 responses (when respondents were still on IS), it is evident that those looking for work at Wave 2 were doing more activities to help them enter work.

**Table 5.4 Activities done to look for work**

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>	
	<b>Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Looked for a job on your own	91	81
Attended an education or training course	40	30
Been to a careers office or careers advice department	31	30
Done voluntary work	27	20
Put your name on the books of a private recruitment agency	24	13
Done something towards setting up your own business	7	5
None of the above	4	5
<i>Base: All not in work, but looking for work</i>	336	1,067

Previous research found that those looking for a job on their own would very often use internet searches to do so, but that some lone parents had trouble accessing the internet, for example, if their local library (with free access) was not close by (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.35). Other research found that informal networks were also an extremely important source of jobs for lone parents (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

## 5.4 Work preferences

Lone parents who were either looking for work or said they thought they would look for work at a specified time in the future were asked about the types of work they would like to undertake, including the:

- hours they would be willing to work;
- times of year they would be willing to work;
- amount of time they would be willing to travel to work; and
- importance of flexible working arrangements.<sup>23</sup>

### 5.4.1 Preferred hours

Previous research with lone parents on IS and lone parents who had gone through LPO and were claiming JSA has found that lone parents have a preference for part-time work, and a particular preference for work of exactly 16 hours per week (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.34). In part, this is likely to reflect the financial incentives in the current benefit system, based on the marginal deduction rate of increasing working hours.<sup>24</sup> The threshold of 16 hours per week is also relevant in relation to tax credits: lone parents need to work 16 hours or more a week to claim help with childcare costs through Working Tax Credit. This has led some to suggest that the introduction of the Universal Credit could actually encourage some lone parents to work fewer hours than under the current benefits regime (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.34).

<sup>23</sup> In this section it was not possible to compare the answers of those claiming JSA with those claiming ESA, as not enough ESA claimants either were looking for or expected to look for work in the future. This section also has looked specifically to draw comparisons between the work preferences of those who were in and not in work, where they are statistically significant.

<sup>24</sup> According to the government document *Universal Credit: welfare that works*, 'under the current system a lone parent working 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage would only increase their take home pay by £5 a week if they increased their hours to 25 hours' (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010).

As was found at Wave 1, most respondents (78 per cent) stated that they wanted to work part-time, between 16 and 29 hours, with more than half of those (representing 44 per cent of all respondents) wanting to work for exactly 16 hours. As shown in Table 5.5, those in work were more likely to be looking for full-time work, of 30 hours or more, than those not in work.

**Table 5.5 Preferred hours for future work, by work status<sup>25</sup>**

	<i>Column Percentages</i>		
	<b>Not in work</b>	<b>In work</b>	<b>All</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Fewer than 16 hours	5	4	5
16 hours exactly	46	36	44
17 to 29 hours	34	36	34
30 hours or more	15	24	17
<i>Base: All looking for work or intending to</i>	398	122	520

Table 5.6 compares respondents’ preferences for hours with the hours they worked in their current or previous job.

Those whose last or current job was fewer than 16 hours per week were more likely to want to work fewer than 16 hours or exactly 16 hours per week in the future, and less likely to want to work for 30 hours or more per week, compared with those whose current or previous job was for 16 hours per week or more. Nevertheless, 91 per cent of those whose last or current job was fewer than 16 hours per week ideally wanted to work 16 hours per week or more.

These findings confirm that there is a proportion of lone parents who want to work more hours than in their current or most recent job. This ties in with the findings in Section 3.4.3, which found a similar pattern.

**Table 5.6 Preferred hours for future work, by current or previous hours of work<sup>26</sup>**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Current or previous job 16+ hours</b>	<b>Current or previous job fewer than 16 hours</b>	<b>All</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Fewer than 16 hours	3	9	5
16 hours exactly	30	46	44
17 to 29 hours	40	33	34
30 hours or more	28	12	17
<i>Base: All looking for work or intending to</i>	197	116	520

When comparing the number of hours respondents would prefer to work, and the number of hours of the job most recently applied for, the figures are broadly similar – see Table 5.7. This suggests that respondents are mainly finding jobs to apply for that match their preferences. The one difference

<sup>25</sup> These percentages exclude answers of ‘Don’t know.’

<sup>26</sup> These percentages exclude answers of ‘Don’t know.’

was that more respondents wanted to work for 16 hours exactly than had applied for jobs offering these hours.

**Table 5.7 Preferred hours for future work and hour of work applied for**

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>	
	<b>Last job applied for</b>	<b>Preferred hours of work</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Fewer than 16 hours	12	5
16 hours exactly	34	44
17 to 29 hours	35	34
30 hours or more	19	17
<i>Base</i>	261 <sup>1</sup>	520 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All applying or intending to apply for a job.

<sup>2</sup> All looking for work or intending to.

#### 5.4.2 Working outside school hours

Previous research has found that balancing work and childcare responsibilities is a major challenge for lone parents. In particular, it can be difficult to balance work and childcare if the parent is working out of school hours, or during the summer holidays (Haux *et al.*, 2012, pp.50-51). Previous evidence has also noted other factors which lead lone parents to want to work only while their child was at school. For those with older children, there was a desire to be around so that their children did not get into trouble, or mix with the wrong people, as well as a general desire not to spend less time with their children, and a (misinformed) belief for some lone parents that they would not receive financial support to pay for childcare (Lane *et al.*, 2011, pp.32-34).

To inform this issue, lone parents who were looking for work, or who expected to do so in the future, were asked whether they would be willing to work outside school hours and outside term-time (see Table 5.8).

Over half of respondents (56 per cent) said they would only be willing to work during school hours, and nearly one-third (31 per cent) said they would only be willing to work in term-time. In addition, 29 per cent of respondents reported that they would only be willing to work if the job was **both** in school hours and during term-time.

**Table 5.8 Willingness to work outside school hours or in school holidays**

<b>Would you be prepared to work...?</b>	<b>%</b>
Before/after school hours	21
Only willing to work during school hours	56
It depends	22
Throughout the year	51
Term-time only	31
It depends	17
<i>Base: All looking for work, or intending to</i>	539

A number of groups of lone parents were more likely to say they would only be willing to work in a job that was both in school hours and during term-time:

- those with a limiting disability were more likely than those without one (39 per cent compared to 26 per cent);
- those who had never worked or who had not worked since the birth of their oldest child (38 per cent) were more likely than those who had worked since the birth of their oldest child but were not currently in work (17 per cent);
- those living in socially rented accommodation (renting from housing associations or local authorities) were more likely than those living in privately rented accommodation (31 per cent compared to 20 per cent);<sup>27</sup>
- those aged 35 and older were more likely than those aged under 35 (36 per cent compared to 20 per cent).

Other research has shown how the desire to work within school hours and not in school holidays has affected lone parents' jobsearch, in particular, by encouraging lone parents to apply for work in schools, such as, as teaching assistants or catering assistants (Lane *et al.*, 2011, p.34). However, Section 3.4.4 showed that lone parents who said they were only willing to work in school hours often worked outside these hours when they actually moved into a job.

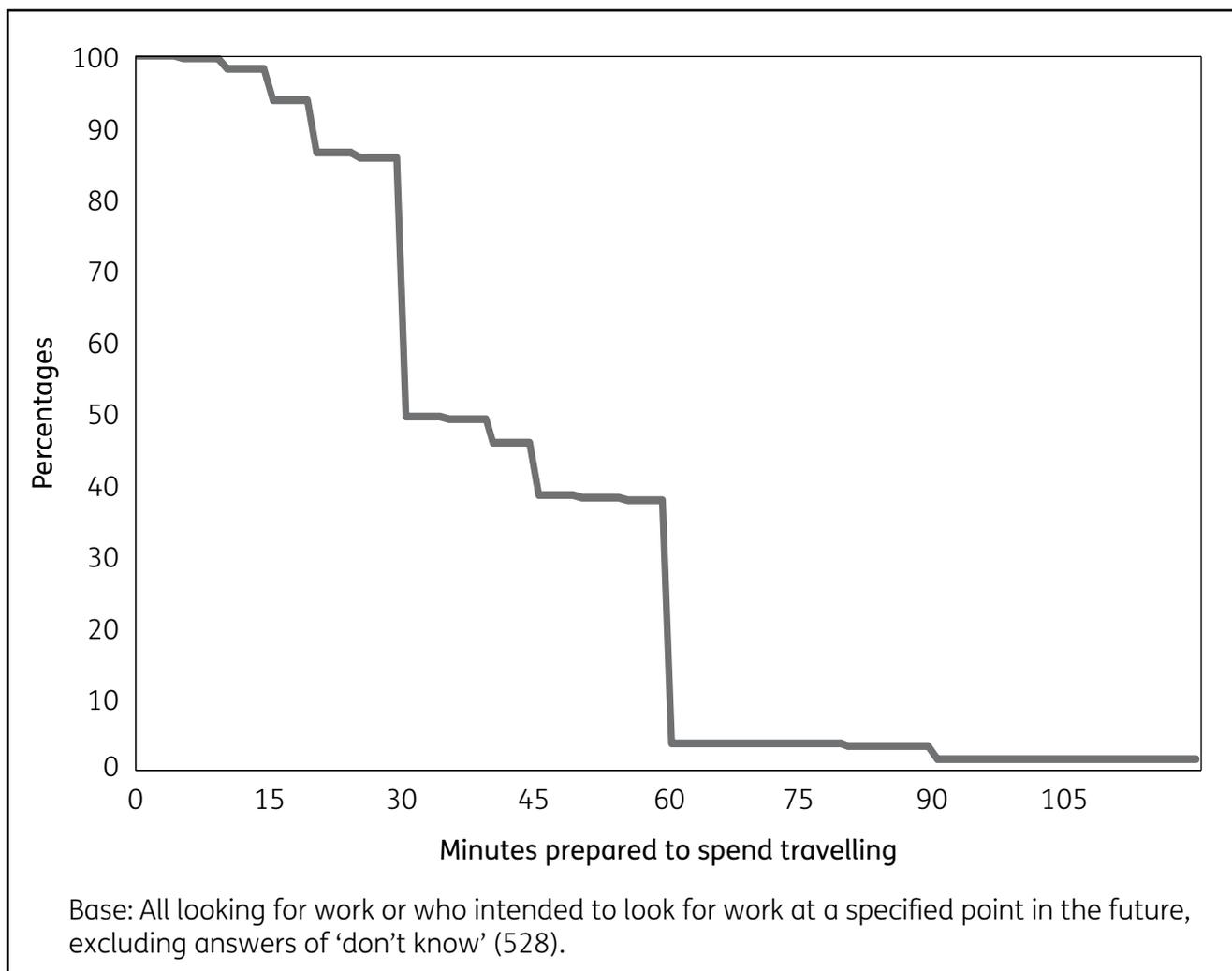
### 5.4.3 Importance of flexibility

Respondents were asked how important flexible working arrangements were in any jobs they applied for. In total, 88 per cent said flexible working arrangements were very or quite important, including 61 per cent who said they were very important. Only five per cent reported that flexible working arrangements were either not at all or not very important. All respondents looking for work, or intending to look for work at a specified point in the future (except those who said that flexible working arrangements were not at all important) were asked if they would take a job if flexible working arrangements were not available. In total, 42 per cent said the lack of flexible working arrangements would stop them taking a job, although 17 per cent were not sure. However, a significantly higher proportion, 57 per cent, of those who said flexible working arrangements were very important said the lack of them would stop them taking a job.

### 5.4.4 Travel to work time

Respondents were also asked how long they would be willing to spend travelling to work (one way), including any time necessary to take their children to or from childcare. In total, 51 per cent were willing to travel for 30 minutes or less (including 36 per cent of respondents for whom 30 minutes was the maximum length of time they would travel to work). On the other hand, 38 per cent were willing to travel for an hour or more (including 34 per cent for whom an hour was the maximum length of time they would travel). The average (mean) time was 43 minutes, and the most common answer (median) was 30 minutes. These findings are very similar to Wave 1 findings, for which the mean time was 40 minutes, and the median was 30 minutes.

<sup>27</sup> Those living in privately rented accommodation tended to be better qualified and have fewer children than those living in socially rented housing.

**Figure 5.3 Time prepared to spend travelling to work (one way)**

Some respondents were more likely to be willing to travel for more than 30 minutes to work. In particular, those living in privately rented accommodation (who tended to be better qualified and have fewer children) were more likely than those in socially rented accommodation to do so (62 per cent compared to 47 per cent). In addition, those in work at the time of the interview were less likely than those who were not in work to be willing to travel to work for more than 30 minutes (41 per cent compared to 52 per cent).

When compared against Office for National Statistics (ONS) data (2011), the times lone parents were willing to travel to work are on average longer than the average commutes experienced by workers in the UK, suggesting that travel to work time is unlikely to be a significant barrier to entering employment.<sup>28</sup> However, most commuters in the UK (71 per cent) used a car rather than public transport to get to work, but only 34 per cent of LPO lone parents had permanent access to a motor vehicle.

<sup>28</sup> See Section 6.3 for more about commuting as a barrier to work.

**Table 5.9 Maximum time willing to travel and actual commuting times of all workers**

	<i>Column percentages</i>	
	<b>Actual commute times in UK</b>	<b>LPO lone parents – maximum time willing to commute</b>
	%	%
Up to 30 minutes	75	51
31 minutes to 59 minutes	20	11
An hour or more	5	38
<i>Base:</i>	<i>Unknown<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>528<sup>2</sup></i>

<sup>1</sup> Data from the Labour Force Survey presented in ONS (2011), 'Commuting to work – 2011'.

<sup>2</sup> All looking for work or who intended to look for work at a specified point in the future, excluding answers of 'Don't know'.

## 5.5 Training or education courses

Respondents were asked whether they had undertaken any training courses or education classes to improve their skills, help them do a job or find employment since they were interviewed in 2010. In total, 41 per cent of respondents had gone on such a course.

Those respondents who had made a JSA claim since moving off IS were more likely to have gone on a training or education course than those who had not (44 per cent compared with 34 per cent). However, this difference is partly the result of the Work Programme. Those respondents who had been on the Work Programme were more likely to have been on a training or education course, compared to those who had not (56 per cent compared to 39 per cent). If one examines only those who were claiming JSA who were not referred to the Work Programme, only 41 per cent did any training, which is not significantly different to the 34 per cent who did training and had not made a JSA claim.<sup>29</sup> Recent research found that lone parents considered that moving on to JSA '*meant the start of moving towards work via training, rather than having to be available for work immediately*', but that their expectations '*were at odds with the reality of the JSA regime*', where training was limited by the 16-hour rule and because it was not discussed as a matter of course with Personal Advisers (Haux *et al.*, 2012, pp.89-91).

A number of groups of respondents were more likely to have been on at least one training or education course. In particular:

- those respondents who did not have a limiting disability were more likely to have gone on a training or education course than those who did have one (43 per cent compared with 34 per cent). Those who had mental-health problems were particularly unlikely to have done any training (29 per cent, compared with 43 per cent of those who did not), although those with a physical limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity were no more or less likely to have gone on training compared to those who did not;

<sup>29</sup> In addition, it should be noted that 68 per cent of respondents undertaking at least one course went on one of their courses while in employment.

- those who lived in privately rented housing were more likely to have gone on a training or education course than those renting from a local authority or housing association (50 per cent compared to 39 per cent). Those living in privately rented accommodation tended to be better qualified and have fewer children than those living in socially rented housing;
- those with higher level qualifications at Wave 1 were more likely have undertaken training than those with lower level qualifications. While 45 per cent of those with qualifications at Level 2 or above had done some training or an education course since their Wave 1 interview, only 35 per cent of those with no qualifications or qualifications below Level 2 had done so.

The majority of those who had been on a course had only been on one course (60 per cent), but nearly one-quarter (22 per cent) had been on two courses, and one in six (17 per cent) had been on three or more. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents reported that staff at Jobcentre Plus had arranged at least one of their courses.

All those who were no longer doing one of their courses were asked whether they had completed their course(s). In total 87 per cent of respondents had completed all of their courses, but 13 per cent had not done so. The number of respondents who had not completed a course was not high enough to allow analysis of why they had not completed. However, the Wave 1 report suggested that the most common reasons for not completing a course for lone parents on IS were that they had become disaffected with their course, they experienced problems with childcare, they had become ill, or that they had some other domestic or personal reason.

Of those who had completed their course (or at least one of the courses they had done), nearly four in five (78 per cent) had gained a qualification. Of those who had gained a qualification (and the levels of the highest qualifications held by respondents from Wave 1 and Wave 2 were known), analysis suggests that around half of respondents (52 per cent) had gained at least one qualification level.

## 5.6 Summary

- On average, lone parents were closer to the labour market in Wave 2, after having gone through LPO, than in Wave 1, when they were claiming IS. At Wave 1, 59 per cent of respondents were either in work or looking for work, but this had risen to 81 per cent by Wave 2.
- In total, 50 per cent of lone parents were looking for work. This included 68 per cent of those not in work (and 92 per cent of JSA claimants), and 25 per cent of those in work (who tended to be those working for fewer than 16 hours per week).
- In line with other research, the amount of jobsearch lone parents had conducted at Wave 2 was significantly higher than in Wave 1 (when on IS). Over 50 per cent of lone parents had applied for 11 or more jobs in the 12 months before being interviewed, compared to only 20 per cent at Wave 1. In addition, lone parents were doing more to find jobs, such as putting their name on the books of private recruitment agencies, than they were at Wave 1.
- Lone parents had a strong preference for part-time work. When asked about their most recent job application, 69 per cent of respondents had applied for part-time work, including 34 per cent who had applied for a job of 16 hours exactly (the minimum number of hours to be eligible for tax credits). This broadly matched lone parents' preferences for working hours.

- Lone parents had a strong preference for jobs that fit around their childcare responsibilities. Lone parents were often unwilling to work outside school hours; 56 per cent said they would be unwilling to work outside school hours, and 31 per cent said they would only work during term-time (with 29 per cent reporting that they would only be willing to work if their job was both during school hours and term-time only). Furthermore, 88 per cent said that flexible working arrangements were important, and around four in ten reported that they would not take a job that did not have flexible working.
- On average, the time lone parents were willing to travel to work was longer than the average commute in the UK, again demonstrating a willingness to work. However, seven in ten UK commuters used a car to go to work, but only 34 per cent of LPO lone parents had access to a car.

# 6 Attitudes and constraints to work

Recent research has shown that the attitudes of lone parents towards work and parenting are ‘key predictors of future work outcomes,’ but also that attitudes are altered in response to changing circumstances. For example, ‘prolonged labour market inactivity ... strengthens a set of attitudes that appear to discourage lone mothers from seeking employment’ (Tomaszewski et al., 2010, p.33).

This chapter draws on a set of questions developed through the Family and Children’s Study (FACS) which look to measure respondents’ opinions and attitudes about a wide range of factors relating to work and parenting. The questions also analyze lone parents’ hopes and expectations for the coming years, the barriers to entering work of those who are not in employment, and the barriers to staying in work of those who are in (self-)employment.

A key interest in this chapter is how far lone parents’ attitudes, hopes and expectations for the future, and barriers to work have changed since Wave 1, when they were claiming IS and were yet to go through the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) changes.

## The ‘Choices and Constraints’ question set

Since 2006, the FACS has included a set of questions referred to as the ‘Choices and Constraints’ question set (Collins et al., 2006). This set of questions comprises three sections:

- self-completion questions on attitudes towards parenting, childcare, work and related issues;
- questions about future intentions, including the kind of work they may want to do in the future;
- card sort exercises in which respondents sort a series of statements by whether they perceive them to be a ‘big factor’, a ‘smaller factor’ or ‘not a factor’ in their decision to work, or their ability to stay in work.

Key findings from this question set, as asked of LPO respondents, are reported in this chapter.

## 6.1 Attitudes to work, parenting and childcare

Previous research has found that ‘the relationship between mothers’ attitudes towards caring and working on the one hand, and their employment on the other, is complex. While attitudes affect employment decisions they can also adjust to both changes in the mother’s own behaviour and, in the longer-term, to changes in social norms. Himmelweit and Sigala [2004] reported that .... when a conflict arises between the mothers’ attitudes and their working behaviour, they either adjust their attitudes or their behaviour’ (Tomaszewski et al., 2010, p.3).

In this research, we are able to measure lone parents’ attitudes to work, parenting and childcare after they stopped receiving Income Support (IS), and compare them with the opinions they held previously while on IS, in order to form judgements about how far LPO has affected lone parents attitudes.

Therefore, respondents were asked about their attitudes towards parenting, work and childcare through a series of statements, to which they were asked whether they agreed or disagreed. At Wave 1, factor analysis was conducted to reduce these 27 separate attitudes into four broader

themes. These were:

- parental childcare-focused attitudes;
- employment-focused attitudes;
- social stigma of staying at home;
- motivation towards combining work and parenting.

The results at Wave 2 show that, as in Wave 1, respondents were very work focused (see Table 6.1). Over seven in ten respondents agreed that having almost any job is better than being unemployed, keeping a job was important even if you did not like the job, and that working parents provide a good role model for their children. In addition, 86 per cent agreed that having a job is the best way to be an independent person. Nevertheless, strong parental childcare focused attitudes were also present; for example, 78 per cent of lone parents agreed that children aged under five are happiest being looked after by their parents, and 69 per cent agreed that it is always better if the parent can look after the child themselves.

When responses from Wave 2 are compared with responses of the same lone parents in Wave 1, an interesting pattern emerges. Respondents were more likely to agree with certain employment focused statements. For example, more respondents at Wave 2 than at Wave 1 agreed that 'Having almost any job is better than being unemployed' and that 'Once you've got a job, it's important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it.' As well this shift towards employment focused statements, there was also an increase in the proportion who agreed with statements relating to the social stigma of benefits. In particular, more respondents agreed in Wave 2 than in Wave 1 that 'If you live on Social Security Benefits, everyone looks down on you' and 'The government expects all lone parents to work.'

There was less of a change in relation to parental childcare statements. In some cases, respondents were somewhat less likely to agree at Wave 2 than at Wave 1: fewer respondents agreed that 'Children do best if their mum stays home to look after them' and 'My job is to look after the home and family'. However, for other statements there was no difference between attitudes at Wave 1 and at Wave 2.

Overall, these findings suggest that lone parents' attitudes were more work-focused and, to some extent, less focused on parental childcare, after leaving IS and moving on to other destinations. However, it is important to note that the level of change (in percentage points) is relatively small, and the general pattern – of both a strong work focus and a strong focus on parental childcare – remained.

**Table 6.1 Attitudes to work, parenting and childcare in waves 1 and 2**

	<i>Column percentages</i>	
	<b>Wave 1</b>	<b>Wave 2</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Parental childcare</b>		
It's always better if the parent can look after the child themselves	73	69
Children do best if their mum stays home to look after them	50	45
Children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents	80	78
A job is all right, but I really want to be with my children at home	41	37
My job is to look after the home and family	57	51
I always thought that if I had children I would stay at home and look after them	52	50
If you work when your children are little you will miss out on seeing them grow and develop	70	67
No one should ever feel badly about claiming social security benefits	73	71
<b>Employment focus</b>		
Having almost any job is better than being unemployed	60	71
Once you've got a job, it's important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it	64	73
Having a job is the best way for me to be an independent person	83	86
Working for pay is more fulfilling than looking after the home and family	21	20
<b>Social stigma of benefits</b>		
Stay-at-home mums are not valued by society	49	49
If you live on Social Security Benefits, everyone looks down on you	61	69
It's not possible to put your children first and work	45	42
The government expects all lone parents to work	61	72
A person must have a job to feel a full member of society	29	34
Combining work and family brings more problems than benefits	32	31
<b>Motivation to balance work and family life</b>		
Most of my closest friends think mums should go out to work if they want to	64	64
Working mums provide positive role models for their children	61	70
Working mothers have the best of both worlds	33	38
<i>Base: All LPO respondents, excluding 'don't know'</i>	931	968

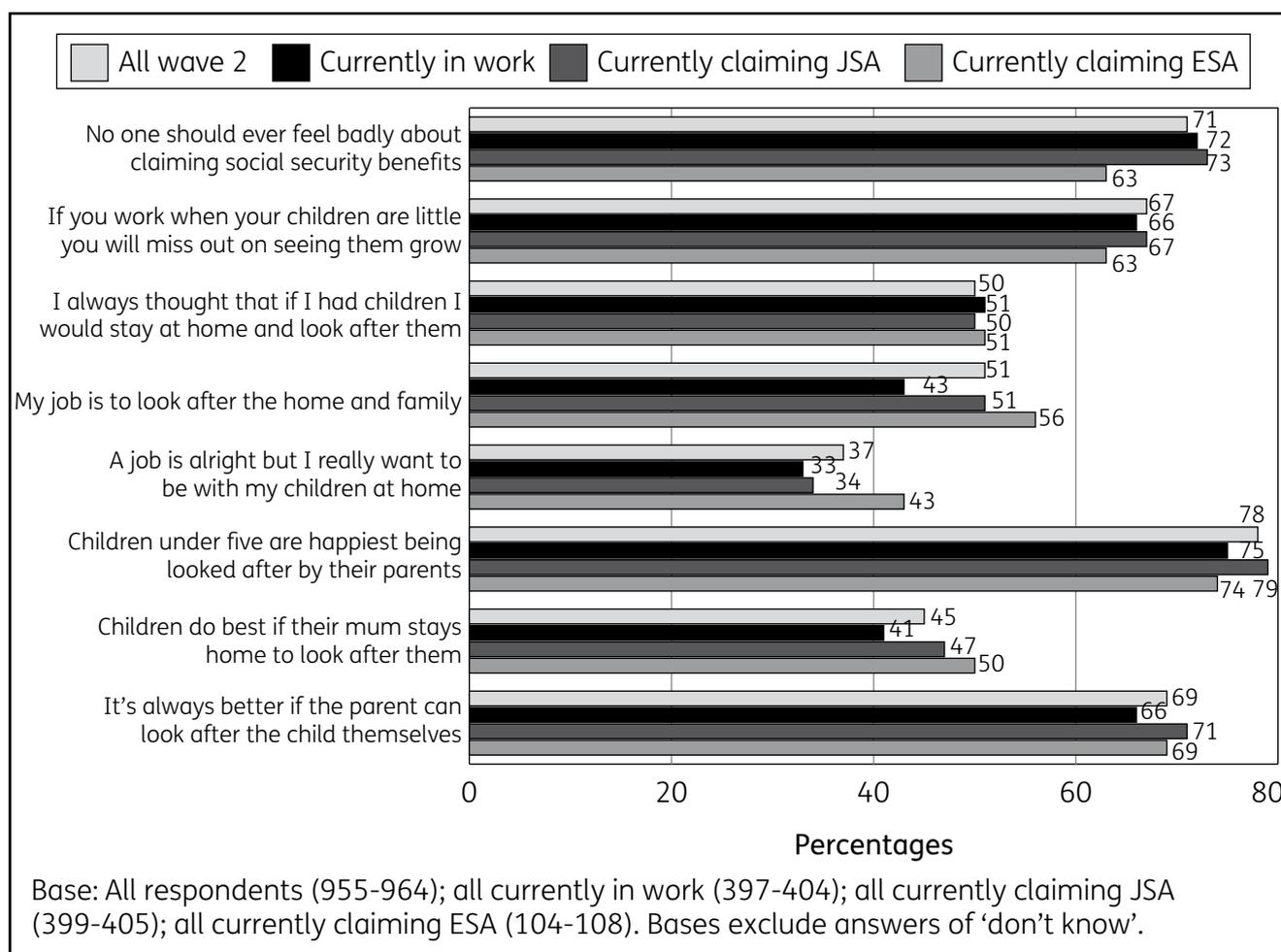
The rest of this section examines each of these groups of statements in turn, and has a particular focus on whether respondents' benefit/work status at the time of interview were related to their attitudes. In general, the attitudes of those in work, claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and claiming Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) were often very similar with regard to parenting and social stigma, although there were more differences with regard to employment focus and balancing work and family life.

### 6.1.1 Parental childcare-focused attitudes

Figure 6.1 shows the proportion of respondents who agreed with each statement related to parental childcare focused attitudes, comparing findings of all respondents against their work or benefit

status at the time of the interview. As noted above, the findings show a strong focus on parental childcare among most respondents.

**Figure 6.1 Agreement with parental childcare-focused statements by current activity**



Respondents' work/benefit status did not have any impact on their agreement towards these parental childcare focused statements, with one exception; unsurprisingly, those currently in work were less likely to say that their job was to look after the home and family. Overall, the similarities between groups suggest that these attitudes remained strongly in place irrespective of a move into work, JSA or other destinations. However, a number of factors did make it more likely for respondents to agree with these statements:<sup>30</sup>

- those with more children were more likely to agree with statements compared to those with only one child;
- those with literacy or numeracy problems were more likely to agree with statements than those without;
- older respondents were more likely to agree than younger respondents;
- those who had never worked were more likely to agree than those in work or who had worked since the birth of their eldest child.

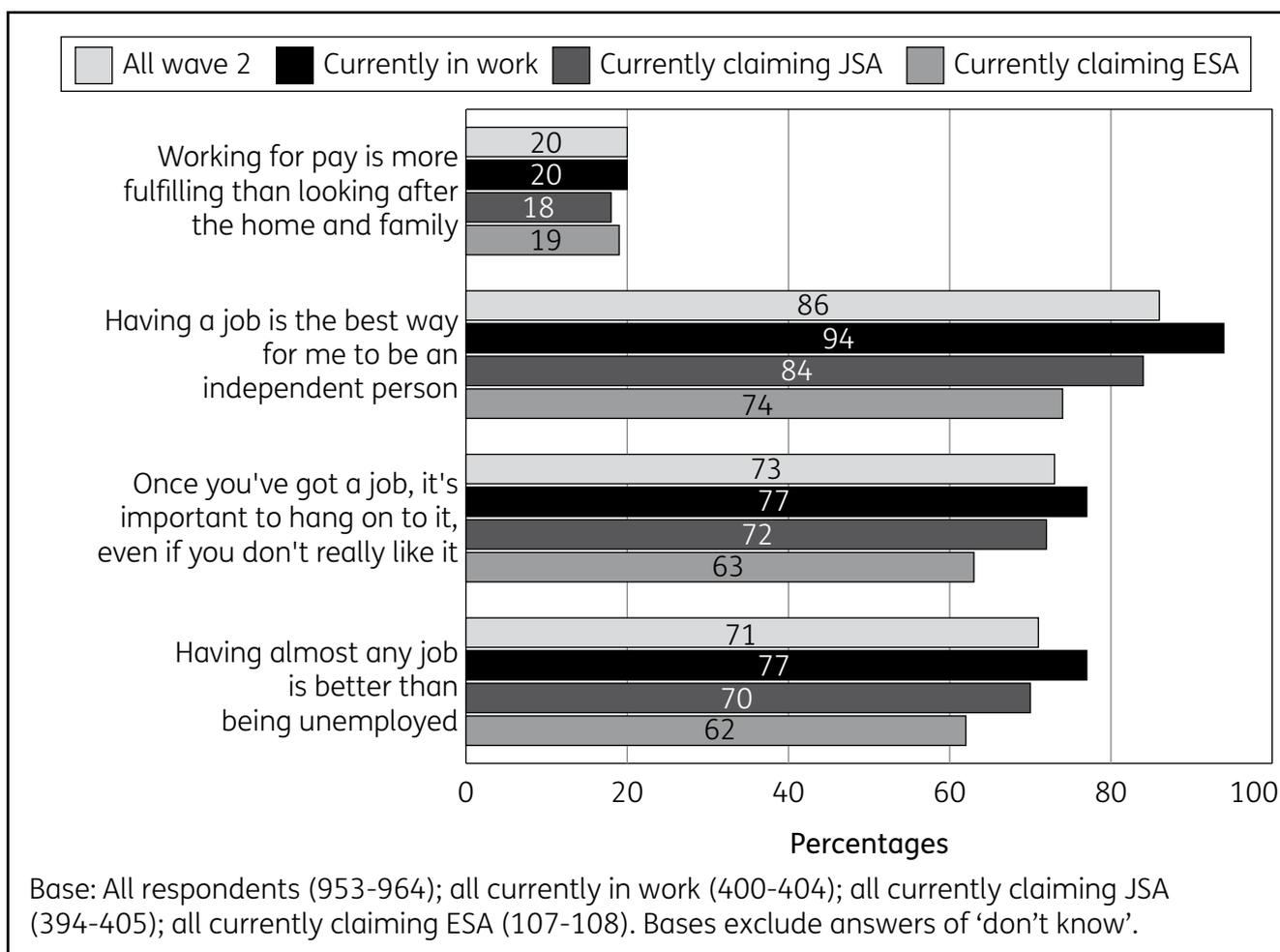
<sup>30</sup> The following groups saw significant differences in at least three of the attitudes above.

That the sub-groups of lone parents noted above were more likely to agree with these statements was in line with findings from Wave 1 one of the research. However, Wave 1 did not find that older respondents were more likely to agree with these statements than younger respondents.

### 6.1.2 Employment-focused attitudes

As noted above, lone parents expressed a strong employment focus in their attitudes, and there was a shift in Wave 2 towards higher agreement with employment-focused attitudes when compared with Wave 1.

**Figure 6.2 Agreement with employment-focused statements by current activity**



With one exception, there was a strong relationship between these statements and respondents' work/benefit history. Overall, respondents in work were the most likely to agree with them, and those claiming ESA (and, therefore, furthest from the labour market), least likely to agree. Reflecting these findings for ESA, those with a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LLSI) were also less likely to agree with these statements.

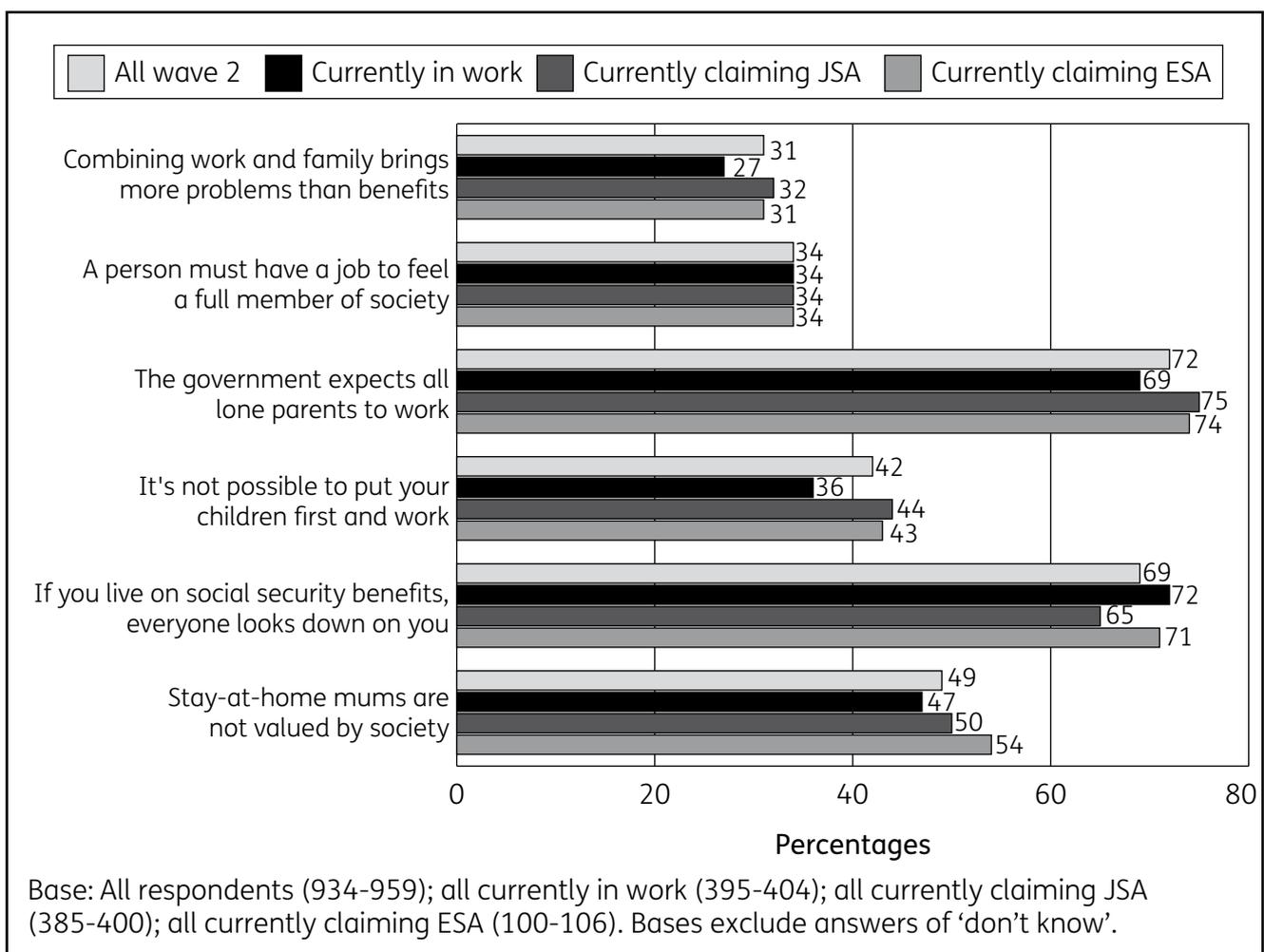
Those with lower level qualifications (below level 2) or no qualifications at all were more likely to agree with some of the statements. While 78 per cent of those with lower level or no qualifications agreed that 'Once you've got a job, it's important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it' only 70 per cent of those with level 2 or higher qualifications did so. Similarly, while 25 per cent of those with lower level or no qualifications agreed that 'Working for pay is more fulfilling than looking after the home and family', only 16 per cent of those with level 2 or higher qualifications did so. This may

suggest that more qualified respondents were more selective about jobs they were prepared to do in order to ensure a positive work-life balance.

### 6.1.3 Social stigma of staying at home

Figure 6.3 shows the proportion of respondents who agreed with each statement related to the social stigma of staying at home, comparing findings of all respondents against their work or benefit status at the time of the interview. As noted above, there were higher levels of agreement with some of these statements in Wave 2 than there had been in Wave 1.

**Figure 6.3 Agreement with social stigma statements by current activity**



There was not a strong relationship between work/benefit status and agreement with statements relating to the social stigma of staying at home. However, respondents who were in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview were less likely to agree that 'It is not possible to put your children first and work' than those claiming JSA. Conversely, those in work were more likely than those claiming JSA to agree that 'If you live on Social Security Benefits everyone looks down on you.'

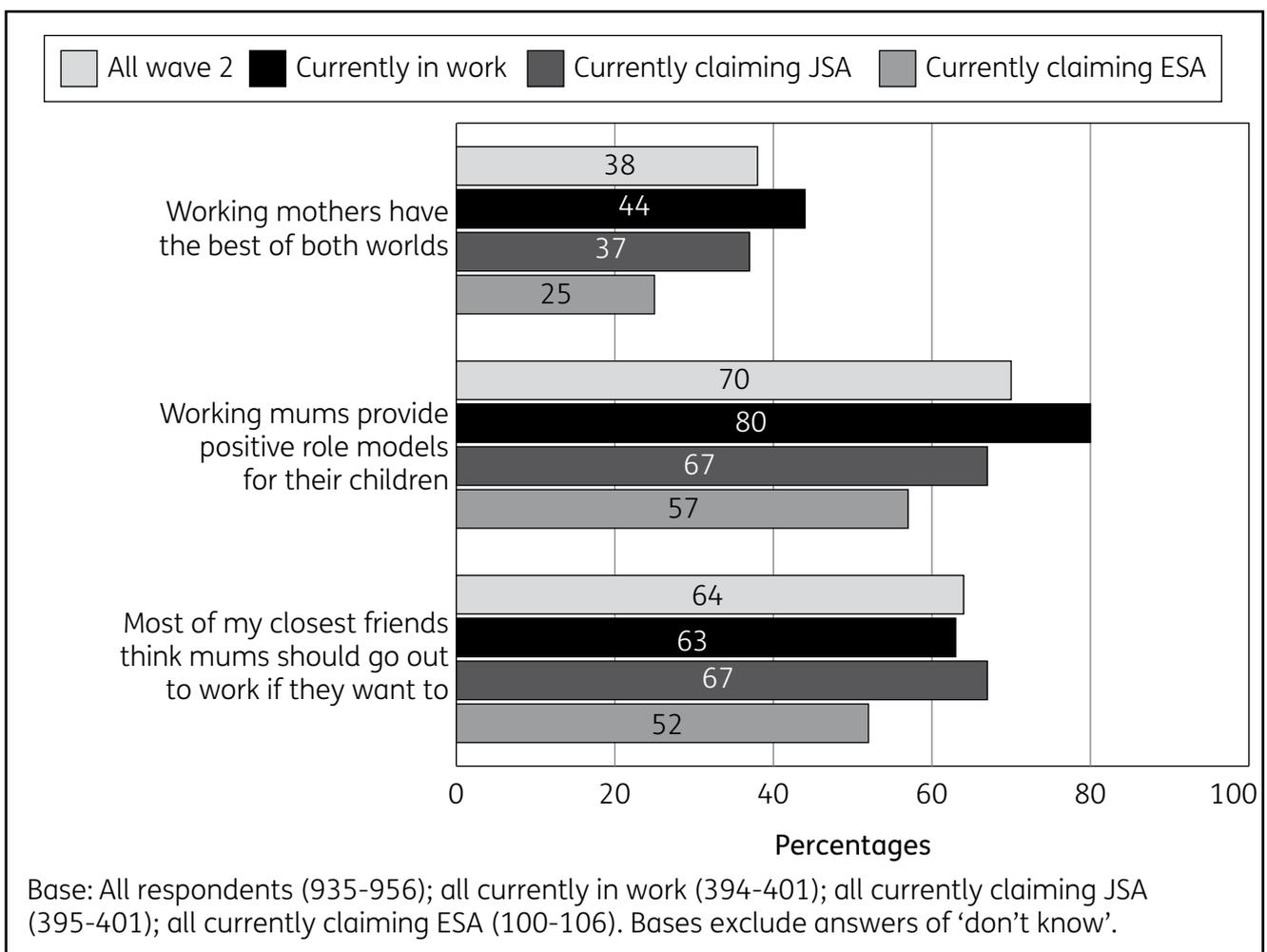
Those lone parents who had claimed ESA or JSA and been referred to the Work Programme were more likely to agree with some of these statements than those JSA/ESA claimants who had not been referred to the Work Programme. In particular, 83 per cent of JSA/ESA claimants on the Work Programme agreed that 'The government expects all lone parents to work' compared to 73 per cent of those who were not. Similarly, 60 per cent of JSA/ESA claimants on the Work Programme agreed that 'Stay-at-home mums are not valued by society', while only 50 per cent of those not on the Work Programme did.

On the whole, there were fewer clear patterns of responses by other lone parent sub-groups for these social stigma statements than for the parenting and employment focused statements noted previously. The main exception was that older respondents were more likely to agree with these statements than younger ones.

#### 6.1.4 Motivation towards combining work and parenting

Figure 6.4 shows the proportion of respondents who agreed with each statement related to motivation towards combining work and parenting, comparing findings of all respondents against their work or benefit status at the time of the interview.

**Figure 6.4 Agreement with combining work and childcare statements by current activity**



There was a strong relationship between current work/benefit status and agreement with these statements. In particular, those respondents in work at the time of the interview were more likely to agree than those claiming JSA or ESA that 'Working mums provide positive role models for their children' and 'Working mothers have the best of both worlds.'

Some other groups of lone parents were more likely to agree with these statements than others.<sup>31</sup> In particular:

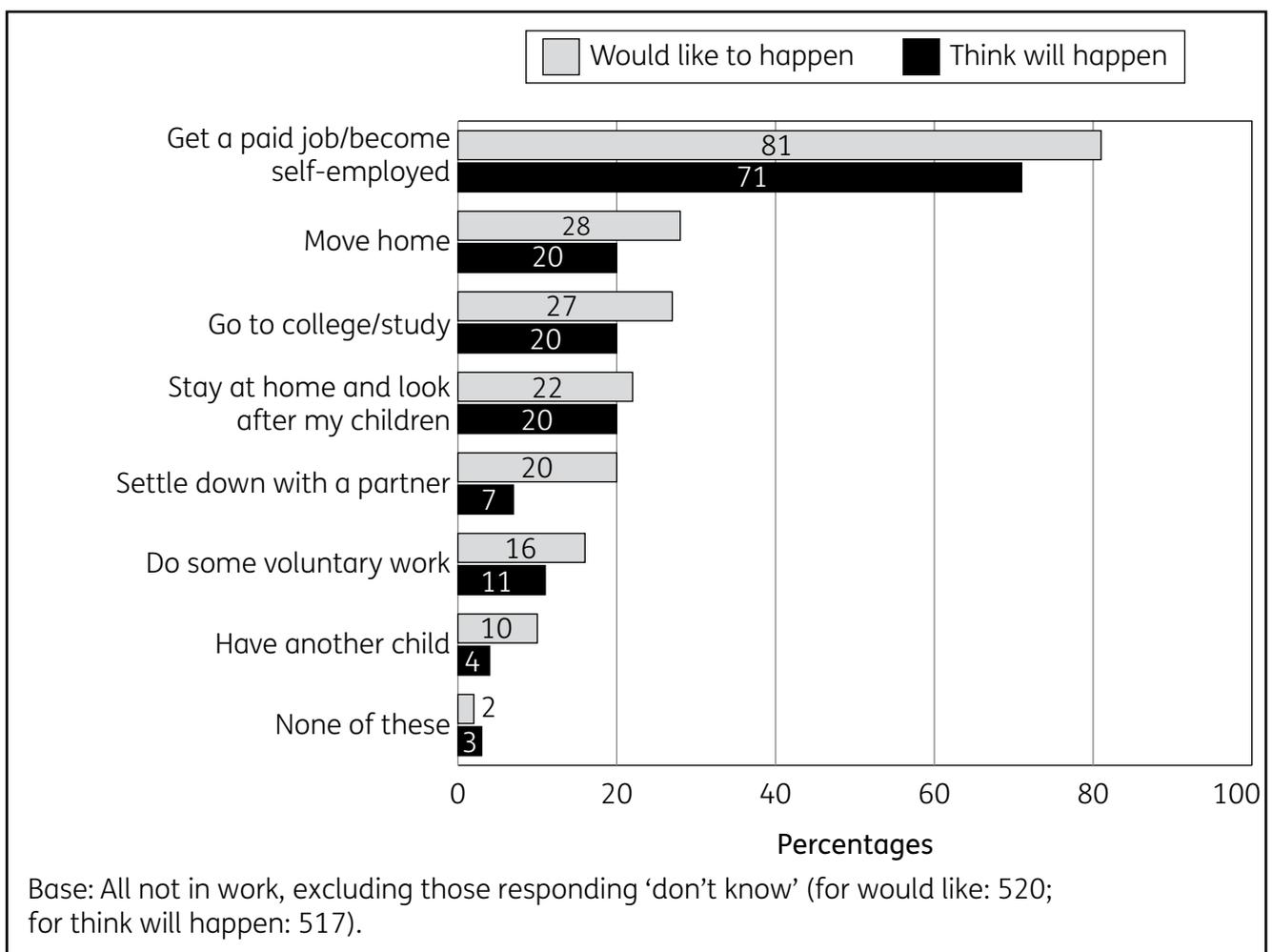
- younger respondents were more likely to agree with these statements than older respondents;
- those who did not have their ability to work restricted by caring for a disabled child or a disabled adult were more likely to agree to these statements than those who did have to.

## 6.2 Future expectations and intentions

Respondents who were not in work were asked whether they would like and whether they expected a range of things to happen to them in the next few years. The results are presented in Figure 6.5.

Eighty-one per cent of lone parents not in work wanted to enter work in the next few years, and 71 per cent expected that this would happen. The other most common aspirations were to move home (28 per cent), and to go to college or study (27 per cent), but these were much less commonly mentioned than entering work.

**Figure 6.5 Respondents' views on what they want to happen in the next few years and what they think will happen**



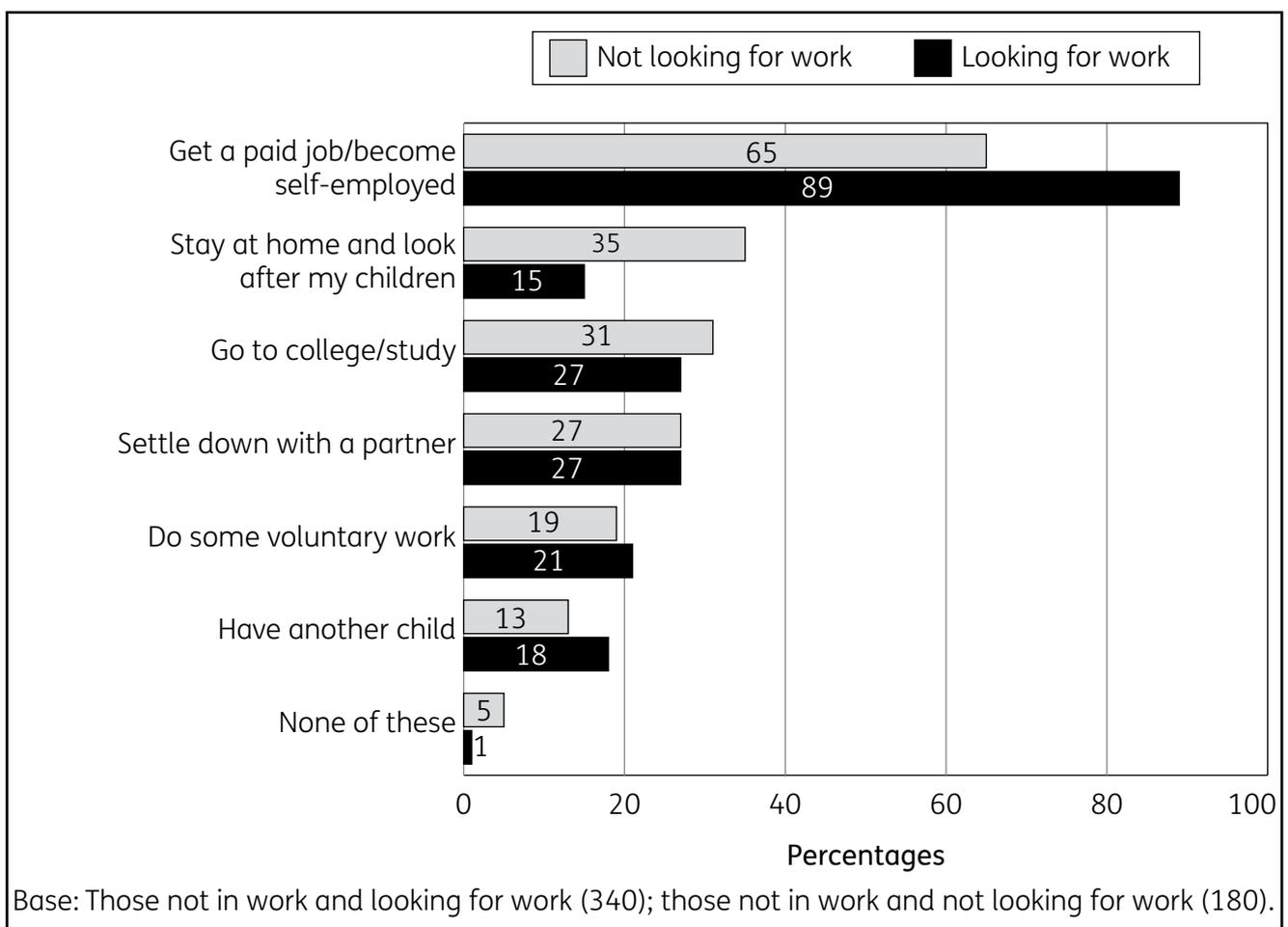
<sup>31</sup> These sub-groups were significantly more likely to agree to at least two out of three statements.

Some groups of lone parents were more likely to expect to move into work in the next few years. In particular those who:

- had made any JSA claim since moving off IS were more likely to expect to move into work compared to those who had not (77 per cent compared with 50 per cent); and
- did not have an LLSI were more likely than those who did have one (77 per cent compared to 56 per cent).

Figure 6.6 compares the hopes for the future of those who were and were not looking for work at the time of interview.

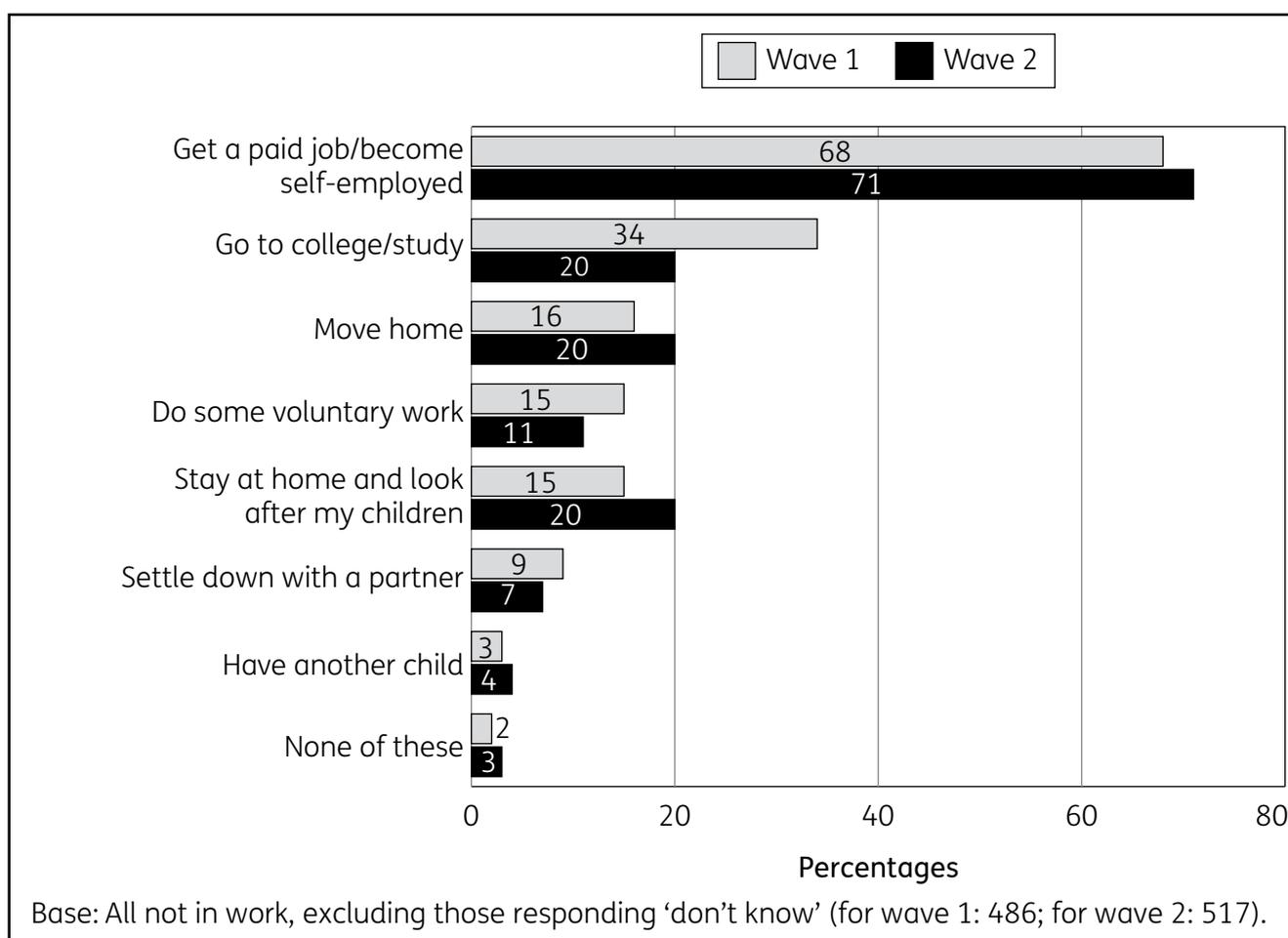
**Figure 6.6 Respondents' views on what they want to happen in the next few years by whether looking for work**



Those looking for work differed from those not looking for work in being more likely to say they hoped to get a paid job or become self-employed, and less likely to say they hoped to stay at home and look after their children. However, even though fewer of those not looking for work said they hoped to get a paid job or become self-employed, the proportion still represented two-thirds of this group. Otherwise, there were no significant differences between the hopes for the coming years of those looking for work and those not looking for work.

Figure 6.7 compares these respondents' expectations for the next few years at Wave 2 and when they were interviewed at Wave 1.

**Figure 6.7 Respondents' views on what they expect to happen in the next few years in Wave 1 and Wave 2**



There was not a statistically significant difference between the proportion of lone parents who expected to enter work between 2010 (Wave 1) and 2012 (Wave 2). The proportion expecting to go to college or study, however, declined dramatically, from 34 per cent in 2010 while they were claiming IS, to 20 per cent in 2012. This may be explained by recent research which showed that many lone parents saw learning as a stepping stone in the path towards work, but the realities of the JSA regime meant that less training was available to them than expected (Haux *et al.*, 2012, pp.89-94).<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly, the proportion expecting to stay at home and look after their children was somewhat higher in 2012 than it was in 2010, when respondents were claiming IS. However, those who had received JSA after leaving IS were less likely to expect to stay and home and look after their children: only 16 per cent of those who had claimed JSA expected to do this, compared with 34 per cent of those who had not claimed JSA.

### 6.3 Perceived barriers to employment of those not in work

In both waves 1 and 2, respondents who were not in work were asked to complete a card sort exercise in which they sorted a 19 statements by whether they perceive them to be a 'big barrier', a

<sup>32</sup> See also Section 5.5.

‘smaller factor’, or ‘not a factor’ in their decision to work. In Wave 1, factor analysis was conducted to reduce these 19 separate potential barriers into five broader themes. These were:

- childcare and jobsearch constraints;
- personal constraints;
- ‘parenting as a choice’;
- job concerns;
- peer pressure.

Overall, the most commonly experienced barriers in Wave 2 tended to be issues relating to childcare and jobsearch constraints – see Table 6.2. In particular, 58 per cent of respondents reported that the fact they needed a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their children was a big barrier, and 57 per cent said the lack of suitable job opportunities in the local area was a big barrier to entering work. On the other hand, the least commonly mentioned barriers related to peer pressure. On average, respondents reported 4.9 big barriers to work, with 40 per cent reporting six or more of the 19 issues as big barriers. Only seven per cent said that they faced none of these barriers to entering work.

Table 6.2 also shows the proportions of these lone parents who reported each of these issues as big barriers to employment when they were asked the same questions in Wave 1. For most of these issues, there were not significantly different proportions of respondents reporting them as big barriers to work in Wave 1 and Wave 2.

However, the significant differences that did exist suggested that negative opinions towards work and concerns about benefits were less likely to be big barriers in Wave 2 than in Wave 1, while practical problems were more likely to be barriers. Therefore, a higher proportion of lone parents reported that a lack of suitable job opportunities in the local area, or their health condition or disability were big barriers to work in Wave 2, compared with Wave 1. Conversely, smaller proportions said needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren), being concerned about leaving the security of benefits, and not being sure they would be financially better off in work, were big barriers in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1.

**Table 6.2 Respondents' perceived barriers to work in Wave 1 and Wave 2**

	<i>Column percentages</i>	
	<b>Wave 1</b> %	<b>Wave 2</b> %
<b>Childcare and jobsearch constraints</b>		
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	30	34
Employers aren't family friendly	24	24
My family or close friends are not able, or live too far away, to provide childcare	38	33
There are few suitable job opportunities in the local area	45	57
I would need a job where I could take time off at short notice to look after my child(ren)	66	58
I would have problems with transport to and from work	21	21
<b>Personal constraints</b>		
I have personal or family troubles that need to be sorted out	20	21
I have difficulties owing to my health condition or disability	15	21
I care for someone with has a health condition, disability, or learning difficulties	13	14
<b>'Parenting as a choice'</b>		
I want to look after my child(ren) myself or at home	32	28
I am worried I will not have enough time with my child(ren)	34	29
I am not prepared to leave my child(ren) in the care of anyone other than my family or close friends while I work	38	34
My child(ren) wouldn't like me to work	17	13
<b>Job concerns</b>		
I am concerned about leaving the security of benefits	18	12
I haven't got the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job I would want	37	33
My confidence is low at the moment	31	28
I am not sure I would be financially better off in work	41	34
<b>Peer pressure</b>		
My husband/partner/ex-partner wouldn't like it if I worked	1	2
My parent(s) wouldn't like it if I worked	4	2
<i>Base: All LPO respondents not in work, excluding 'don't know'</i>	468	501

The remainder of this section presents analysis of the issues in each of these factors. In addition to reporting results for all those not in work at Wave 2, we also examine whether particular groups of lone parents were more or less likely to find these issues barriers to entering work, with a particular focus on those currently claiming JSA and ESA. Analysis of those claiming ESA is based on fewer than 100 interviews, and, as such, caution should be exercised when interpreting this data.

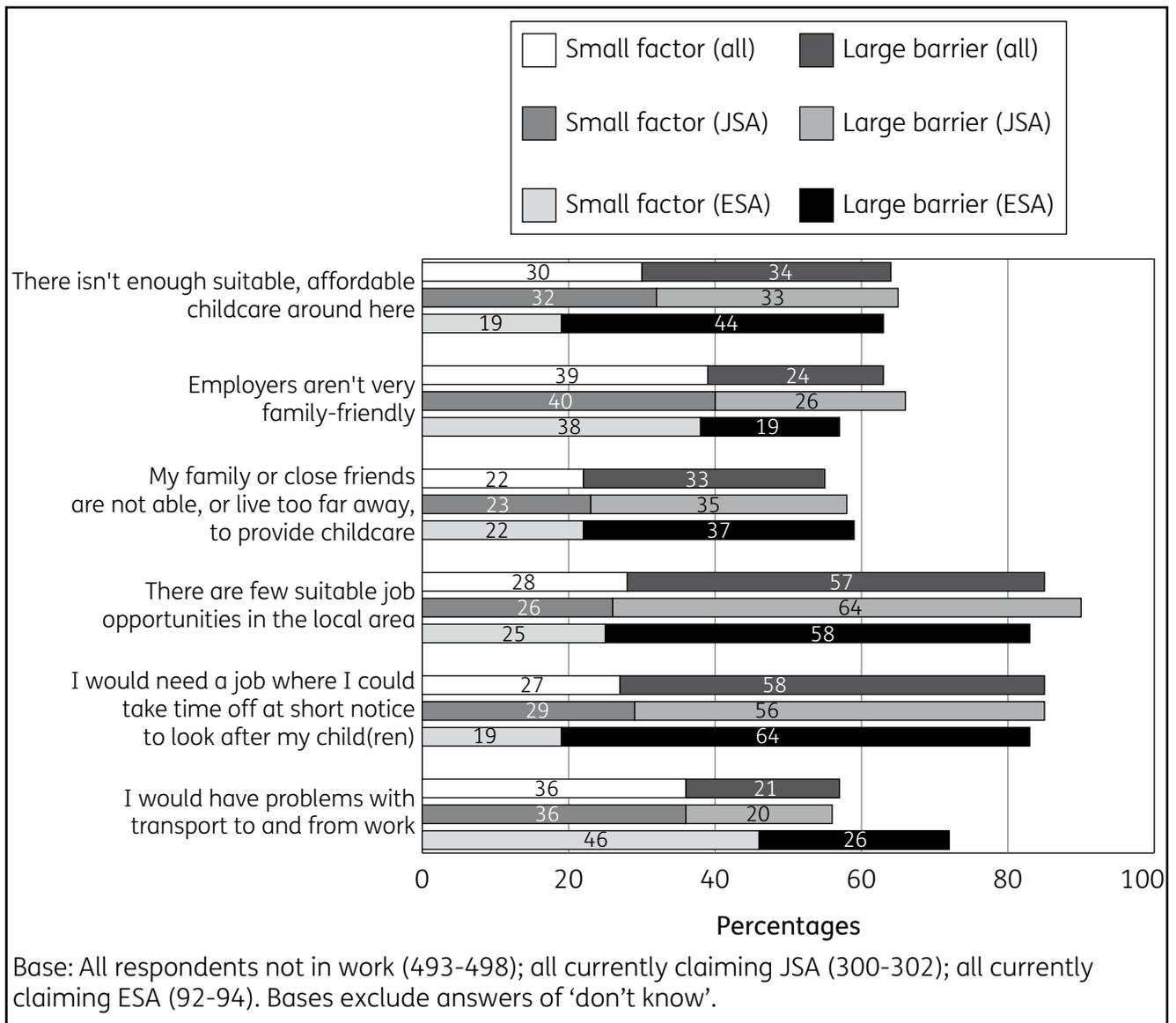
### 6.3.1 Childcare and jobsearch constraints

The first types of barrier to employment faced by lone parents are childcare and jobsearch constraints. Figure 6.8 shows the proportion of respondents who considered each of the issues related to childcare and jobsearch to be a large barrier or a small factor. The chart also shows the

responses of those who were claiming JSA (in the middle bar) and ESA (in the bottom bar) at the time of the interview.

The issue that was most commonly noted as a big barrier by lone parents was that they would need a job where they could take time off at short notice to look for their children, noted by 58 per cent of respondents. This was closely followed by concerns that there were few suitable job opportunities in the local area, noted by 57 per cent of respondents.

**Figure 6.8 Barriers to entering work – childcare and jobsearch constraints**



With one exception, there were no significant differences between the answers of those claiming ESA and JSA at the time of interview. The one exception was that those claiming ESA were more likely to cite problems with transport as at least a small factor than those claiming JSA. Nevertheless, there were some significant differences depending on whether the lone parent had a disability which limited the amount or type of work they did (not all of whom were claiming ESA). Those with an LLSI were more likely to report the following as big barriers to work:

- not enough suitable, affordable childcare available locally (44 per cent, compared to 30 per cent of those without an LLSI);

- needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after children (66 per cent, compared to 55 per cent of those without an LLSI);
- problems with transport to and from work (31 per cent, compared to 17 per cent of those without an LLSI).

Other variations included lone parents:

- who were not in work at the time of the interview, but who had worked since the birth of their oldest child, were less likely to report that the fact that they would need a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after children as a big barrier (50 per cent), compared with those with had either not worked since their oldest child was born or who had never worked (65 per cent);
- with no qualifications or qualifications below level 2 were more likely to say the perception that employers were not very family friendly was a big barrier (29 per cent) compared to those with qualifications at or above level 2 (19 per cent);
- with two or more children were more likely to report that it was a big barrier that they did not have friends or close family who were able to provide childcare (38 per cent), compared to those with only one child (25 per cent).

### **6.3.2 Personal constraints**

Personal constraints to employment include other caring responsibilities, health conditions and other personal circumstances which impede work. Figure 6.9 shows the proportion of respondents who considered each of the following personal constraints to be a large or a small barrier. The chart also shows the responses of those who were claiming JSA (in the middle bar) and ESA (in the bottom bar) at the time of the interview.

One in five lone parents (21 per cent) reported that personal or family troubles that needed to be sorted out before they could enter work were a big barrier, with a further 16 per cent reporting this as a small factor. In addition, 21 per cent reported health conditions which inhibited their ability to work as a big barrier, and 14 per cent reported the need to care for someone with a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties as a big barrier.

**Figure 6.9 Barriers to entering work – personal constraints**



Those claiming ESA were more likely to cite all of these barriers than those claiming JSA. This included nearly half of all those claiming ESA who reported that family or personal trouble that needed to be sorted out was a big barrier to employment, compared to 13 per cent of those claiming JSA. Chapter 2 on destinations reported that these barriers were the ones that were most strongly correlated with moving into work; in other words, these can be considered the most fundamental barriers to work. This is consistent with the lower proportion of lone parents with an LLSI who entered work.

Those not looking for work were more likely than those looking for work to say their health condition or disability was a big barrier (45 per cent compared to nine per cent), that the fact that they had to care for someone with a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulty was a big barrier (21 per cent, compared to 11 per cent), or that they had personal or family troubles that needed to be sorted out (32 per cent, compared to 15 per cent). This is linked to the fact that those claiming ESA were less likely to be looking for work than those claiming JSA.

Certain other groups of lone parents were more likely to say some issues were big barriers than others:

- lone parents with two or more children were more likely to say that they had to care for someone with a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulty (17 per cent, compared to ten per cent of those with only one child). Moreover, these lone parents were more likely to report having personal or family troubles that needed to be sorted out (24 per cent, compared to 16 per cent of those with only one child);
- lone parents whose highest qualification was below level 2 or who had no qualifications were more likely to cite having personal or family trouble that needed to be sorted out as a big barrier compared to those with level 2 or higher qualifications (25 per cent compared to 16 per cent);
- those living in socially rented accommodation (that is, renting from a local authority or housing association) were more likely than those living in other forms of housing to report that health conditions or a disability were a big barrier to entering work (25 per cent, compared to 14 per cent). Those living in privately rented accommodation tended to be better qualified and have fewer children than those living in socially rented housing.

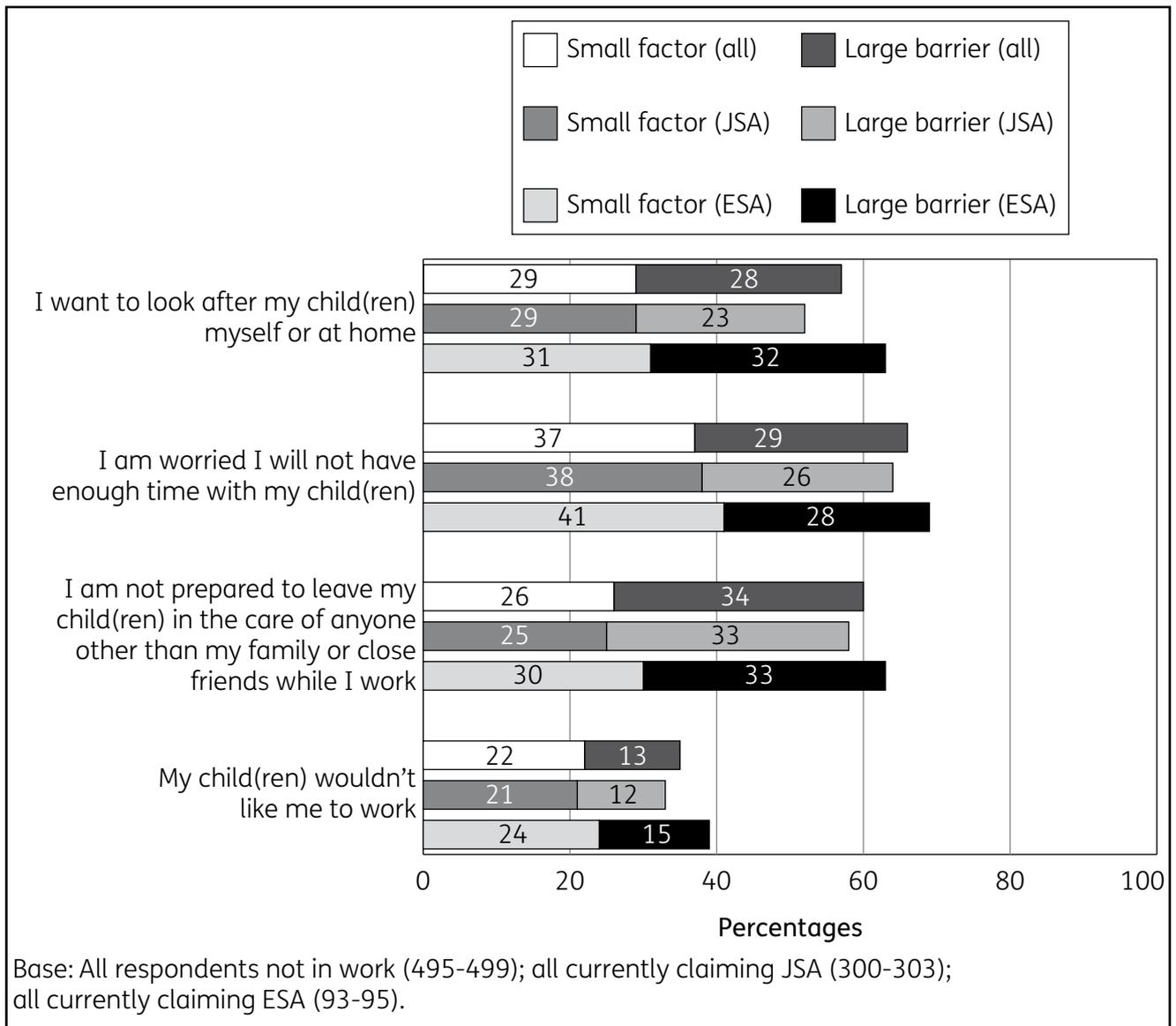
### 6.3.3 'Parenting as a choice'

Previous research has shown that there are a group of lone parents for whom parenting is a choice that is preferable to work. Moreover, as we have seen, Tomaszewski *et al.* found that '*prolonged labour market inactivity ... strengthens a set of attitudes that appeared to discourage lone mothers from seeking employment, such as those where parenting is treated as a job*' (Tomaszewski *et al.*, 2010, p.29).

Around three in ten respondents to this survey reported that the fact that they wanted to look after their child(ren) themselves at home, were worried that they would not have enough time with their children if they entered work, or were not comfortable with using formal childcare were big barriers to work (see Figure 6.10).

As one would expect, lone parents who were looking for work at the time of the Wave 2 interview were less likely to cite these barriers than those who were not looking for work. Moreover, those with a disability that limited the amount or type of work they could do were more likely to say it was a big barrier that they wanted to look after their children at home than those who did not have one (40 per cent compared to 23 per cent). Nevertheless, there were not significant differences depending on whether respondents were claiming JSA or ESA at the time of the interview.

**Figure 6.10 Barriers to entering work – parenting as a choice**



### 6.3.4 Job concerns

Many lone parents reported that concerns about their employability or the benefits of being in work were barriers to their moving into work. In particular, one-third of respondents reported that the fact that they thought they had not got the right qualifications or experience to get the kind of job they wanted, and/or that they were not sure they would be better off in work, were big barriers to employment. However, only 12 per cent of respondents said concern about leaving the security of benefits was a big barrier to work.

In total, nearly three-quarters of respondents said that their uncertainty about whether they would be better off in work was at least a smaller barrier. Nevertheless, other research has suggested that this is less of a factor for lone parents. For example, one recent report found that ‘among the parents interviewed, many needed little additional incentive to leave benefits. Indeed, financial motives were rarely the only or the most important reason for doing so. Some parents chose to enter work even though they were little better off than they were on benefits’ (Griffiths, 2011; p.4).

**Figure 6.11 Barriers to entering work – job concerns**



Respondents claiming ESA were more likely to cite low confidence as a big barrier to entering employment than those claiming JSA. Similarly, those with an LLSI were more likely to cite low confidence as a big barrier to work than those without one – 43 per cent compared to 21 per cent. However, there were no other significant differences between the barriers reported by those claiming JSA and ESA.

Lone parents with less recent work experience (those who had not worked since the birth of their oldest child or who had never worked) were more likely to report the following as big barriers to work:

- having low confidence (32 per cent, compared to 21 per cent of those who had worked since the birth of their eldest child);
- not having the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job they would like (42 per cent, compared to 24 per cent);
- not being sure they would be better off in work (38 per cent, compared to 29 per cent).

In addition, those with low level qualifications (below level 2) or with no qualifications were more likely than those with level 2 or higher qualifications to cite the following as big barriers to work:

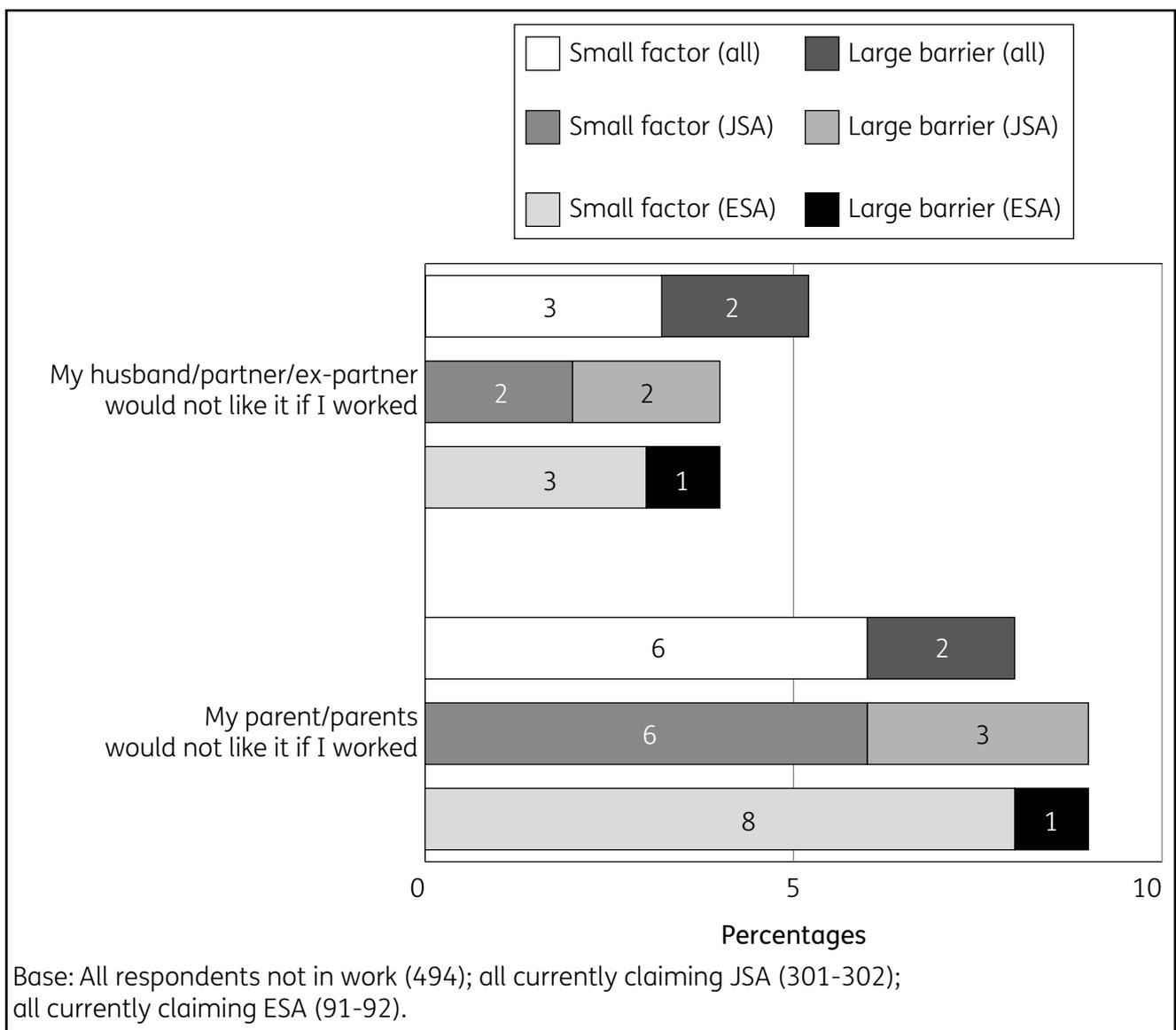
- having low confidence (37 per cent compared to 19 per cent);
- not having the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job they want (48 per cent compared to 20 per cent);
- not being sure they would be better off in work (39 per cent compared to 29 per cent).

These variations are consistent with Wave 1 findings.

### 6.3.5 Peer pressure

Only a very small number of respondents considered peer pressure to be a big barrier to their entering work. Only two per cent reported that their husband, partner or ex-partner would not like them working, with the same proportion saying their parents would not like it.

**Figure 6.12 Barriers to entering work – peer pressure**



## 6.4 Perceived barriers to staying in work

Previous research has found that being in work can present lone parents with a range of problems. For example, Bell *et al.* note that *'for lone parents, the co-ordination and management of work, education, childcare and travel is anything but a mundane or straightforward aspect of family life. [Balancing different commitments] is a highly skilled activity where events and resources have to be brought together in a particular time frame to make key events happen and arrangements run smoothly'* (Bell *et al.*, 2005, p.103).

To look into this in detail, respondents who were in work at the time of interview completed a card sort exercise in which they sorted a series of statements by whether they perceived them to be a 'big barrier', a 'smaller factor' or not a factor in their being able to stay in work.

The largest barrier to staying in work respondents reported was not being sure they were financially better off in work (with 27 per cent citing this as a big barrier), followed by there not being enough suitable, affordable childcare (cited by 25 per cent).

Nevertheless, no other barriers were mentioned by more than a quarter of respondents, and respondents each cited relatively few barriers to staying in work. Nearly one-third of respondents (32 per cent) said there were no big barriers to staying in work, and on average respondents noted 2.3 big barriers (compared to 4.9 big barriers to entering work cited by those out work, see Section 6.3). Just one-quarter of respondents (25 per cent) cited four or more big barriers. In this context, it is worth noting the findings reported in Section 3.4.11: the majority of working respondents said that it was very or fairly easy for them to stay in their job.

Factor analysis was conducted to reduce the 18 individual barriers to staying in employment into a smaller number of factors (see Appendix A for further details of how the factor analysis was carried out). The results revealed that the barriers could be summarised in the following six categories:

- parental concerns;
- money concerns;
- childcare concerns;
- employer concerns;
- not enjoying work/struggling to cope with work; and
- peer pressure/travel.

### 6.4.1 Parental concerns

Parental concerns, which centred around spending time with children and combining work and family life, were the most common barriers to staying in work. Nearly three in five lone parents found that the stress of combining work and family life was at least a small barrier to staying in work, and over half were concerned about not spending enough time with their children.

**Table 6.3 Barriers to staying in work – parental concerns**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
My children don't like me working	19	23	59	398
I find it stressful combining work and family life	20	37	43	398
I am worried I do not have enough time with my children	23	29	48	398

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Lone parents working longer hours were more likely to note the latter two of these statements as at least small barriers to staying in work than those working shorter hours. This confirms the findings reported in Section 3.4.9, that there is a strong link between working hours and pressure on parental childcare.

### 6.4.2 Money concerns

Money concerns were also among the more often mentioned barriers to staying in work. Over half of respondents said the fact that they hadn't anticipated all the extra costs they would have in work was at least a small barrier. Similarly, 52 per cent said they were not sure they were financially better off in work and that this was at least a small barrier to staying in work. The link between work and income, and deprivation is discussed in the next chapter.

**Table 6.4 Barriers to staying in work – money concerns**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
I hadn't anticipated all the extra things I would need to spend money on now that I'm in work	23	34	43	397
I am not sure I am better off financially in work	27	26	48	398
I am finding it difficult to adjust to having money coming in every month rather than every week	10	17	73	397

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Those working fewer hours were more likely to note the second and third of the statements in Table 6.4 as big barriers compared to those working more hours. Similarly, those with lower weekly incomes were more likely to cite these barriers. As noted in Section 3.4.8, lone parents were often working in poorly paid, unskilled jobs, and this was particularly likely to be the case when they were working fewer hours (e.g. fewer than 16 hours per week).

### 6.4.3 Childcare concerns

Respondents were considerably more likely to report the lack of suitable, affordable childcare as a barrier than to report concerns about the quality of childcare itself. This is likely to be linked to the high and rising costs of childcare in the UK (Daycare Trust, 2012).

**Table 6.5 Barriers to staying in work – childcare concerns**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	25	19	56	396
My children are not happy in childcare while I'm at work	13	12	74	395
I'm not confident my childcare arrangements will continue	12	13	75	396

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Those not using formal childcare were less likely than those who were using it to say that there was not enough affordable, suitable childcare in their area and that this was a big or small barrier to staying in work (39 per cent compared to 56 per cent of those using formal childcare).

#### 6.4.4 Employer concerns

In total, 13 per cent of respondents said pressure to work longer hours, stay late or do overtime was a big barrier to staying in work, and nine per cent reported that the fact that their employer was not very family friendly was a big barrier.

**Table 6.6 Barriers to staying in work – employer concerns**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
There is a lot of pressure in my present job to work longer hours, stay late, or do overtime	13	13	74	396
My employer is not very family friendly	9	7	85	396

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Those working a greater number of hours were more likely to report pressure in their job to work longer hours, stay late, or do overtime, compared with those working fewer hours.

#### 6.4.5 Not enjoying work/struggling to cope with work

Very few respondents reported issues relating to not enjoying work, or struggling to cope with work as barriers to staying in work. However, a slightly higher proportion of respondents, 12 per cent, reported that they could not see their job going anywhere and that there were no promotion prospects.

**Table 6.7 Barriers to staying in work – not enjoying work/struggling to cope with work**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
My confidence has taken a knock since I entered work	3	7	90	397
I am not enjoying working as much as I thought I would	5	14	81	397
I have difficulties working owing to my health condition or disability	5	6	89	397
I can't see this job going anywhere, there are no promotion prospects	12	19	69	397

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Those working fewer hours were more likely than those working more hours to say they couldn't see their job going anywhere and that there were no promotion prospects, and also more likely to say their confidence had taken a knock since they started working.

#### 6.4.6 Peer pressure/travel

Very few respondents reported peer pressure, either from their parents or from husbands/partners or ex-partners, being a barrier to stop working. A slightly higher proportion, 18 per cent, reported that they had problems with transport to and from work, and that this was either a big or a small barrier to staying in work.

**Table 6.8 Barriers to staying in work – peer pressure/travel**

	<i>Row percentages</i>			
	<b>Big barrier</b>	<b>Small barrier</b>	<b>Not a barrier</b>	<i>Base: All respondents not in work<sup>1</sup></i>
My parents don't like me working	2	5	93	397
My husband/partner/ex-partner does not like me working	2	2	96	397
I have problems with transport to and from work	6	11	82	395

<sup>1</sup> Bases are all respondents in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know'.

Those living in socially rented accommodation were more likely to cite these barriers than those living in other forms of accommodation. Moreover, those without access to a vehicle were more likely to cite problems with transport as a big barrier, compared with those with access (ten per cent, compared to three per cent).

## 6.5 Summary

- Lone parents expressed a strong work focus in their attitudes, alongside a strong focus on parental childcare.
- In broad terms, attitudes towards work, parenting and childcare remained similar between Wave 1 (when on IS) and Wave 2 (after the move off IS on to other destinations). However, at Wave 2, respondents were less likely to agree with some parental childcare focused statements (such as ‘children do best if their mum stays at home to look after them’), and were more likely to agree with employment focused statements (such as ‘having almost any job is better than being unemployed’).
- Lone parents who were in work were more likely to agree than those claiming JSA or ESA with employment focused statements and statements suggesting motivation to combine work and childcare (such as ‘working mothers have the best of both worlds’). However, there were less strong differences in opinion in relation to attitudes towards ‘parental childcare’ (such as ‘children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents’) and the social stigma of benefits (such as ‘stay-at-home mums are not valued by society’).
- When respondents out of work were asked about their barriers to work, the most commonly mentioned barriers related to jobsearch constraints, such as there not being enough suitable job opportunities in the local area, or needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after children. The least commonly mentioned barriers to work related to peer pressure. On average, respondents noted 4.9 big barriers to entering employment (out of a possible 19). Those claiming ESA were more likely than those claiming JSA to cite ‘personal’ barriers to entering employment, such as having a health condition, or having personal troubles that needed to be sorted out. ESA claimants were also more likely to cite low confidence as a barrier to work.
- When compared to responses in Wave 1, there was not a large shift in the frequencies of different types of barrier. Nevertheless, there was a small shift in that barriers to work were less likely to be because of negative opinions about work but slightly more likely to reflect practical problems. Therefore, a higher proportion of lone parents reported that a lack of suitable job opportunities in the local area, or their health condition or disability were big barriers to work in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. Conversely, smaller proportions said needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren), being concerned about leaving the security of benefits, and not being sure they would be financially better off in work were big barriers in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1.
- Respondents in work were less likely to perceive barriers to staying in work, than those out of work perceived to entering work. In total, only two (out of 18) big barriers to staying in work were mentioned by one-quarter of respondents or more. These were: not being sure about being financially better off in work (mentioned by 27 per cent) and a lack of suitable, affordable childcare (mentioned by 25 per cent of respondents). In total, respondents mentioned only 2.3 big barriers to staying in work on average.

# 7 Wellbeing and deprivation

There is a large body of evidence demonstrating the financial problems and levels of deprivation among lone parents and their children. While, on average 21 per cent of all families are in poverty in any month, a higher proportion of lone mothers (41 per cent) and lone fathers (33 per cent) faced poverty than parents living as couples (13 per cent) (Browne and Paull, 2010). Moreover, analysis of the British Household Panel Survey found that 68 per cent of lone parent families experienced poverty at least once during the four-wave period of research, compared with 34 per cent of the whole population. In addition, 19 per cent were in poverty across all four waves, compared to only seven per cent of the whole population (quoted in Smith and Middleton, 2007).

This chapter aims to examine the income levels and prevalence of material deprivation among lone parents. In particular, there is a focus on if and how far material deprivation and financial problems are alleviated if a lone parent enters work. To examine these issues, data from both the Wave 1 and Wave 2 surveys have been analysed. After a brief consideration of the income levels of lone parents, and the extent to which they face financial difficulties after entering work, the chapter gives consideration to material deprivation experienced by lone parents. This analysis is based on a suite of questions developed as part of the Family Resources Survey, and examines data for the entire Wave 1 cohort (interviews while still on Income Support (IS)), as well as for those who had entered work or increased the number of hours they worked when interviewed in Wave 2.

## 7.1 Income and financial problems

### 7.1.1 Household income

Respondents were asked to place the total income of their whole household (before deductions for income tax, National Insurance, etc.) into one of 12 bands. Figures were, therefore, self-reported by respondents, and were not verified. Table 7.1 shows the figures for total household income by current work status. The table also shows the income distribution reported by the same lone parents when they were interviewed at Wave 1.

In total, 52 per cent of lone parents had a weekly income of less than £200, including 17 per cent with less than £100 per week. On the other hand, 18 per cent had a weekly income of £300 or more. As one would expect, those in work typically had higher weekly incomes than those out of work; for instance, those in work were three times as likely as those out of work to have an income of £300 or more.

**Table 7.1 Total household income, by current work status**

	<i>Column percentages</i>			
	Not currently in work	Wave 2 Currently in work	Total Wave 2	Wave 1
	%	%	%	%
Under £100/week	21	12	17	16
£100–199	42	26	35	48
£200–299	22	28	25	23
£300+	10	30	18	6
Don't know/refused	5	5	5	7
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	566	406	972	972

When these respondents' income is compared to their income at Wave 1, we see that, on average, weekly incomes were higher in 2012 than they were in 2010. While only six per cent of lone parents had a weekly income of £300 or more at Wave 1, this had risen to 18 per cent in Wave 2. This change is linked with the proportion of respondents in work which, as discussed in Chapter 2, was much higher at Wave 2 than at Wave 1.

Moreover, those in work in Wave 2 had higher incomes on average than those who had been in work at Wave 1. Only 12 per cent of respondents in Wave 1 who were in work had a weekly income of £300 or more, significantly lower than the 30 per cent of respondents in work at Wave 2. The growth in income for those in work is in part because those in work in Wave 2 tended to be in work of 16 hours or more, while those in work in Wave 1 were more likely to be in work for fewer than 16 hours (often while still claiming IS). The Wave 1 report found that the household income of those working for fewer than 16 hours work per week was not significantly higher than those not in work.

While there was not a statistically significant difference between the household incomes of those with and without a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LLSI), those lone parents with mental-health problems tended to have lower weekly incomes; for example, 24 per cent had a weekly income of less than £100 compared to 16 per cent of those without mental-health problems. This is in line with findings in Chapter 2 that those with mental-health problems were less likely than those without to have entered employment. Moreover, in line with other findings that couple families were less likely to be in poverty than lone parent families, quoted above, those respondents who lived in a household with another adult were less likely to have a household income of less than £200 per week than those who did not share their household with another adult. In addition, respondents with more children were more likely to have a higher income than those with fewer children; this is likely to in part be because those with more children will receive more Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits.

Data from the Childcare and Early Years survey 2009, quoted in the Wave 1 report (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011, p.35), showed that 25 per cent of all lone parents in the population (i.e. not just lone parents affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO)) had a household income of less than £10,000 per year, or approximately £200 per week. Given that over half of LPO lone parents had a household income of less than £200 per week, this suggests that, although LPO lone parents are on average earning more at Wave 2 than they were at Wave 1, they are still significantly worse off than lone parents as a whole.

### 7.1.2 Financial problems

Respondents who had worked in the past two years were also asked a series of questions about whether they felt their income was sufficient, and about any debt problems that they might have. The results are presented in Table 7.2.

At Wave 2, just over one-quarter of respondents reported that they found it quite or very difficult to manage financially, nearly three in ten never had money left over at the end of the week, and just over one in six (16 per cent) had trouble with debts almost all of the time. Seven per cent of respondents reported experiencing all three of these financial problems.

Nevertheless, a smaller proportion of respondents experienced financial problems at Wave 2 (in 2012) than when they were interviewed in 2010, with the decrease particularly large for those who were in work when interviewed at Wave 2; only five per cent of those in work at the time of the Wave 2 interview reported that they experienced all three financial problems. Again, this shows the positive financial impact for lone parents of moving into work.

Nevertheless, significant minorities of those in work when interviewed at Wave 2 were experiencing the individual financial problems; over one-quarter never had any money left over at the end of the week, and over one-fifth found it quite or very difficult to manage financially.<sup>33</sup>

**Table 7.2 Perception of financial problems, but current work status**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Currently in work</b>	<b>Total Wave 2</b>	<b>Wave 1</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Find it quite or very difficult to manage financially	22	26	40
Never have money left over at the end of the week	26	29	47
Trouble with debts almost all of the time	13	16	23
All of the above	5	7	13
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	406	476	476

When compared with all lone parents in the population (i.e., not just those who had gone through LPO) measured in the Families and Childrens Study (FACS), lone parents who had gone through LPO were equally as likely as all lone parents to have debts almost all the time (13 per cent of all lone parents in FACS – not significantly different from the 16 per cent of LPO lone parents). However, they were actually slightly more likely to have some money left over at the end of the week than all lone parents in the population. While 29 per cent of LPO lone parents reported they never had money left over at the end of the week, 34 per cent of all lone parents said this (FACS 2008 data, quoted in Coleman and Lanceley, 2011, p.35).

## 7.2 Material deprivation and low income at Wave 1

As noted above, lone parents and their children are a great deal more likely to be living in poverty than couple families. Previous research has shown that families living in poverty ‘were often doing without everyday necessities like food, clothing, fuel and social activities. Parents, especially mothers, also often went without so that they could try and ensure their children’s needs were met.’

*‘For many families even vigilance and strict budgeting could not make their money go far enough, and the everyday demands of sustaining family life coupled with the sudden appearance of extra needs could result in severe financial problems and debt.’*

(Ridge, 2009)

This section examines levels of material deprivation and low income experienced by lone parents when they were first interviewed in early 2010.<sup>34</sup> The analysis is based on a suite of questions, first used in the Family Resources Survey, which look to measure material deprivation based on whether households can afford to buy a range of common goods and services. Respondents were asked if

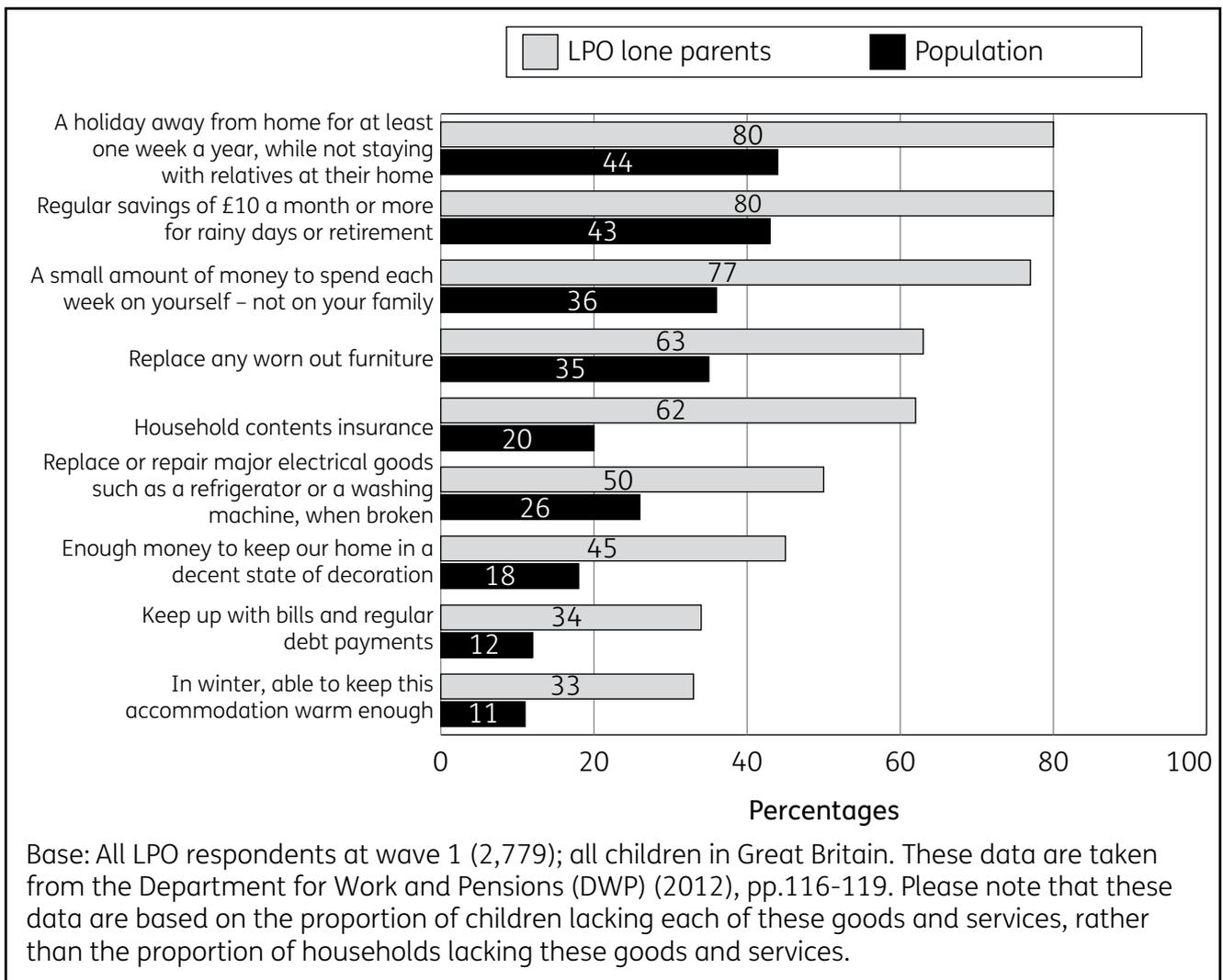
<sup>33</sup> Bases of those in mini-jobs, and full-time work were not large enough to determine whether money problems were more or less acute for those doing mini-jobs compared to part or full-time work. However, comparisons were made between those working for 16 hours or fewer and those working 17 hours or more, and there were no significant differences.

<sup>34</sup> The data is being analysed now, and was not analysed in the wave 1 report. This is because the ‘prevalence weights’ required to run analysis from 2010/11 had not been released when the wave 1 report was written.

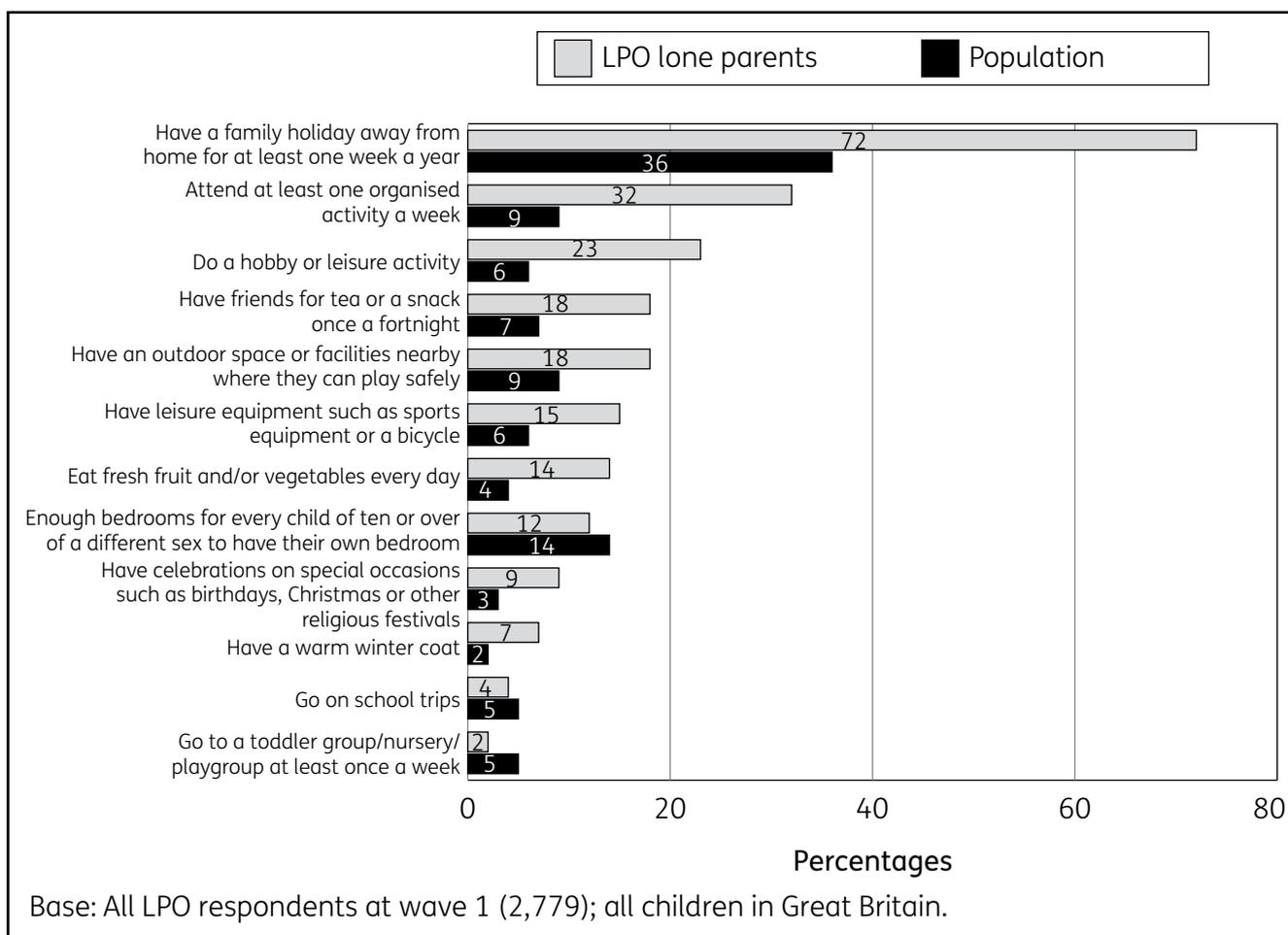
they had, wanted but could not afford, or did not want/need all of these items. These items can be split into those relating to adults/households and those specifically relating to children. The proportions of respondents that wanted each of these things but could not afford them at the time of the interview are reported in Figures 7.1 and 7.2. These findings are compared against the proportion of children in the population who live in households which lack but want each of these goods and services.

In general, lone parent households in the survey were more likely to lack goods and services relating to adults or the household than they were for goods or services relating to children, supporting Ridge's analysis that parents in families in poverty would often go without to ensure their children's needs were met. Between 33 per cent and 80 per cent of households lacked each of the adult/household goods and services, but only one item relating to children was lacked by more than one-third of households (having a family holiday away from home for at least one week a year).

**Figure 7.1 Lone parents wanting but unable to afford a range of adult/household material deprivation items at Wave 1**



**Figure 7.2 Lone parents wanting but unable to afford a range of child material deprivation items at Wave 1**



As might be expected, lone parent households in this survey were more likely to want but not afford most goods and services than the population as a whole. The largest percentage point differences were for the proportion with household contents insurance (42 percentage point difference), and the proportion where the parent had a small amount of money to spend each week on themselves, not their family (41 percentage point difference). Moreover, children in lone parent households were nearly four times less likely to do a hobby or leisure activity, or have a winter coat than all children, and were nearly three times less likely to be able to attend at least one organised activity a week.

Results from these questions can be combined to give each respondent a 'deprivation score'. These scores range from 0 (if a household lacks none of the items) to 100 (if they lack them all). If an item is more commonly held by households in the population as a whole it is given a higher score, and if the item is less commonly held it has a lower score.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, if a family cannot provide a winter coat for a child it would receive a higher score than if they cannot afford to go on holiday, as holidays are less common within the population than owning a winter coat. If a household has a deprivation score of greater than 22, it can be said to be experiencing material deprivation. If that family experiences a deprivation score of greater than 22 and has a household income less than 70 per cent of the median household income before housing costs, it can be said to be in material

<sup>35</sup> This is achieved using a set of prevalence weights. Prevalence weights are released every year, so that the analysis reflects how common each good or service was in that particular year, given this might change over time.

deprivation and have low income.<sup>36</sup> Results, comparing respondents in work and those not in work, are presented in Table 7.3.

In total, two-thirds of respondents (67 per cent) were in material deprivation and had low income. This is significantly higher than for all lone parents in the population, as reported in the Department for Work and Pensions' 2010/11 HBAI report<sup>37</sup> This suggests that 28 per cent of children living in lone parent households were living in material deprivation and with low income. As noted in the Wave 1 report, the lone parents taking part in this study were more disadvantaged than lone parents as a whole, not all of whom will have claimed IS.

As shown in Table 7.3, LPO lone parents in work were less likely to be in material deprivation and have low income than those not in work. The HBAI population figures, however, show a much greater drop in material deprivation and low income levels for lone parents in work: while 48 per cent of children in workless lone parent households were in material deprivation and had low income, this figure dropped to seven per cent of those in full-time work, and 12 per cent of those in part-time work.<sup>38</sup> The smaller difference in the LPO survey is likely to be linked to the fact that most lone parents were working fewer than 16 hours before LPO.<sup>39</sup> In total, 54 per cent of those in mini-jobs of fewer than 16 hours were in material deprivation and had low income, compared with 40 per cent of those working (primarily) part-time or full-time.

**Table 7.3 Material deprivation and low income by whether in work**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>In work</b>	<b>Not in work</b>	<b>All</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Material deprivation	54	74	72
Material deprivation and low income	49	69	67
<i>Base: All respondents, excluding those who answered 'Don't know' to any question</i>	280	2,305	2,585

Some groups of lone parents were more likely to be in material deprivation and low income than others. Binary logistic regression analysis was carried out, in order to identify the sub-groups where there was an independently significant difference:

<sup>36</sup> For more details about how material deprivation is calculated, please see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3 of Department for Work and Pensions (2012).

<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that material deprivation in the HBAI report is based on a similar, but slightly different set of questions than is used in the LPO surveys (17 of the 21 items are the same, with four being different). The items asked about in HBAI were slightly more commonly held than the questions used in the LPO survey, therefore, in order to ensure they remain comparable, material deprivation and low income are defined by a deprivation score higher than 25 (not 22 as in the LPO survey) and household income of less than 70 per cent of median income, before housing costs. This difference in the threshold is in accordance with Department for Work and Pensions analysis found in Appendix 3 of the HBAI 2010/11 report.

<sup>38</sup> Full-time and part-time work in this analysis did not relate to a set number of hours, but were based on the lone parent's perception.

<sup>39</sup> See Section 3.4.3 of Coleman and Lanceley (2011).

- Lone parents with lower qualification levels were more likely to be in material deprivation and low income than those with higher level qualifications. While 73 per cent of lone parents with no formal qualifications were in material deprivation and had a low income, 62 per cent of those with qualifications at level 4 and above were.
- Barnes *et al.* (2008b) found that lacking access to a car was associated with an increased likelihood of persistent, rather than temporary, poverty. This study also found that lone parents without access to a car were more likely to be in material deprivation and have a low income than those who had access (71 per cent compared to 58 per cent).
- Lone parents with fewer dependent children were more likely to be in material deprivation and have a low income than those with more. In total, 69 per cent of lone parents with one dependent child were in material deprivation and had a low income, compared to 60 per cent of those with four or more.

Unsurprisingly, lone parents who considered themselves to have financial problems<sup>40</sup> were more likely to be in material deprivation than those who did not. Nevertheless, more than six in ten respondents (62 per cent) who did not consider that they had financial problems were living in material deprivation and low income, suggesting that material deprivation had become normalised in many lone parent families.

### 7.3 In-work material deprivation and low income in 2012

Browne and Paull (2010) note that *'moving into work is an important factor in lifting families out of poverty'*, and that during the first three years following work entry, the poverty rate falls from 37 per cent to 17 per cent for lone mothers and 22 per cent to 16 per cent for lone fathers. LPO encourages lone parents to enter work, and, as shown in Chapter 2, many more lone parents were in employment in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. Nevertheless, in-work poverty is a growing problem. While in the mid-1990s 45 per cent of children living in poverty had working parents, the figure in 2010/11 was 61 per cent (Goulden, 2012).

This section examines the levels of material deprivation experienced in households in which the lone parent had moved into employment since Wave 1, or who had increased their working hours since the first survey, to see what impact entering work had on levels of material deprivation. It will also make comparisons to the levels of material deprivation experienced by these respondents when they were interviewed in 2010.<sup>41</sup>

Respondents were asked the same set of questions about whether they had, wanted but could not afford, or did not want/need a range of common goods and services to measure their material deprivation. Again, these goods and services can be split into those relating to adults/households and those specifically relating to children. The proportions of respondents who wanted each of these things, but could not afford them at the time of the interview, are reported in Figures 7.3 and 7.4.

Looking first at the Wave 2 findings in their own right, the results demonstrate much higher levels of want for adult/household material deprivation items in households than the child material deprivation items. In Wave 2 only one child deprivation item was experienced by more than one in five respondents (having a family holiday), while all the adult/household items were experienced

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<sup>40</sup> That is finding it quite or very difficult to manage financially, not having money left over at the end of the week, and have trouble with debts almost all of the time.

<sup>41</sup> The previous section examined material deprivation for all lone parents surveyed in the first wave of research, in early 2010.

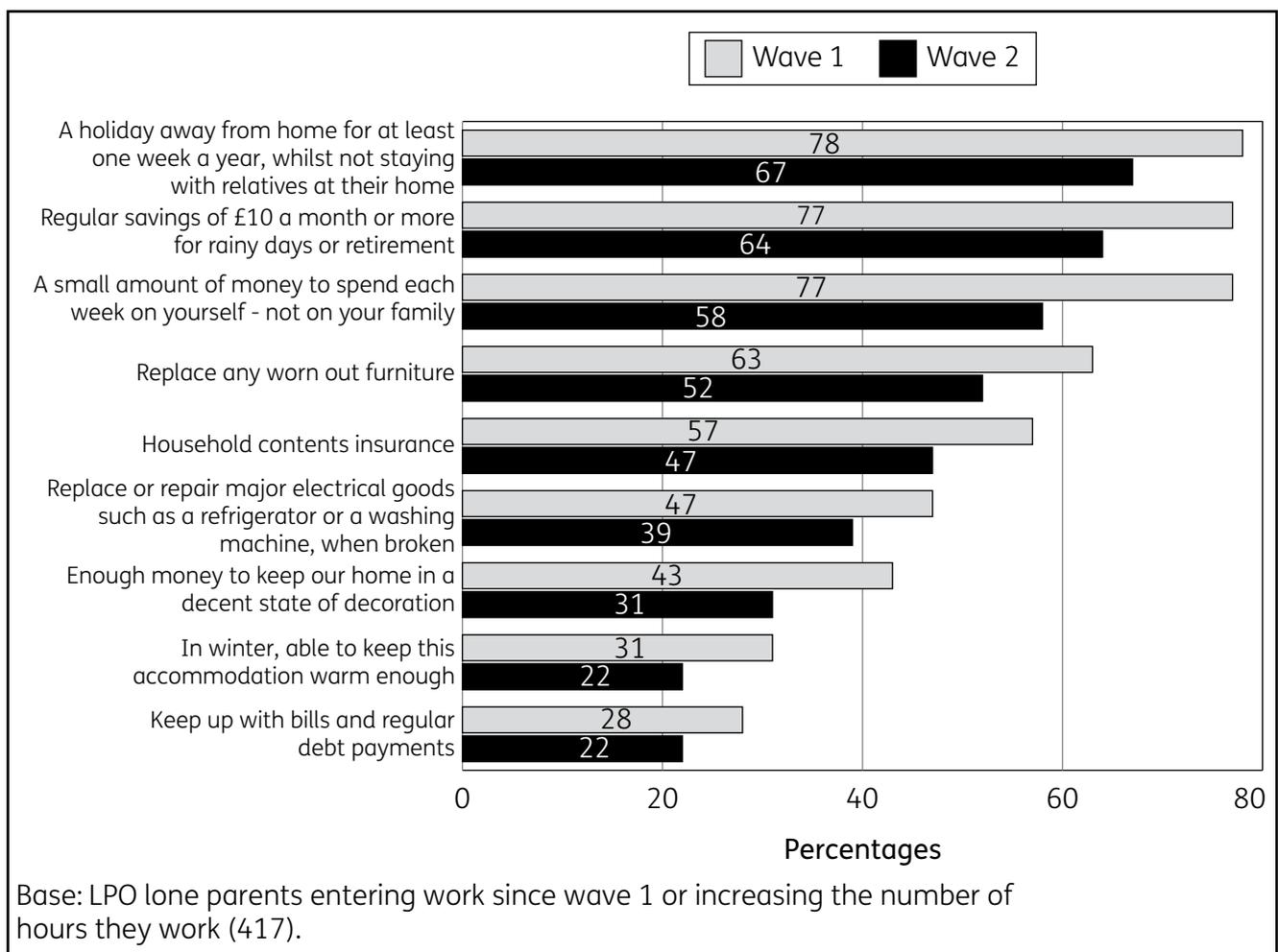
by more than 20 per cent. The items that were most commonly desirable but unaffordable were holidays, saving at least £10 a month for rainy days or retirement, lone parents spending a small amount of money each week on themselves and not their family, and replacing worn out furniture.

Nevertheless, there were statistically significant decreases in the proportions of these lone parents experiencing the majority of material deprivation items between waves 1 and 2. The largest absolute falls were:

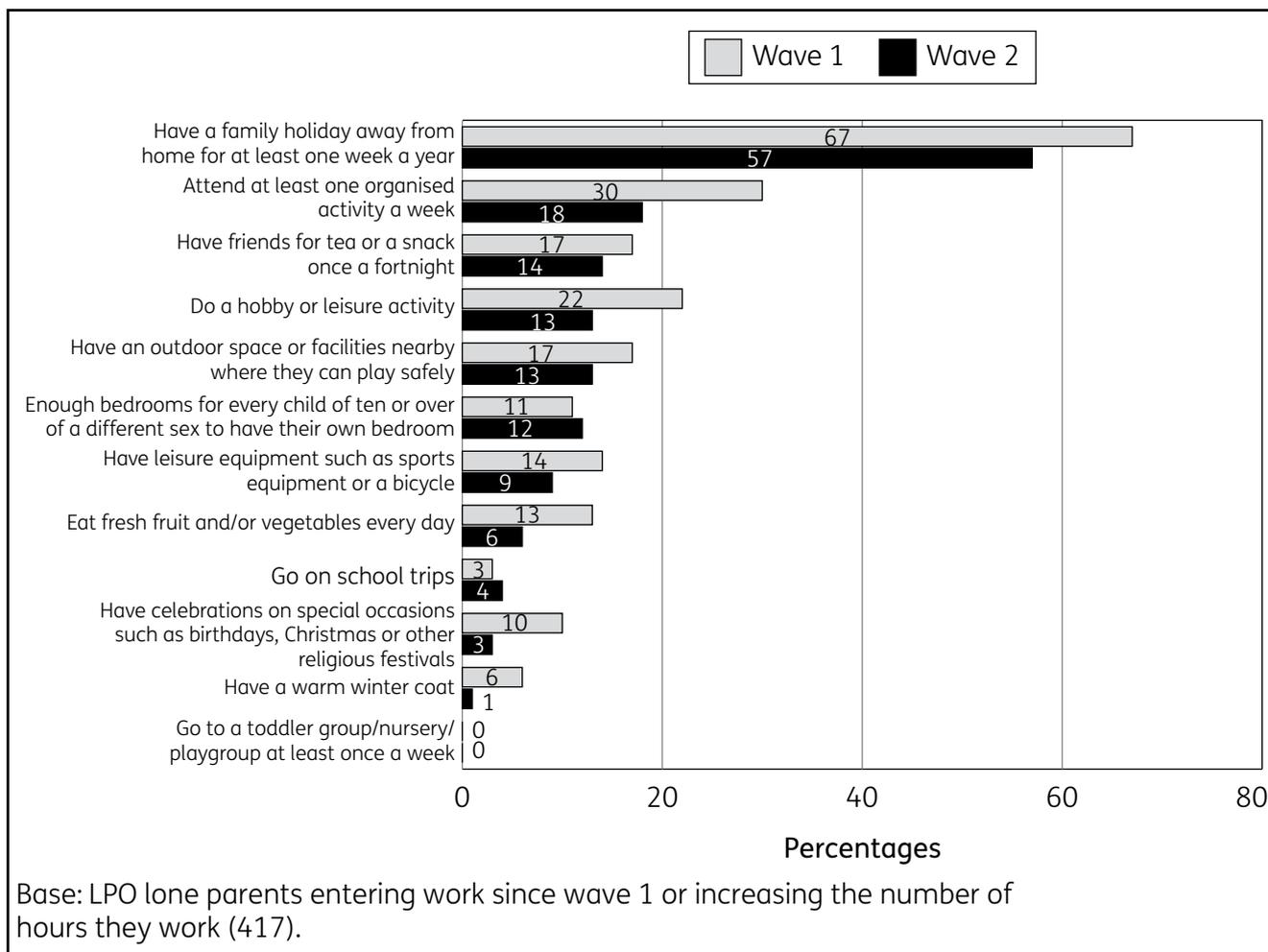
- having a small amount of money to spend each week on yourself – not on your family (19 percentage point decrease);
- being able to make regular savings of £10 a month or more for rainy days or retirement (13 percentage point decrease).

While the absolute (percentage point) decrease in the proportions of households wanting but not being able to afford adult/household items was higher than for child items, the average proportional decrease was higher for child items (an average 30 per cent decrease) compared to adult/household items (an average 21 per cent decrease).

**Figure 7.3 Lone parents wanting but unable to afford a range of adult/household material deprivation items at Wave 1 and Wave 2**



**Figure 7.4 Lone parents wanting but unable to afford a range of child material deprivation items at Wave 1 and Wave 2**



As in the previous section, results from these questions can be combined to give each respondent a deprivation score – see Section 7.2 for details. Table 7.4 shows the proportion of respondents in material deprivation and with a low income, and compares their situations before and after the LPO changes.

Levels of material deprivation and low income were significantly higher in Wave 1 when compared to Wave 2, at which point respondents had either started work when they were not working before, or were working more hours. The decreases in material deprivation in wave two were in part because the majority of those working at Wave 1 were working fewer than 16 hours, and, as we have seen the household income of those working for fewer than 16 hours work per week was not significantly higher than those not in any work.

Nevertheless, two in five households in which a lone parent had entered work were still living in material deprivation and with a low income in Wave 2, suggesting that in-work poverty still remains a problem for these lone parents. As expected, those working fewer hours were more likely to be in material deprivation and low income than those working more hours (48 per cent of those working 16 hours or fewer per week, compared with 27 per cent of those working more than 16 hours per week). As noted in Section 3.4.8, many lone parents were working for very low pay, and these findings indicate that these pay levels were often not sufficient to move them out of material deprivation.

**Table 7.4 Material deprivation and low income by whether entered a job or working more hours**

	<i>Column percentages</i>					
	Newly entered work since Wave 1		Currently working more hours than Wave 1		Either new work or more hours	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Material deprivation <sup>1</sup>	72	51	60	33	70	48
Material deprivation and low income <sup>2</sup>	67	41	55	25	65	39
<i>Base: resps. doing more work</i>	326		68 <sup>3</sup>		394	

<sup>1</sup> This is defined as a deprivation score of more than 22.

<sup>2</sup> This is defined as a deprivation score of more than 22 and a household income of less than 70 per cent of the median household income, before housing costs

<sup>3</sup> This analysis is based on fewer than 100 interviews, and, as such, caution should be exercised when interpreting this data.

## 7.4 Summary

- The average total household income of respondents at Wave 2 was higher than for the same lone parents at Wave 1. While six per cent of respondents at Wave 1 had a total household income of £300 or more, this had risen to 18 per cent at Wave 2.
- Respondents who had worked since Wave 1 were less likely to experience a range of financial problems. Twenty-six per cent found it quite or very hard to manage financially (down from 40 per cent when the same lone parents were interviewed in Wave 1), 29 per cent never had money left over at the end of the week (down from 47 per cent), and 16 per cent had trouble with debt almost all of the time (down from 23 per cent).
- When asked about whether respondents would like but could not afford a range of goods and services, households were more likely to lack adult or household items, such as replacing worn out furniture and electrical goods, rather than items for children, such as having friends over for tea or a snack, or having leisure equipment, such as sports equipment or a bike.
- Levels of material deprivation and low income among the cohort of all lone parents interviewed at Wave 1 were very high. In total, 67 per cent were in material deprivation and low income. This compares to 28 of all lone parent families in the UK, as reported in the Department for Work and Pensions's HBAI series. Material deprivation was particularly high among lone parents with lower qualification levels, those without access to a vehicle, and those with fewer children.
- Lone parents who had entered work or increased their hours between Wave 1 and Wave 2 were less likely to be in material deprivation. While 65 per cent had been in material deprivation and low income at Wave 1, this had fallen to 39 per cent by wave two. Nevertheless, this means that two in five households in which a lone parent had entered work were still living in material deprivation and low income, suggesting that in work poverty still remains a problem for these lone parents.

# 8 Experience of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance

This chapter looks at lone parents' experiences of Jobcentre Plus while claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA), in the period of around one year since their eligibility for Income Support (IS) ended. Where appropriate, findings are compared with respondents' experiences when they were on IS, as measured by the Wave 1 survey; this took place around six to eight months before their scheduled IS end date.

The chapter covers the types of support received; awareness and experience of conditions and sanctions; the level of personalised support; and overall perceptions of the service provided by Jobcentre Plus. These findings can help to identify aspects of the service that lone parents feel could be improved, as well as assessing the groups of customers who are more or less receptive to the type of support offered by the JSA and ESA regimes.

Throughout the chapter, results are shown separately for those who claimed JSA and ESA. Where appropriate, results are also shown for those that had claimed both JSA and ESA since leaving IS. Questions in this section were not asked of ESA claimants who were in the Support Group, since the questions on work-related advice and support were not appropriate. However, as well as people who were in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), the sample of ESA claimants includes those who had not yet had a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), whose claim had been stopped or who were awaiting the decision of the WCA or of a tribunal. It is, therefore, important to note that the ESA sample includes a group of respondents who might have had little experience of the ESA regime.

## 8.1 Advice and support

### 8.1.1 Types of support provided

Table 8.1 shows the types of advice or support which lone parents said they had received from Jobcentre Plus in the previous 12 months. Findings are shown separately for respondents who had been on JSA in the previous 12 months (and not ESA); those who had been on ESA (and not JSA); and those who had been on both JSA and ESA.

Lone parents who had been on JSA said they had received a range of different types of advice and support, as had those that had received both JSA and ESA. Respondents who had claimed ESA but not JSA were much less likely to have had work-related advice (e.g. looking at job vacancies or looking at the sort of work they might do). As is the case throughout this chapter, the findings for this last group should be treated with caution, owing to the small number of respondents who had claimed ESA but not JSA (72).

Within the JSA sample, those who said they were actively looking for work were more likely to have had work-related advice. For example, 68 per cent of those actively looking for work said they had looked at job vacancies, compared with 46 per cent who were not actively looking for work. Respondents who had been on the Work Programme (most of whom had gone via JSA) were very similar in their responses to JSA claimants as a whole.

**Table 8.1** Types of advice or support received in the previous 12 months

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Benefit</b>		
	<b>JSA</b>	<b>ESA</b>	<b>Both JSA and ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Making a benefits claim	22	28	39
Making a tax credits claim	11	7	4
Looking at job vacancies	60	7	56
Applying for a job, for example, help with CV, job application or preparation for interview	42	7	45
Looking at the sort of work you might do	45	13	47
Looking or applying for an education course	16	7	19
Looking for voluntary work	10	6	12
Any of the above	79	43	86
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	540	72	121

### 8.1.2 Advice and support as part of the Jobcentre Plus Offer

The Jobcentre Plus Offer for claimants was introduced across Great Britain in April 2011. Because lone parents in this cohort were scheduled to leave IS between January and April 2011, their experiences of JSA and ESA will almost exclusively have been since the Jobcentre Plus Offer was introduced. In this section, we, therefore, examine the support that lone parents had received as part of the Jobcentre Plus Offer.

Lone parents who had claimed JSA or ESA were asked whether they had received various types of advice and support that are available under the Jobcentre Plus Offer. Firstly, they were asked whether Jobcentre Plus advisers had talked to them about various types of support. They were then asked what they had actually done or had help with (see Table 8.2).

The majority of respondents who had been on JSA said that they had discussed having regular one-to-one meetings with an adviser to help prepare for work (61 per cent of those that had been on JSA only and 69 per cent of those that had also been on ESA). Around a third of JSA claimants had discussed training courses with an adviser, while around one in six discussed other types of support: a skills assessment, work experience placements and access to careers advice. Discussion of setting up as self-employed was lower (five per cent). JSA claimants who were said they were actively looking for work were more likely to have discussed the various types of support. Discussion of some support was lower in rural areas: work experience placements and training courses.

ESA claimants who had not also claimed JSA were consistently less likely to have discussed the various types of support. The evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus Offer has also observed much less discussion of support options with ESA customers than JSA customers, even when ESA customers are looking for work (Coulter *et al.*, 2012).

The right-hand side of Table 8.2 shows the proportion of lone parents who had actually been on various activities. Again, figures were consistently higher for JSA claimants than ESA claimants. Around half of JSA claimants had actually attended regular one-to-one meetings with an adviser, while participation in support options ranged from three per cent for self-employment to around one

## 108 Experience of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance

in five for training courses (24 per cent who had been on JSA only and 12 per cent who had been on both JSA and ESA).

Lone parents who had been on the Work Programme were more likely than other respondents to say they had received a skills assessment (24 per cent) and had been on a training course (35 per cent). It is not clear from the analysis whether these activities took place while they were actually on the Work Programme or while they were receiving support from Jobcentre Plus.

**Table 8.2 Whether talked about or done/had help with types of support**

	<i>Column percentages</i>					
	Talked about			Done/had helped with		
	JSA %	ESA %	Both JSA and ESA %	JSA %	ESA %	Both JSA and ESA %
Attending regular one-to-one meetings with a Jobcentre Plus adviser to help prepare for work	61	32	69	55	17	38
Skills assessment to help make decisions about the sort of work you might do	17	4	21	14	3	10
Work experience placements	15	4	14	8	0	6
Access to careers advice and seeing a Careers Adviser	16	4	12	14	1	4
Training courses – e.g. to improve skills for work or help look for work	35	14	31	24	1	12
Setting up your own business	5	0	2	3	0	0
Talked about any of the above	76	38	79			
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>

Around two in five respondents (42 per cent) who had taken up at least one of the types of support said that they were referred to an organisation outside Jobcentre Plus for at least some of this support. As expected, this was higher among respondents who had been on the Work Programme (74 per cent) than those who had not been on the Work Programme (33 per cent).

The majority of respondents who had taken up the various support options said that they found them helpful (see Table 8.3 – note that there are small sample sizes for some of the types of support).

**Table 8.3 Helpfulness of support**

<b>Types of support</b>	<i>Row percentages</i>		
	<b>Very/fairly helpful</b>	<b>Not very/not at all helpful</b>	
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<i>(Base)</i>
Attending regular one-to-one meetings with a Jobcentre Plus adviser to help prepare for work	71	29	(359)
Skills assessment to help make decisions about the sort of work you might do	66	32	(86)
Work experience placements	66	26	(49)
Access to careers advice and seeing a Careers Adviser	81	17	(78)
Training courses – e.g. to improve skills for work or help look for work	79	19	(144)

Base: All who had taken up each type of support

Note: base size too small to analyse setting up own business.

Respondents who said they had not talked about any of the types of support were asked whether they would be interested in any of them. Interest was highest in relation to training courses: 42 per cent of those that had not talked about any of the types of support said they would be interested in training courses.

### **8.1.3 Financial help**

Respondents were asked whether they had received any financial help from Jobcentre Plus towards expenses, such as childcare, travel and training costs. Around one in seven lone parents who had been on JSA said they had received financial help (15 per cent who had only been on JSA and ten per cent who had been on both JSA and ESA). The proportion was lower for those that had been on ESA but not JSA (six per cent).

Most respondents who had received financial help said that it was for travel costs (in 72 per cent of cases), while 19 per cent said it was for training costs, 13 per cent for childcare and four per cent for work clothes.

### **8.1.4 Work Programme**

As noted in Chapter 2, 12 per cent of respondents said that they had been on the Work Programme, and a further 17 per cent said that an adviser had spoken to them about it during their time on JSA or ESA. Figure 8.1 breaks this down by benefit type.

**Figure 8.1 Discussion of and attendance on the Work Programme**

### 8.1.5 In-work support

Previous research has found that lone parents continue to need support after starting work. This can be to help with practical issues in the transition to work, for example paperwork and issues related to finances, the workplace, or childcare (Hosain and Breen, 2007), or to find alternative jobs that were more suitable, less stressful jobs or more family-friendly (Casebourne and Britton, 2004). The Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) evaluation found that in Jobcentre Plus offices that provided more support to participants while working, there were also more positive impacts on employment (Hendra *et al.*, 2011).

Those who had started work since the previous wave, or had increased their hours, were asked whether they had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus staff while they were working. In total, 27 per cent said that they had been in contact, and this was higher for those that had received JSA at some point (35 per cent). A further 13 per cent said that, although they did not have any contact, Jobcentre Plus staff had offered to stay in contact with them.

There were mixed views on the usefulness of this contact. Over half (56 per cent) of those with contact with Jobcentre Plus while in work said that the advice they received was very or fairly useful, while 39 per cent said it was not very or not at all useful; five per cent said they had not had any advice as such. Around one-quarter (28 per cent) said the advice had helped them to stay in work (a lot or a fair amount), while 21 per cent said that it had helped a little and 51 per cent that it had not helped at all. It is worth noting that much of the contact that customers had with Jobcentre Plus while they were in work was on administrative matters. The evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus Offer found that most of the in-work support that customers had involved help with benefits or financial

arrangements or assisting with paperwork (Coulter *et al.*, 2012). It is, therefore, not surprising that many respondents did not think the support had directly helped them to stay in work.

Those who had been in work were also asked if they had received any financial support from Jobcentre Plus during their time in work, as an in-work emergency payment. Ten per cent said they had, and most of these respondents said that it had helped them (more detailed analysis is not possible owing to the small number of respondents concerned).

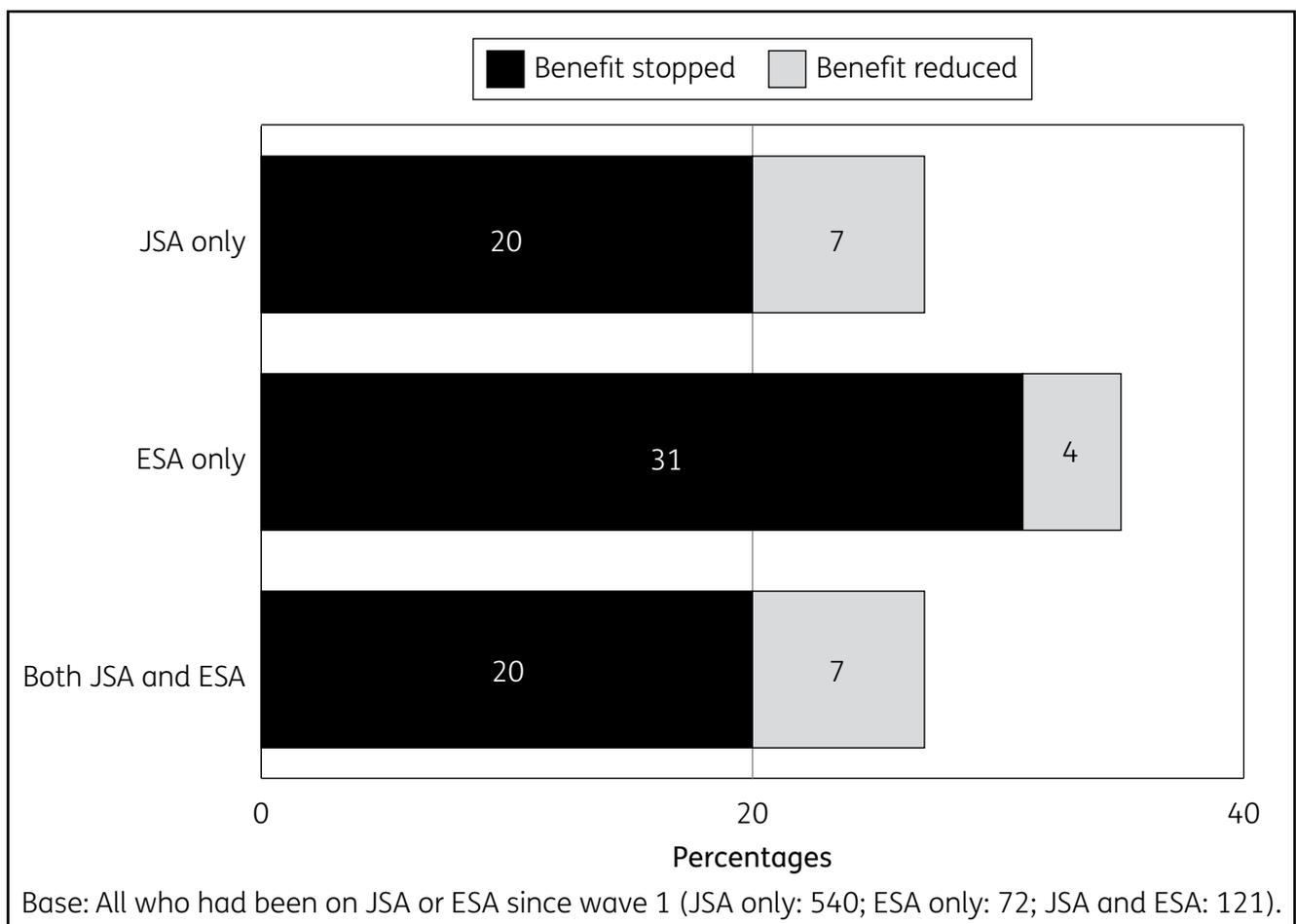
## 8.2 Conditions and sanctions

Current JSA claimants were asked how well advisers had explained the conditions of claiming JSA. The majority said that they had explained this very well (26 per cent) or quite well (48 per cent), while around one in four felt that this had not been explained very well (14 per cent) or at all well (ten per cent). Nearly all current JSA claimants said that they had been told by an adviser that their benefit might be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions or do certain things (87 per cent).

In the qualitative research, staff and customers also demonstrated a good understanding of the JSA regime for lone parents, and lone parents also generally reported understanding what they had to do and finding it easy to meet the requirements of their Jobseeker’s Agreement (JSAg) (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

Around one in four lone parents (28 per cent) who had been on JSA or ESA said that their benefits had been reduced (seven per cent) or stopped (21 per cent) for some reason by Jobcentre Plus since they started their claim. This is broken down by benefit type in Figure 8.2.

**Figure 8.2 Experience of benefit being stopped or reduced**



## 112 Experience of Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance

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A number of groups were more likely to say that their benefit had been stopped: those with a limiting longstanding illness, disability or infirmity (LLSI) (33 per cent), those with a dependent child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) (29 per cent) and those without any formal qualifications (28 per cent). In general, previous evidence from several countries, including the United States, suggests that sanctions are experienced disproportionately by more disadvantaged lone parents (Finn and Gloster, 2010).

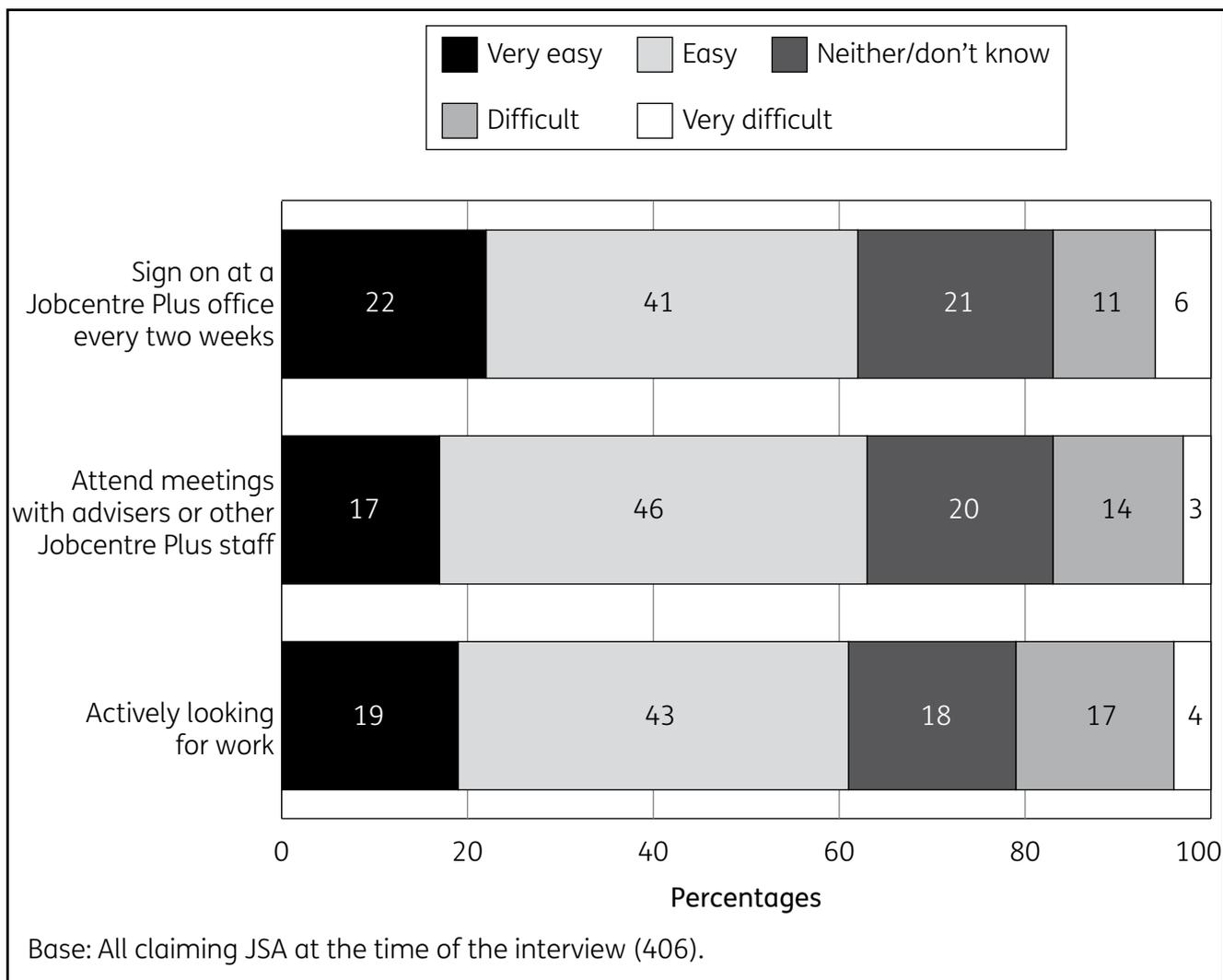
The most common reason for lone parents benefit stopping or being reduced was missing a signing on appointment (25 per cent), while 13 per cent said that they missed an appointment at Jobcentre Plus that they were told they had to attend. It is possible that respondents have also included delays or problems in receiving benefit payments, e.g. in the transition to JSA or ESA or as part of the process for claiming ESA. The answers given by respondents are, therefore, likely to over-estimate the proportion who have actually experienced sanctions, and this is confirmed by the administrative data, which record only a small proportion of these respondents having had a sanction applied to them. The qualitative research noted that some lone parents described having gaps in their payment of ESA (e.g. if they did not realise that they had to continue sending in sick notes as a condition of receiving benefit) (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

Of the respondents who said their benefit had been stopped or reduced, 18 per cent said they were told about 'hardship payments', and five per cent said they had actually received one.

The questionnaire also covered lone parents' ability to comply with the conditions for claiming JSA. As shown in Figure 8.3, most respondents who were claiming JSA said that they found it at least fairly easy to sign on every two weeks, to attend meetings and to look for work actively. However, a proportion (between 17 per cent and 21 per cent) said that they found these things difficult. This was higher among respondents with an LSI; for example 32 per cent said that it was difficult for them to look for work actively.

It is also worth noting that 20 per cent of JSA claimants who described themselves as 'looking for work' also said that it was difficult for them to look for work actively. This indicates that active jobseeking on JSA can be difficult for some lone parents, and also that while lone parents may see themselves as 'looking for work' in line with their status on JSA, actual jobsearch behaviour may be limited.

**Figure 8.3 Ability to comply with JSA conditions**



### 8.3 Jobseeker’s Allowance flexibilities

Lone parents on the JSA regime are subject to the same legal regulations as other jobseekers, including being required to complete a JSAG, actively to look for work and to attend a Jobcentre Plus office regularly to confirm that they have been available for, and actively seeking work. While many lone parents will be able to meet existing JSA requirements, it is recognised that the circumstances of lone parents are varied. Therefore, ‘parent flexibilities’ have been inserted into the JSA regulations for lone parents,<sup>42</sup> to recognise their responsibility to care for a dependent child.

Respondents who had claimed JSA since Wave 1 were asked whether they had been told about any flexibilities.<sup>43</sup> Around one-third (35 per cent) said they had been told there were things they were

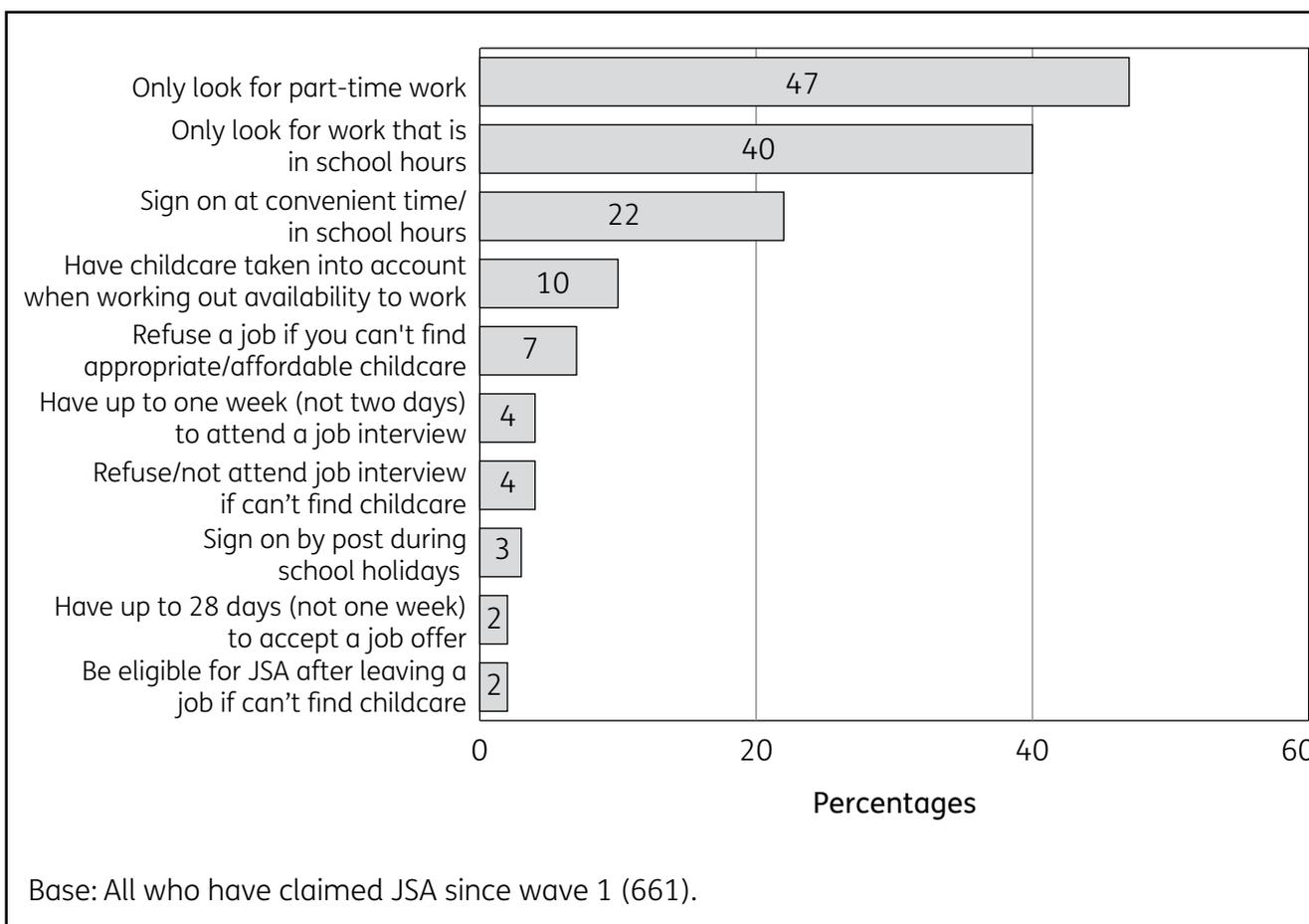
<sup>42</sup> Some flexibilities also apply to dependent partners of main claimants who are parents.

<sup>43</sup> Respondents were asked whether Jobcentre Plus had ‘told them about any things that you are allowed to do, or do not have to do, because you are lone parent, for example only having to look for or accept certain types of work.’

allowed to do or did not have to do. This was higher among respondents who had been on the Work Programme (44 per cent), but lower among those with an LSI (24 per cent).<sup>44</sup>

When asked whether any of a list of flexibilities applied to them during their time on JSA, 64 per cent said that at least one applied to them, most commonly only having to look for part-time work (47 per cent) or only having to look for work that was during school hours (40 per cent).

**Figure 8.4 Whether flexibilities apply to lone parents**



These findings suggest that Jobcentre Plus staff are making JSA customers aware of specific flexibilities, at least in some cases. However, it is worth noting that in the qualitative research, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that they apply the flexibilities where appropriate but do not typically inform lone parent customers about them. This was confirmed by lone parents themselves in the qualitative research, who in some cases were not aware that flexibilities were being applied to them, even though (on further discussion) it was clear that flexibilities were in fact being applied (Lane et al., 2011).

## 8.4 Personalised support

All respondents who had claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1 were asked whether they felt the advice they had received had taken their individual circumstances into account. As shown in Table 8.4,

<sup>44</sup> The flexibility to only look for work during school hours applies during term-time only, and only to lone parents whose youngest child is aged under 13.

there is an even split between those that thought that their circumstances had been taken into account, and those that did not. These findings were very similar by benefit type.

Those with an LSI were less likely to feel their circumstances were taken into account (39 per cent across all benefit types); this was also the case at Wave 1 in relation to support on IS.

In the qualitative research, some staff felt that support was not always being sufficiently tailored to lone parents’ needs, and that this was happening either when non-specialist staff were working with lone parents on JSA and/or where lone parent customers were not identified as such (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

**Table 8.4 Whether individual circumstances were taken into account by Jobcentre Plus staff**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Benefit</b>		
	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>	<b>Both JSA and ESA %</b>
Yes	45	45	41
No	46	41	46
Hard to say	7	6	9
Had not had any help or advice	2	9	4
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>

One in four respondents (24 per cent) said they would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff or advisers. This figure was not significantly different by benefit type, but was higher among those who had never worked (35 per cent).

We can compare these findings with those from Wave 1, when respondents were asked the same questions about their time on IS. The proportion who would have liked more time with staff was very similar at Wave 1 (22 per cent). However, respondents were more likely to say that their individual circumstances were taken into account when they were on IS (62 per cent) than on JSA or ESA (between 41 and 45 per cent, as shown in Table 8.4).

## 8.5 Overall attitudes to Jobcentre Plus support

Respondents who had claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1 of the survey were asked how helpful they had found the advice they had received overall. Strikingly, over one-third of JSA claimants and over half of ESA claimants felt that they had not had any help or advice. This confirms the findings from the LPO qualitative research, in relation to JSA. This found that when lone parents moved on to JSA, ‘*signing-on appointments were felt by customers to be of little use to them in their jobsearch, and of more use to the Jobcentre to check they had been looking for work*’ (Gloster *et al.*, 2010). The later phase of qualitative research found that these views depended very much on whether respondents were seeing staff who were specifically trained in lone parent issues. Where lone parents were not seeing such staff, it was common for them to feel that they were not receiving any support at all while on JSA. In general, seeing staff trained in lone parent issues (or not) was a key influencer of the level and quality of support that lone parents felt they had received while on the JSA regime, and their attitudes to Jobcentre Plus staff (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

It is important to note that these findings reflect lone parents’ **perceptions** of whether they had help or advice. The findings earlier in this chapter show that the majority of lone parents confirmed that they had received advice about benefits or jobsearch (see Table 8.1) or Jobcentre Plus Offer activities (see Table 8.2).

Where lone parents did feel that they had received help or support, they were likely to say that the support was helpful rather than unhelpful. Details are shown in Table 8.5. The views of respondents who had been on the Work Programme were similar to the wider sample of JSA claimants.

**Table 8.5 Overall helpfulness of advice and support from Jobcentre Plus staff**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>JSA</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Both JSA and ESA</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
Very helpful	15	11	12
Quite helpful	34	10	27
Not very helpful	9	3	15
Not at all helpful	4	3	2
Had not had any help or advice	37	74	44
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>

A comparison with Wave 1 shows that lone parents were more positive towards the helpfulness of the IS regime: 64 per cent said it was helpful and 11 per cent unhelpful, while 25 per cent said that they had not had any advice.

The ways in which advice had helped lone parents are shown in Table 8.6. Lone parents who had been on JSA were more likely to say they had been helped in various ways than those who had been on ESA. This applies in particular to being made more aware of job opportunities. As noted above, many respondents did not feel that they had received help or advice.

It is possible to analyse these findings in relation to the types of advice or support that respondents had received. Although it is difficult to be conclusive with this analysis (as some of the sample sizes are small), it is clear that those who had either received a skills assessment, had advice on training or had attended training were particularly likely to say they had improved their skills and had their confidence increased.

**Table 8.6 How Jobcentre Plus advice has helped in previous 12 months**

	<i>Column percentages</i>		
	<b>Benefit</b>		
	<b>JSA %</b>	<b>ESA %</b>	<b>Both JSA and ESA %</b>
Made more aware of job opportunities	41	12	37
Increased confidence	22	14	16
Improved skills	17	4	11
Not had any help or advice/not applicable	36	72	43
Hard to say/don’t know	17	11	15
<i>Base: All who have claimed JSA or ESA since Wave 1</i>	<i>540</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>121</i>

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with four aspects of the JSA and ESA benefit regimes. In general, lone parents expressed negative attitudes towards JSA and ESA.

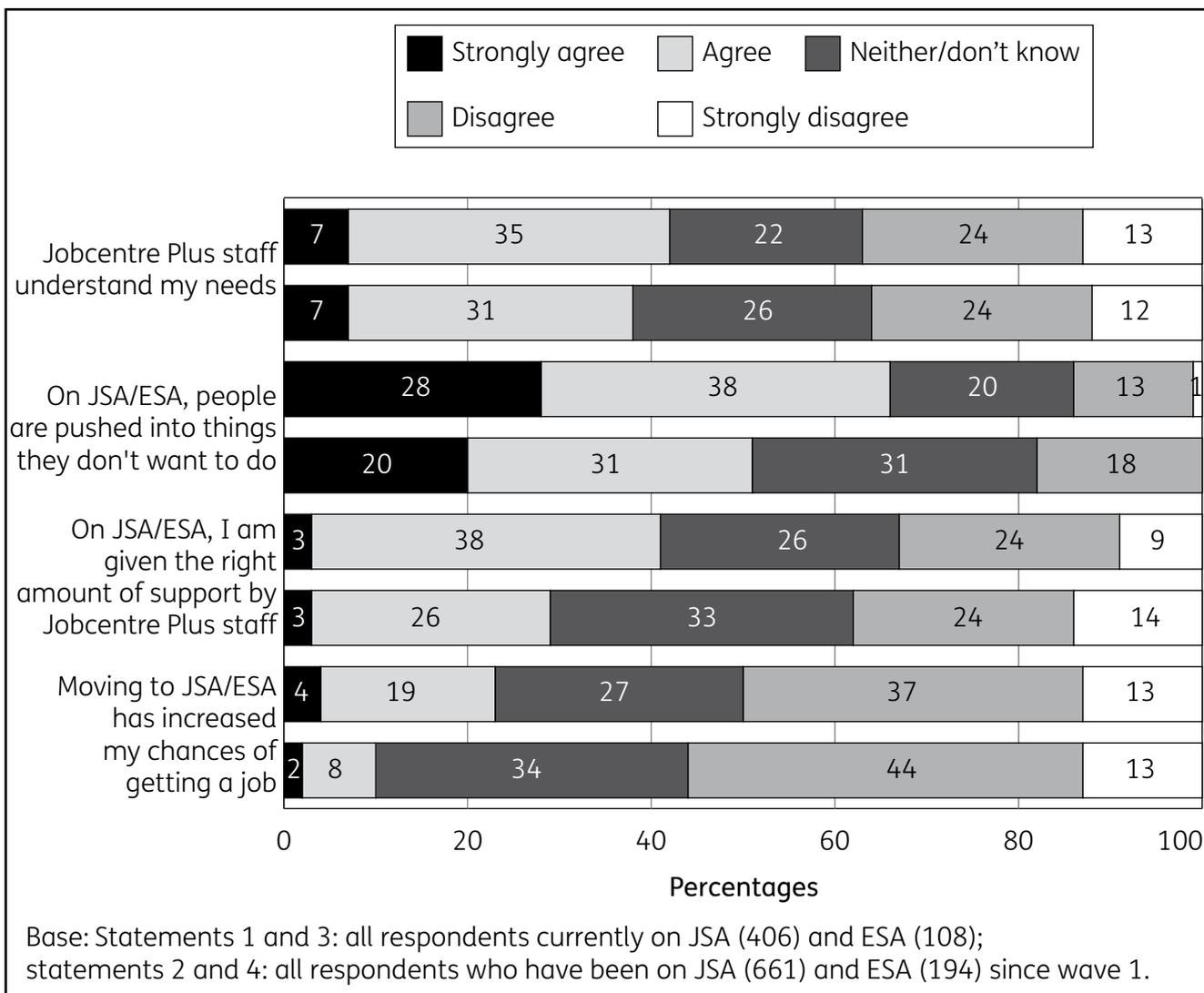
As shown in Figure 8.5, respondents were approximately equally likely to agree as disagree that Jobcentre Plus understood their needs; views were similar for JSA and ESA. However, respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that on JSA/ESA, people were pushed into things they did not want to do, and this was higher for JSA (66 per cent agreed) than ESA (51 per cent).

Respondents were less positive about ESA than JSA, in terms of whether they are given the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus staff (41 per cent agreed in relation to JSA, 29 per cent for ESA). Lone parents were more likely to disagree than agree that moving to JSA or ESA had increased their chances of getting a job (50 per cent for JSA, 57 per cent for ESA).

Within the JSA sample, respondents with an LLSI were more negative than other respondents. For example, 79 per cent agreed that on JSA people were pushed into things they did not want to do, and 40 per cent disagreed that they were given the right amount of support. In addition, those with stronger parental childcare-focused attitudes (for example those who agreed that their job was to look after the home and family) were more likely to feel that on JSA people are pushed into things they did not want to do. These findings suggest that those who were further from the labour market were more likely to feel that they were pushed into things they did not want to do.

The qualitative research also found that, across the different groups of lone parents on JSA, there was a strong dislike of claiming JSA, both under the Jobcentre Plus Offer regime and the previous Jobseeker’s Regime and Flexible New Deal (JRFND) regime (Lane *et al.*, 2011). Interviews with staff highlighted that the early stages of the previous JRFND regime in particular were not designed for JSA claimants who had been out of work for some time, and therefore might have been less suitable for lone parents moving from IS (the lone parents examined in this survey) rather than new or repeat JSA claimants (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

Figure 8.5 Attitudes to JSA and ESA regimes



The views of lone parents were more negative about JSA and ESA than they had been about IS when they were interviewed at Wave 1. While on IS, respondents tended to agree rather than disagree that Jobcentre Plus staff understood their needs (54 per cent agreed and 19 per cent disagreed), and that they were given the right amount of support (52 per cent agreed and 20 per cent disagreed).

### 8.6 Summary

- Lone parents who had been on JSA were much more likely than those who had been on ESA to have received various types of advice and support, such as looking at job vacancies or looking at the sort of work they might do.
- The same pattern applied to the support options available under the Jobcentre Plus Offer. Three in four JSA claimants (76 per cent JSA only and 79 per cent who had been on both JSA and ESA) had discussed support options such as regular adviser meetings or training courses, compared with 38 per cent of those that had been on ESA (but not JSA). Actual attendance on these support options was also higher among JSA claimants.

- The majority of respondents who had taken the various support options said that they had been helpful (ranging from 66 per cent to 81 per cent for the various activities).
- Around one in seven lone parents who had been on JSA said they had received financial help from Jobcentre Plus towards expenses, most commonly travel costs. The proportion who had received financial help while on ESA was lower (six per cent).
- In total, 12 per cent of respondents had been on the Work Programme and a further 17 per cent had discussed it with an adviser while on JSA or ESA.
- Around one-quarter (27 per cent) of those who had started work since Wave 1, or had increased their hours, said they had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus staff while they were working. An additional 13 per cent said they were offered this support.
- Most JSA claimants (74 per cent) said that advisers had explained the conditions of claiming JSA very or quite well, and nearly all (87 per cent) said that they had been told that their benefit might be stopped or reduced if they did not agree to certain conditions.
- Around one in four said that their benefit had been stopped (21 per cent) or reduced (seven per cent) for some reason while on JSA or ESA.
- Most JSA claimants said they found it at least fairly easy to comply with the conditions for claiming JSA: signing on every two weeks (63 per cent), attending meetings (63 per cent) and actively looking for work (62 per cent). However, between 17 per cent and 21 per cent found each of these things difficult.
- One in three (35 per cent) said that they were told there were things they were allowed to do or did not have to do, as part of the parent flexibilities on JSA. Two in three (64 per cent) said that at least one of the flexibilities applied to them, most frequently only having to look for part-time work (47 per cent) or only having to look for work that was during school hours (40 per cent).
- Less than half of respondents said that they felt their individual circumstances were taken into account (45 per cent who had been on JSA only, 45 per cent on ESA only and 41 per cent on both JSA and ESA). One in four (24 per cent) would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff.
- There were negative attitudes to the JSA and ESA regimes, and these were more negative than corresponding attitudes to the IS regime as expressed at Wave 1. Many respondents did not think that they had received help or advice while on JSA (37 per cent) or ESA (74 per cent), and respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that on JSA/ESA people are pushed into things they don't want to do. There were also mixed views on whether lone parents' needs were taken into account on JSA/ESA and whether they were given the right amount of support. However, in the JSA sample, some respondents did feel that JSA had made them more aware of job opportunities (41 per cent).

# 9 Conclusions and policy implications

The overall aim of the evaluation is to explore how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment. This report has focused on:

- the destinations of lone parents affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) (Chapter 2);
- attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to work and family life, and choices and constraints in relation to work (Chapter 6);
- behaviour in relation to work, either being in work (Chapter 3) or looking for work (Chapter 5), and childcare arrangements (Chapter 4);
- wellbeing and deprivation (Chapter 7);
- lone parents' experience of and attitudes towards the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support allowance (ESA) regimes (Chapter 8).

The survey has examined a cohort of lone parents on their journey through LPO, and as a result we are able to provide a detailed insight into the relationships between destinations, behaviour and attitudes. However, the survey is not able to quantify the impact of LPO on this group of lone parents, in terms of movement into employment or other outcomes.

There are a number of key implications from this research for the future; specifically, in relation to lone parents' movement into, or closer towards, work; the implications for support for these lone parents from Jobcentre Plus and on the Work Programme; the extension of LPO to those with a youngest child aged five; and the introduction of Universal Credit. This section of the report draws together the findings to consider these implications.

## 9.1 Destinations

The analysis in this report excludes lone parents who remained on Income Support (IS), and focuses on the destinations of those who became ineligible for IS. Immediately after leaving IS, over half of lone parents moved on to JSA (55 per cent), while 12 per cent claimed ESA, and 24 per cent got a job.

Longer-term destinations (in the year or so after IS eligibility ended) showed that 45 per cent of lone parents had worked at some point since their IS claim ended. A further 31 per cent had long spells on JSA (these respondents had only claimed JSA since leaving IS – they had not worked at all or claimed another benefit during this time).

Around one in four (23 per cent) had claimed ESA since leaving IS, including 12 per cent who had claimed both JSA and ESA. There was a range of outcomes on ESA, including equal proportions who were in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), the Support Group and found fit for work. In addition, some respondents who had made a claim for ESA had not yet had a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) or were awaiting a decision or the outcome of a tribunal. These findings indicate that many lone parents who claimed ESA had a complex journey and may not have had a smooth transition from IS to ESA.

Five per cent of lone parents had neither worked nor claimed a benefit at all since they left IS, and at the time of the Wave 2 interview nine per cent were neither working nor claiming a benefit; many of these respondents (48 per cent) had re-partnered.

In broad terms, it is possible to identify three groups of lone parents from the destinations data and other survey findings: those that had been in work, those who were actively looking for work (usually on JSA), but who had not moved into work; and those who were not actively looking for work, including those with a limiting long-standing illness or disability (LLSI) or other barriers.

The survey findings indicated that a number of groups were more or less likely to have worked since they moved off IS. Lone parents were more likely to have worked if they had recent work experience or were actively looking for work while on IS. Movement into work was also more likely among lone parents with higher qualifications, those with access to a vehicle and those who lived in a rural area. It was also more likely among those who used informal childcare before they started work (see below).

Lone parents with an LLSI, especially those with mental-health problems, were less likely to move into work. There were also differences in terms of attitudes to work: those who were more family-focused in their attitudes and less concerned about the stigma of being on benefits were less likely than other respondents to have worked at all.

As a whole, these findings confirm that a wide range of factors affect the likelihood of lone parents moving into work, including characteristics and circumstances, working history, access to childcare and attitudes to work. This is of relevance to efforts by Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers to assess customers' level of employability or 'work readiness', for example through the Customer Assessment Tool. The survey findings confirm previous research which indicates that any assessment needs to be thorough and broad-ranging, in order to identify the various factors that may affect customers' ability to move into work.

Of particular interest are lone parents with an LLSI, who made up 21 per cent of the sample. As well as being less likely to have moved into work, these respondents were also less likely to sustain work when they did move into employment. As noted above, these lone parents could also have complex benefit journeys, including claims for both JSA and ESA, and varied outcomes from claiming ESA. This confirms the findings from the qualitative research, which found that those with an LLSI can have '*disparate journeys*' as part of LPO, and that these customers could experience difficulties in negotiating this type of process. These findings suggest that the difficulties that these lone parents have in moving into and sustaining work may be compounded by complexities in their LPO journey after leaving IS. Furthermore, the support available to these lone parents on JSA or ESA may not always be appropriate, as discussed below.

## 9.2 Attitudes, values and beliefs

Overall, the survey confirms the balance of work and family as a key concern for lone parents affected by LPO. At both waves of the survey, lone parents expressed a strong work focus alongside a strong focus on parental childcare.

The survey assessed the extent to which LPO had changed attitudes, as well as jobsearch behaviour. The Wave 2 findings indicate a slight increase in work-focused attitudes since Wave 1, and a lessening of some barriers to work. At the same time, respondents maintained a strong focus on parental childcare in their attitudes, and this applied equally to lone parents in different destination groups (in work, on JSA and on ESA). This suggests that while it may be possible to reinforce positive messages about work and increase lone parents' commitment to work, it is unlikely that advisers or the benefits regime as a whole will change their attitudes towards parental childcare. As a result,

elements such as the parent flexibilities, available to lone parents on JSA, are important and should not be compromised.

At the same time, the survey showed that lone parents' preferences regarding working hours were less fixed than might be expected. Many lone parents expressed a desire to work around 16 hours per week and to work only in school hours or school holidays. However, when comparing these preferences at Wave 1 with actual jobs at Wave 2, some respondents worked outside these hours when they actually moved into a job. This suggests that advisers may be able to persuade lone parents to consider greater flexibility in the working hours they are considering, while at the same time acknowledging their strong attitudes towards parental childcare.

### 9.3 Experience of work

Reflecting previous evidence, the jobs carried out by lone parents since leaving IS were concentrated in low skilled occupations (40 per cent worked in elementary occupations and 23 per cent in personal service occupations). The survey also found that many lone parents reported being on a very low wage: around one in three of those in work (33 per cent) said that they were paid less than £6 per hour (the National Minimum Wage at the time of the survey was £6.08 per hour).

The survey examined the extent to which mini-jobs (jobs of fewer than 16 hours per week) could act as a stepping stone to increased hours. Respondents who were working fewer than 16 hours per week had often increased their hours by the time of the Wave 2 interview, although it should be noted that the increase could be small (e.g. to 16 hours per week). Moreover, nine in ten of those working in mini-jobs in Wave 2 noted a preference to work for 16 hours or more. At the same time, there was a group of respondents who were originally working fewer than 16 hours per week while on IS, who continued to work these hours while moving on to JSA.

In considering the role of mini-jobs, it is also worth noting that these jobs were particularly likely to be poorly paid jobs in unskilled or elementary occupations; and also that some respondents wanted to increase their hours but had not been able to do so (either in their current job or in a new job). Those working fewer hours were also more likely to say that they could not see their job going anywhere. Therefore, although mini-jobs can potentially be useful in giving lone parents a taste of working life, and can sometimes allow them to then increase their hours, it is important to note that a large number of mini-jobs are poor quality jobs which do not necessarily lead to work involving more hours or provide scope for advancement.

As at Wave 1, the Wave 2 findings showed that the balance between work and family was a crucial issue for lone parents, and that this balance was strongly associated with hours worked. The proportion who said that their job prevented them from giving the time they wanted to their children at least 'sometimes' was much higher among those working over 16 hours per week.

Another important issue for working lone parents is the availability of flexible working arrangements. The majority (61 per cent) of those looking for or intending to work said that this was very important, and 42 per cent said that the lack of flexible working arrangements would stop them from taking a job. In general, the survey indicated that employers are somewhat patchy in offering flexible and family-friendly arrangements. There was evidence of some employers offering flexible working arrangements, such as flexi-time. However, some of the respondents in work said that their employer was not family-friendly and that this was a large barrier to their staying in work (nine per cent), while 13 per cent said that the pressure to work longer hours or do overtime was a large barrier. More generally, the largest barrier to staying in work was the stress of combining work and family life. This suggests that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and Jobcentre Plus need to continue to work with other Government Departments and local employers to promote family-friendly workplaces, and also to try to encourage the availability of better quality part-time jobs.

## 9.4 Looking for work

The survey suggests that lone parents had moved closer to the labour market following their move off IS. The majority of respondents at Wave 2 were either in work or looking for work – just 19 per cent were not looking for work, whereas at Wave 1, 41 per cent were neither working nor looking for work.

In addition, where lone parents were looking for work, they were more intensive in their jobsearch than was the case on IS. At Wave 2, around half (54 per cent) of those who had applied for jobs had made more than ten applications in the previous 12 months, compared with a corresponding figure of 20 per cent at Wave 1. The Wave 1 report noted the low jobsearch intensity among lone parents who were looking for work while on IS, and identified this as an issue which may be slowing their movement into work. The Wave 2 findings showed that this issue had been addressed to a large extent through the JSA regime, which had increased lone parents' jobsearch intensity.

At the same time, a substantial proportion of respondents had prolonged spells on JSA without moving into work (31 per cent of the Wave 2 sample), in some cases lasting the year or so after they left IS. To some extent this is not surprising, given the length of time that many lone parents had previously spent on IS without working. Equally, this confirms the challenge in moving lone parents off benefits and into work. Longer spells on JSA were more common among lone parents without qualifications and whose first language was not English. This suggests that an emphasis on skills and training may be appropriate to reduce the number of lone parents with long spells on JSA, and to help them move into work. Although a substantial proportion of respondents in the survey (41 per cent) had been on a training course since Wave 1, this was not significantly higher for JSA claimants, unless they had also been on the Work Programme.

### 9.4.1 Childcare

Overall, the findings confirmed a reliance on informal childcare, with grandparents providing the bulk of informal childcare.

The survey confirmed the importance of informal networks of family, friends and neighbours in providing informal childcare. Firstly, the analysis of destinations showed that those who had used informal childcare while they were not working were more likely to have moved into work. This suggests that having informal childcare networks in place can help with the transition into work. Secondly, there was a high prevalence of reciprocal arrangements – looking after children in return and other non-financial arrangements – as part of informal childcare. Both of these findings indicate that it is important for advisers to explore these issues and discuss informal childcare networks with lone parents.

Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were by far the most commonly used type of formal childcare. This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary school age children, with very few pre-school children. Respondents also expressed a strong interest in using after-school or holiday clubs in the future, suggesting that there may be scope for encouraging more lone parents to use this type of childcare, particularly if awareness can be increased. This applies in particular to holiday clubs, as only 23 per cent of non-users were aware of holiday clubs. This suggests that advisers may be able to do more to increase awareness and to encourage lone parents to use these facilities.

As working hours increased, the main change in childcare patterns was a greater use of both formal and informal childcare. These findings indicate that work of more than 16 hours per week often requires a package of different types of childcare. This suggests that advisers need to discuss options for formal and informal childcare as part of a package. In doing so, it may be possible to re-assure

lone parents that using formal childcare does not necessitate a major change – that it is usually a case of using school-based childcare alongside informal networks.

### 9.4.2 Wellbeing and deprivation

Levels of material deprivation and low income among the cohort of lone parents interviewed at Wave 1 were very high. In total, 67 per cent were in material deprivation and low income. This compares to 28 per cent of all lone parent families in the UK, as reported in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) *Households Below Average Income* series.

Detailed analysis shows that households were more likely to lack adult or household items, such as replacing worn out furniture and electrical goods, rather than items for children, such as having friends over for tea or a snack, or having leisure equipment, such as sports equipment or a bike.

The findings on material deprivation can also inform the extent to which lone parents were better off in work. Lone parents who had entered work or increased their hours between Wave 1 and Wave 2 were less likely to be in material deprivation. While 65 per cent of these lone parents had been in material deprivation and low income at Wave 1, this had fallen to 39 per cent by wave two. Nevertheless, this means that two in five households in which a lone parent had entered work were still living in material deprivation and had a low income. This confirms that many of the jobs that lone parents move into – with low pay and a small number of hours – are not sufficient to enable an improvement in moving people out of material deprivation.

### 9.4.3 Experience of the Jobseeker's Allowance, and Employment and Support Allowance regimes

Between the first interviews lone parents undertook, in 2010, and the second interview, in 2012, the JSA regime changed from the more prescriptive Jobseeker's Regime and Flexible New Deal to the more flexible Jobcentre Plus Offer regime. The survey as a whole has highlighted the diverse and complex needs and barriers of this group of lone parents, confirming the need for personalised support.

Nevertheless, the Wave 2 findings suggest that lone parents in the survey were not always getting a high level of individualised support from the JSA or ESA regimes. Less than half of lone parents on JSA and ESA felt that the advice they had received had taken their individual circumstances into account. Moreover, over one-third of JSA claimants and over half of ESA claimants did not feel that they had had any help or advice as such. The qualitative research also found that support was not always being sufficiently tailored to lone parents' needs, and that this was often linked with whether or not they saw a specialist lone parent adviser.

The qualitative work also found that, although JSA could be *'a demanding and sometimes uncomfortable experience'* for lone parents, in comparison with claiming IS, this was helping to give them *'a push towards work'* (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

The evaluation findings as a whole suggest that JSA is providing a push towards work, and by increasing lone parents' jobsearch intensity is often moving them closer to job entry. However, lone parents suggest that the JSA regime does not offer personalised support or (as noted above) 'support' at all for a group of JSA customers.

In addition, the survey findings indicate that customers with an LLSI did not necessarily feel that the support they received on JSA or ESA reflected – or was appropriate to – their needs. The views of these respondents to JSA were even more negative than other lone parents. Within the JSA sample, respondents with an LLSI were more negative than other respondents. For example, 79 per

cent agreed that on JSA people were pushed into things they do not want to do, and 40 per cent disagreed that they were given the right amount of support.

Lone parents who claimed ESA were less likely than those on JSA to say that they had received any meaningful support. Discussion of and participation in support activities was also very low on ESA. As noted above, experiences of claiming ESA could also be complex, with various outcomes from the WCA, and many respondents claiming both JSA and ESA. Moreover, it is possible that delays to lone parents' WCA in some cases have meant that they were not yet at the stage to receive support from Jobcentre Plus.

Overall, this suggests that the LPO changes and current benefit regime have struggled to accommodate lone parents with an LLSI, and do not currently provide the necessary support that will help move them closer to the labour market, and to be able to sustain work.

## 9.5 Implications for the extension of Lone Parent Obligations to lone parents with a youngest child aged five or over

In 2012, the LPO changes were extended to include those with a youngest child aged five or over. This survey was restricted to the cohort whose youngest child was aged seven or eight when their eligibility for IS ended, but the findings have broader relevance for those with children aged five or six.

One conclusion from this survey is that the move into work was often a slow process for lone parents. Many lone parents had moved into work by the time of the Wave 2 survey, but this was around a year after their IS eligibility had ended, and the other lone parents in the survey had not entered work, despite in some cases having prolonged spells on JSA and/or time on the Work Programme. To some extent, this slow pace of change confirms the premise that lone parents should be eligible for the LPO changes at an earlier stage. By starting the move off IS when their youngest child is aged five, this (sometimes) slow journey into the labour market can potentially be accelerated at an earlier stage.

Overall, however, the research suggests that the issues faced by lone parents in this survey (with youngest child aged seven or eight) are not very different from those with younger children (aged five or six). Firstly, movement into work did not appear to be affected by the ages of respondents' children (e.g. the age of their other children in addition to their youngest child). It was certainly the case that other issues – health and disability, and other barriers – were more important. The qualitative research also highlighted the importance of critical life events (e.g. worsening of a health condition, homelessness) in lone parents' ability to move into work (Lane *et al.*, 2011).

## 9.6 Implications for Universal Credit

In an effort to simplify the benefit system and improve work incentives, Universal Credit will replace the present benefit structure in 2013. Universal Credit will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment.

A key aim of Universal Credit will be to '*ensure that work always pays and is seen to pay*' (DWP, 2010). This would directly address one of the main perceived barriers to work among lone parents in this survey, namely the perception that 'I am not sure I would be financially better off in work'. One in three (34 per cent) of those not in work described this as a big barrier to employment, and this was also one of the larger barriers to staying in work among working lone parents. If Universal Credit is able to ensure that lone parents are always better off in work (whatever hours they work), and can make this clear to them, this will undoubtedly help in removing this barrier.

The questions on material deprivation indicate that the move into work can move lone parents out of material deprivation; however, two in five lone parents remained in material deprivation despite moving into work. Because of the low pay and small number of hours in many of the jobs lone parents were doing, a move into work will not automatically bring a significant improvement in financial circumstances.

The survey also provides a warning that the comparison between the cost of being in work and being on benefits is not always clear. One of the main barriers among those in work to staying in work was seen as the fact that respondents 'hadn't anticipated all the extra things I would need to spend money on now that I'm in work'.

In addition, it may not just be the incentives in the benefit system that are preventing lone parents from working more than 16 hours per week (rather than around 16). Given the importance of balancing work and family, this suggests that lone parents will often need encouragement and support, to start work of more than 16 hours per week, and to stay in that work.

The survey also found that a substantial proportion of lone parents had tried unsuccessfully to increase their hours, or were working fewer hours than they previously had indicated they would prefer or be prepared to work. It is clear from the survey that jobs involving a small number of hours (e.g. fewer than 16 hours per week) are generally unskilled and low paid. Increasing hours, therefore, offers lone parents the potential to move to better quality work as well as an increase in pay. However, the survey findings suggest that it can be difficult for lone parents to increase their hours. This ties in with the rise of under-employment, which includes part-time workers unable to find a full-time job (standing at 1.4 million in the latest figures) (ONS, 2012) and which, according to recent analysis by the TUC, is concentrated in elementary occupations.

In this context, it is also worth noting that increases in hours (actual or intended) are often small in scale. For example, a move from 16 hours to 22 hours is more likely than a move from 16 hours to 30 hours. The survey suggests that there may be insufficient flexibility in the labour market to allow this type of change – either in employers allowing changes in hours, or in the availability of new jobs with a range of working hours.

### 9.7 Conclusions from the evaluation to date

There have been a number of reports from the LPO evaluation to date: three reports from the qualitative research for the evaluation (Gloster *et al.*, 2010; Casebourne *et al.*, 2010 and Lane *et al.*, 2011), the first report from the LPO survey (Coleman and Lanceley, 2011) and this follow-up report from the survey. A report quantifying the impact of LPO on lone parents, in terms of movement off benefit and into work, is due to be published in 2013. The evaluation to date has, therefore, given us a good insight into the effect of LPO and there are a number of common themes emerging from across the different strands of the research.

There has been greater movement towards and into work amongst lone parents as a result of LPO. The evaluation has found that lone parents are generally positive about work for a range of financial and non-financial reasons, and because of this many lone parents will already have been motivated to move into work, which LPO has supported. For other lone parents, LPO has very often given them an extra 'push' to move towards or into work. For lone parents on JSA, the more active conditionality regime for receiving this benefit has encouraged greater jobsearch and an increased focus on moving into work.

However, there has also been found to be a general dislike of claiming JSA. For lone parents not in work and claiming benefit, there are mixed feelings about the support they receive through Jobcentre Plus. Many do not feel that they receive appropriate help and advice while on benefit, and those with experience of IS very often compare their experiences on JSA or ESA unfavourably with the support they received whilst on IS.

The types of jobs lone parents moved into reflect the need to balance work alongside their family commitments. Lone parents mainly worked part-time, but much of this work is low-skilled and poorly paid. Therefore, a move into work did not always bring a move out of material deprivation for lone parents. Moving to longer hours work, which many were keen to do, may help them find better quality work with higher pay. As such, for many of these lone parents, the operation of the new Universal Credit will be crucial in ensuring that they are better off in work.

# Appendix A

## Factor analysis methodology and results

Factor analysis is used to uncover factors underlying a set of variables and can be used for a number of purposes. In this research it was used to reduce a larger number of variables into a smaller number of factors. These variables derive from the Choices and Constraints question set which has been used in a number of surveys, including Families and Children's Study (FACS). The questionnaire module purposely uses several questions to measure similar issues, such as attitudes to parenting, work and childcare, and therefore is best explored by reducing the questions down into several salient factors.

Respondents who were in work at the time of the interview were presented with a series of cards each inscribed with statements about barriers to staying in work in the future. Each respondent who was out of work was asked to sort the 18 cards into three groups; those that were not a factor, smaller factors and big factors. From these responses a three point scale for each of the 18 factors was created. Only respondents who gave an opinion to each of the attitude statements were included in the factor analysis. Respondents who answered 'don't know' or 'don't want to answer' to any of the statements were excluded from this analysis.

The method of factor analysis used and reported here was Principle Components Analysis (PCA). It was assumed that the underlying factors could be correlated, and therefore, the rotation method used was an oblique rotation (direct oblimin) with Kaiser Normalisation, as this allowed the extracted factors to be correlated (Field 2009 p.644). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis,  $KMO = 0.82$ . Bartlett's test of sphericity  $X^2(153) = 1435.9$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Six components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of one and in combination explained 60 per cent of the total variance found in these 18 barriers. Having interpreted the findings and re-run the analysis to produce different numbers of factors, it was decided to keep a final model of six factors, as the results seemed sensible, meaningful and useful for analysis in this research.

Table A.1 shows the final factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component 1 represents parental concerns, component 2 represents peer pressure and travel concerns, 3 represents money concerns, 4 represents childcare concerns, 5 represents employer concerns, and 6 represents not enjoying work or struggling to cope with work. The descriptions applied to the factors deliberately simplify more complex information. In order to fully understand the underlying factors all items associated with a particular factor must be examined.

**Table A.1 Summary of factor analysis results**

	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>	<b>Factor 5</b>	<b>Factor 6</b>
<b>Parental concerns</b>						
I am worried I do not have enough time with my child/children	.776	.037	.042	.024	.195	.032
I find it stressful combining work and family life	.756	-.035	.064	.164	-.005	.017
My child/children don't like me working	.664	.007	.046	.076	.100	-.072
<b>Peer pressure/travel concerns</b>						
My husband/partner/ex-partner does not like me working	-.094	.778	.030	-.041	.072	-.047
My parent/parents don't like me working	.298	.555	.088	-.039	-.106	-.215
I have problems with transport to and from work	-.079	.477	.115	.141	.348	-.060
<b>Money concerns</b>						
I am not sure that I am better off financially in work	.120	-.088	.810	-.117	-.006	-.103
I hadn't anticipated all the extra things I would need to spend money on now that I'm in work	.185	.049	.694	.016	-.006	.053
I am finding it difficult to adjust to having money coming in every month rather than every week	-.196	.130	.634	.152	-.026	.070
<b>Childcare concerns</b>						
I'm not confident my childcare arrangements will continue	.137	.065	-.077	.756	.031	.051
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	-.107	-.060	.127	.755	.027	.066
My child/children are not happy in childcare while I'm at work	.133	-.054	-.050	.704	-.060	-.216
<b>Employer concerns</b>						
My employer is not very family-friendly	.030	-.019	-.021	.002	.864	-.068
There is a lot of pressure in my present job to work longer hours, stay late or do overtime	.288	.099	-.035	.031	.688	.054
<b>Not enjoying work/struggling to cope with work</b>						
My confidence has taken a knock since I started work	-.166	.145	-.058	.030	.109	-.710
I have difficulties working owing to my health condition or disability	.137	.230	-.024	.029	-.177	-.660
I am not enjoying working as much as I thought I would	.259	-.117	.075	.082	.073	-.591
I can't see this job going anywhere, there are no promotion prospects	-.117	-.375	.256	.007	.225	-.469
Per cent of variance explained	24.6	8.5	8.2	6.4	6.1	5.8

- 1 This table presents the extracted factor loadings (regression coefficients) of each variable and factor as displayed in the pattern matrix generated using SPSS. The closer a factor loading is to one, the stronger the relationship between the attitude statement and the factor. Similar factor loadings were present in the structure matrix.
- 2 The four factors extracted account for 60 per cent of variance in the attitude statements.

## Reliability

Before subgroup analysis was carried out using these four factors, the reliability was tested by calculating the reliability coefficients of each factor (Cronbach’s Alphas):

- Factor 1 parental concerns: .76.
- Factor 2 peer pressure/travel concerns: .42.
- Factor 3 money concerns: .58.
- Factor 4 childcare concerns: .64.
- Factor 5 employer concerns: .48.
- Factor 6 not enjoying work/struggling to cope with work: .53.

The overall reliability was good, and higher for factors relating to parental concerns and childcare concerns.

## Relationships between factors

Most factors were correlated with all other factors meaning that these barriers to staying the work are related. However, levels of correlation were relatively low, with all correlations being lower than 0.3. The strongest correlations were between:

- childcare concerns and parental concerns;
- childcare concerns and money concerns;
- childcare concerns and employer concerns.

**Table A.2 Correlations between factors underlying perceived barriers to staying in employment**

	Parental concerns	Peer pressure/ travel concerns	Money concerns	Childcare concerns	Employer concerns	Not enjoying work/ struggling to cope
Parental concerns	1	.11	.11	.27	.17	.20
Peer pressure/travel concerns	.11	1	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant	.14
Money concerns	.11	Not significant	1	.26	.21	.21
Childcare concerns	.27	Not significant	.26	1	.25	.16
Employer concerns	.17	Not significant	.21	.25	1	.20
Not enjoying work/ struggling to cope	.20	.14	.21	.16	.20	1

Note: the correlation coefficients presented here are based on the factor scores. Given that there are negative factor loadings in factor 6, the correlation of factor scores presented above has involved taking the inverse of the factor for factor 6.

# Appendix B

## Technical report on Wave 2 survey

### Sample design and selection procedures

The sample frame for the second wave of the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) Survey was those respondents who participated in the Wave 1 Survey.

Before selecting the sample for Wave 2 the following cases were removed:

- those who did not agree to be recontacted at Wave 1;
- those who were still receiving Income Support (IS);
- those whose youngest child at Wave 1 was aged 5 or under.

Of the remaining sample of 2,779 cases 1,452<sup>45</sup> were randomly selected for Wave 2.

The sample addresses were checked and updated using Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administration information.

### Pilot

A pilot of the Wave 2 survey questionnaire was conducted in December 2011. Sixty cases were selected for the pilot and 36 interviews were achieved. Fieldwork took place in four areas: South East London, Somerset, Portsmouth and Glasgow. All cases in the sample had been interviewed in the Wave 1 pilot in March 2010.

The aims of the pilot were to test the Wave 2 questionnaire in the field and provide an estimate of the interview length for the mainstage. It also was a chance to test the use of feed-forward data from Wave 1 in the Wave 2 questionnaire.

Four interviewers took part in the pilot. All were briefed and debriefed face-to-face. Interviewers were asked to provide feedback on the questionnaire and other general survey issues, such as gaining participation, using a pilot evaluation form.

Following the pilot some minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire, including the addition of new questions, changes to question wording and question routing changes.

### CAPI testing

The mainstage questionnaire was thoroughly tested using Blaise, the programming language used for computer assisted interviewing, to ensure that it performed well. In particular, the following aspects of the questionnaire were tested:

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<sup>45</sup> The target number of achieved interviews at wave 2 was 1,000; therefore, the number of cases selected was based on the assumption of a 69 per cent response.

- the accuracy and sense of questionnaire wording and response options;
- the accuracy of show card references;
- appropriate instructions to interviewers were included, where required, in the standard format (i.e. in block capitals) or in help screens;
- the accuracy of range and consistency checks and the identification of additional checks to be programmed;
- that the questionnaire coped with different scenarios correctly, that is to say that any routing, range or consistency checks were appropriate for all foreseeable circumstances.

### Briefing and interviewer numbers

A series of eight briefing sessions was held between 15 and 23 February 2012. NatCen researchers conducted the briefings.

Two of the briefings were held in London and the rest took place in Brentwood, Bristol, Derby, Glasgow, Leeds and Liverpool. In total, 115 interviewers were briefed and worked on the study. All were trained members of NatCen's interviewing panel.

### Re-issuing of cases

As the target number of interviews were achieved within this time period there was no reissuing of unproductive cases.

### Fieldwork quality control procedures

As with all surveys conducted by NatCen, a programme of back-checking of interviewer work was undertaken.

Periodically throughout fieldwork, random subsets of respondents were telephoned to check that the interviews were conducted correctly. If they could not be contacted by telephone, they were sent a postal questionnaire. The total number selected amounted to ten per cent of those interviewed. Each respondent selected was thanked for their co-operation and invited to comment on the survey and the way it was carried out.

In total, 212 respondents were selected for telephone contact and 113 of these were contacted. A further 13 respondents were sent a postal questionnaire and five returned it. In total, 11 per cent of those interviewed were successfully checked and in all cases respondents confirmed that the interview had been conducted correctly.

### Response

In total, 1,452 Wave 1 cases were issued to interviewers for the Wave 2 survey. 1,088 interviews were achieved (75 per cent).

A summary of the response is shown in the table below.

**Table B.1 LPO Wave 2 summary response**

	n	%
Total issued	1,452	
<b>Ineligible cases</b>		
Respondent deceased	0	0.0
Follow-up address outside GB or an institution	1	0.0
Other ineligible	2	0.0
<b>Total ineligible</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.0</b>
<b>Eligible cases (=covered-ineligible)</b>	<b>1,449</b>	
<b>Productive cases</b>		
Full interview with main respondent	1,087	75.0
Partial interview with main respondent	1	0.1
<b>Total productives</b>	<b>1,088</b>	<b>75.1</b>
<b>Unproductive cases</b>		
Refusal to Head Office	8	0.6
Refusal to interviewer	207	14.3
Non-contact	85	5.9
Untraced movers	44	3.0
Other unproductive	15	1.0
Eligibility unconfirmed	2	0.1
<b>Total unproductives</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>24.9</b>

## Weighting

A model-based weighting technique was used to develop the Wave 2 non-response weights, where response behaviour is modelled using data from the sampling frame. Ineligible households (deadwood) were not included in the non-response modelling.<sup>46</sup>

A bivariate analysis was used to identify variables on the sampling frame that were significantly related to response.<sup>47</sup> The significant variables were then used to develop a non-response model. Response behaviour was modelled using logistic regression. A logistic regression models the relationship between an outcome variable (in this case response to the wave two LPO interview) and a set of predictor variables. The predictor variables were a set of socio-demographic respondent and household characteristics using information collected at the wave one interview. The variables used to model non-response were: the lone parent's age, ethnicity, gender, highest qualification, duration

<sup>46</sup> There were five individuals with ineligible outcome codes; these individuals were dropped from the weighting. Ineligible outcome codes include households where the individual was deceased, had moved outside Great Britain or the eligibility of the respondent had not been confirmed.

<sup>47</sup> Significance was tested using cross tabs and a chi square test.

for which they had been claiming benefit, whether or not they had a disability, age of the youngest child, whether any dependent child has a disability, whether they had claimed any previous benefits, whether they have claimed any subsequent benefits, whether the lone parent had a partner living with them, number of months the lone parent had been in current job, region, urban/rural indicator and the total number of children in the household. The data were weighted by the Wave 1 weights during modelling to ensure that only differences in response at Wave 2 were adjusted for. The only predictive variables in the model were region, lone parent age group and lone parent disability status. None of the other variables was significantly related to outcome.

The model generated a predicted probability for each respondent. This is the probability the respondent would take part in the Wave 2 interview, given the characteristics of the respondent and the household. Respondents with characteristics associated with non-response (such as living in London) were under-represented in the sample and received a low predicted probability. The non-response weights were then generated as the inverse of the predicted probabilities; hence respondents who had a low predicted probability got a larger weight, increasing their representation in the sample.

### Coding and editing

Checks on the LPO data were conducted at two separate stages in its collection and production. Some data validation was carried out in the first stage by interviewers using the CAPI program in the field. Secondly, more complex checks, which may have proved time consuming and detrimental to the successful completion of the interview, were carried out in the office.

Interviewer checks in the CAPI program allowed interviewers to clarify and query any data discrepancies directly with the respondent. The CAPI program applied range and consistency error checks extensively throughout the questionnaire. Where a check was triggered, the interviewer often opened and recorded a note explaining the respondent's situation.

For each productive interview a 'fact sheet' was produced for editors and the research team to use. This provided a concise summary of the respondent and key data from the interview to alert editors to possible errors or inconsistencies that needed to be dealt with at a later stage. A typical fact sheet contained a listing of the respondent's details, key data items, open and 'other specify' responses, interviewer comments and results to pre-defined edit checks (i.e. whether they had passed or failed the check).

### Editing and coding the questionnaire

An experienced data processing team carried out coding and editing of questionnaires at NatCen's Brentwood offices. Researchers at NatCen were continuously involved in all complex editing decisions.

If the editor could not provide a solution to the check, they would flag the check for further consideration by the research team. These more complex checks required 'in office' editing and coding using a modified version of the CAPI program. The majority of these checks were consistency checks where responses in different parts of the questionnaire were unlikely to occur (for example, extreme values of amounts) or were not logically possible according to some pre-defined rule.

Researchers attempted to validate the extreme value or inconsistency by examining other characteristics of the case to see whether the keyed response could be valid. For example, if long weekly working hours were identified, an attempt was made to examine whether this was because the claimant was self-employed or in a profession where long working hours were not unusual.

If a respondent was in work, the information given about their job and workplace were coded to the standard occupational and standard industrial classifications – SOC (2000) and SIC (2007). SIC was classified to a two-digit level and SOC to a three-digit level.

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Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) were introduced in November 2008. Since then, based on the age of their youngest child, lone parents have lost entitlement to Income Support (IS) solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. From May 2012, the age of the youngest child was lowered to five and over.

This report presents findings from the second and final wave of a longitudinal survey of lone parents. The survey covers lone parents affected by LPO, specifically those with a youngest child of seven or eight when they left IS. The first wave of the survey was conducted in 2010 while lone parents were still on IS. The second wave took place in 2012, around a year after lone parents' eligibility for IS had ended, and tracks lone parents' destinations and experiences over time. At Wave 2, 1,088 interviews were conducted face-to-face with lone parents, between February and April 2012.

The survey aims to understand lone parents' decision-making around returning to work, and the relationship between decision-making and characteristics, attitudes, values and beliefs; destinations and behaviours; and progress through, and experience of, the LPO 'journey'.

The research was carried out by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (Inclusion) and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please email:  
[Socialresearch@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Socialresearch@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

**DWP** Department for  
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# About this report

**This report is the second from Gingerbread's *Paying the Price* project, which runs until June 2015. The project examines single parents' lives in an 'age of austerity' – the combined impact of a weak economy, public spending cuts and welfare reform on their families. This report focuses on employment, looking at single parents' experiences of work and finding work in a recovering economy.**

**Stay up to date with the project:  
[www.gingerbread.org.uk/payingtheprice](http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/payingtheprice)**

## Acknowledgements

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Most importantly, Gingerbread would like to thank single parents for their continued participation in the research for the *Paying the Price* project. Without their generous input, it would not be possible to conduct this work.

## About Gingerbread

Gingerbread is the national charity for single parent families.

Since 1918 we've been providing families with expert advice, practical support and tailored services, as well as campaigning to make sure single parents' voices are heard.

We won't stop working until we achieve our vision – a society in which single parent families are treated equally and fairly.

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## Executive summary

**After more than four years of economic recession and stagnation in the UK, the return to a sustained period of growth is clearly good news. At the same time, however, many single parent families are struggling to maintain an adequate household income. This research shows that the labour market is hindering, rather than helping, single parents to earn their way out of poverty. To put any nascent recovery into perspective, it is vital that we understand the financial reality facing single parents and the changes needed to ensure work genuinely pays in a growing economy.**

### Introduction

The UK's return to economic growth has yet to translate into improved household incomes. Instead, living standards have sharply fallen in recent years, with real disposable income falling more than in previous recessions.<sup>1</sup> From our first *Paying the Price* report, we know that single parents are particularly affected by the squeeze on incomes (Rabindrakumar, 2013). We also found that many single parents are caught in an income trap, where they are struggling both to earn more and to reduce living costs, in order to compensate for losses in income through cuts to wages, tax credits and benefits.

This report focuses on the struggle for single parents to earn an adequate income through work. The report uses a mixed method approach, drawing on:

- Analysis of secondary national data, with a particular focus on the Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey
- An online survey, held from 14 February to 14 March 2014, with 2,486 single parent respondents<sup>2</sup>
- In-depth qualitative interviews with 23 *Paying the Price* panel members.

### No pay, no gain

Over the last 20 years, overall single parent employment has significantly increased. However, this long-term trend masks more complex patterns – in particular, single parent employment growth has slowed in recent years. Gains in single parent employment were steepest in the late 1990s and early 2000s, whereas the increase in the single parent employment rate was much less marked between 2007 and 2011.

Worse still, there are signs that the job market is not only stagnating, but also not providing a route out of poverty for single parent families. Relative child poverty in working single parent families has increased in the past couple of years: over one in five (22 per cent) children in families where single parents

<sup>1</sup> Plunkett, J., Hurrell, A. and Whittaker, M. (2014) *The state of living standards*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/events/state-living-standards-2014/>.

<sup>2</sup> Missing data is excluded from the survey findings quoted in this report, so base numbers vary between questions. Base numbers for all survey data quoted can be found in the full report. All references to single parents surveyed refer to this poll, unless otherwise stated.

work full-time is now in poverty, and this rises to nearly one in three (30 per cent) where single parents work part-time.<sup>3</sup> 67 per cent of working single parents surveyed found it difficult, at best, to make ends meet.

One reason why many working single parents are still facing poverty is that they are too frequently stuck in low paid jobs. Median employment income for single parent households was £110 in 2011/12, compared with £390 for all UK households.<sup>4</sup> Almost four in ten (39 per cent) working single parents surveyed had a low paid job, according to the standard EU definition of low pay, compared with 21 per cent of workers nationally.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, many single parents are also facing falling wages. 25 per cent of working single parents surveyed had experienced a reduction in wages by their employer in the last six months. For single parents already on low wages in particular, pressure on real earnings makes it even less likely that rising living costs can be met.

**“I am earning less per hour now than I was four years ago.”**

## Making up lost income

Single parents have tried to increase their working hours to make up for the losses incurred through stagnant wages and increasing pressure on their finances. 26 per cent of working single parents surveyed had increased their working hours in the last two years due to financial necessity; 12 per cent worked overtime in order to increase their income. Many are also working multiple jobs and long hours. Around one in six working single parents surveyed have more than one job, and a third of single parents surveyed worked 35 hours or more per week.

**“I have to work two jobs, day/night shift patterns [and] find appropriate childcare.”**

Yet even with these efforts, there are marked signs of ongoing under-employment among single parents. 23 per cent of working single parents surveyed would still like to work more hours. Nationally, the proportion of single parents who would like to work longer hours rose from 13.5 per cent in 2007 to 18.5 per cent in 2012.<sup>6</sup> However, this option is increasingly not available for many single parents. The proportion of single parents who are involuntarily working part-time (ie they would like a full-time job) has doubled in just five years, going from 7.6 per cent in 2007 to 15.2 per cent in 2012.<sup>7</sup> Thus, single parents are struggling to find the working hours they want and need to make ends meet.

<sup>3</sup> DWP (2014) Households below average income (HBAI): 1994/95 to 2012/13. [Online]. Available: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/households-below-average-income-hbai-199495-to-201213>.  
<sup>4</sup> DWP (2013) Households Below Average Income, 1994/95-2011/12. 7th edition. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-5828-4>. Household income was estimated from total employment and self-employment income and equalised using the household level OECD equivalence scale (before housing costs).  
<sup>5</sup> Whittaker, M. and Hurrell, A. (2013) Low pay Britain 2013. [Online]. Available: [http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Low\\_Pay\\_Britain\\_2013.pdf](http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/media/downloads/Low_Pay_Britain_2013.pdf).  
<sup>6</sup> ONS (2014c) *Male and female lone parent with dependent children compared to all family type analysis cross referencing various variables from LFS/APS datasets 2007 to 2012*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/business-transparency/freedom-of-information/what-can-i-request/published-ad-hoc-data/labour/may-2014/male-and-female-lone-parent-with-dependent-children.zip>  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Into work...but for how long?

Many single parents now also face increased job insecurity. 56 per cent of working single parents surveyed have become more concerned about job security in the past two years. This reflects the increasing lack of income reliability; 19 per cent of working single parents surveyed said they had lost income due to employers' cuts in wages or hours or through redundancy in the last six months. 30 per cent of working single parents surveyed had also experienced unpaid overtime in the past two years, for the first time – effectively losing out on pay for additional hours worked.

There has been an increase in the proportion of single parents whose job is not permanent (for example, due to temporary contracts or seasonal work) from 4.5 per cent to 5.3 per cent. While this change may seem small, it equates to a 27 per cent increase in the numbers of single parents in temporary work – over 11,200 single parents.<sup>8</sup>

**“They didn’t keep any of the staff on at all that they took on for Christmas, so they let us all go on 11 January.”**

Our survey also suggests that many single parents are experiencing these less secure contracts for the first time: in the past two years, 12 per cent of working single parents surveyed said they had experienced a temporary or fixed term contract; 6 per cent said they had experienced a ‘zero hours’ contract for the first time in the same period.<sup>9</sup>

As a result, around a fifth of working single parents surveyed are not sure, or think it unlikely, that they will be able to stay in work for the next 12 months. These concerns were borne out by responses from non-working single parents surveyed – 26 per cent had left their last paid job due to job insecurity, either from redundancy, temporary jobs ending, or wage cuts (either through reduced wages or hours).

## Self-employment – problem or solution?

Around a fifth of working single parents surveyed were self-employed, compared with 15 per cent of employees nationally (ONS, 2014b). A substantial proportion has made this move recently; about a third (32 per cent) of self-employed single parents surveyed said they had moved into self-employment for the first time in the past two years.

The high rates of self-employment signal a strong motivation to generate income, but this has come at a personal cost for many who are newly self-employed. Our survey indicates that self-employed single parents face a higher risk of being low paid than employee-only single parents surveyed (the rate of low pay was 53 per cent compared with 35 per cent, respectively). Worryingly, self-employed single parents made up over half of those who reported being paid below the minimum wage. Single parents interviewed echoed these findings and described the difficulties faced in setting up a new business in recent years.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> With a lack of a consistent definition of ‘zero hours’ contracts, this was defined as a contract without specified minimum hours with no standby time paid.

## Finding a way back to work

We found the motivation to work was strong among those single parents who are out of work – whether to set an example for their children, to follow in their parents’ footsteps, to provide for their family or to fulfil their own ambition. However, there is a strong feeling of frustration among single parents trying to find their way back to employment.

While there may be job growth nationally, our evidence suggests this growth hasn’t necessarily been in jobs that work for single parents. Of non-working single parents surveyed, 56 per cent said that inflexible working hours stopped them from applying for jobs most or all of the time.

Many also expressed frustration at the lack of responsiveness from employers after submitting applications; around a third (34 per cent) of unemployed single parents said they had never been asked for an interview after making a job application. Most felt this was linked to competition in the current job market. Concern over job competition reflects the perception that there is an inherent labour market disadvantage to being a single parent. A number of single parents out of work thought they would readily be passed over for jobs by employers if competing with people without childcare responsibilities or with another partner to share childcare. This was particularly true of single parents who had been out of the workforce for a longer period of time – often those who had taken time out of the workplace while still partnered to raise children.

**“I know damn well they’d rather employ a 24 year-old who has an administrative background but isn’t a single parent.”**

## Any job will do?

Compounding this frustration is pressure from the welfare system to find jobs that are too often not available or out of reach – a repeated theme from interviews was single parents feeling ‘stuck’. ‘Claimant commitments’ with Jobcentre Plus to apply for a particular number of jobs per week or per month have created perverse incentives for some single parents to apply for any job even if there is no realistic chance of actually being able to undertake the job (eg due to a lack of flexibility, or distance from home). The Universal Jobmatch system was also particularly criticised by some for impairing single parents’ job search – either due to failings in its functionality, or because the system overstated the actual number of jobs available due to jobs being posted multiple times.

**“I found myself just applying for jobs in Tesco, jobs that I’d already been rejected for, just to meet the quota that they had set me.”**

## Where next – our recommendations

Reliant on only one income, single parents are already at a disadvantage in terms of their ability to secure a decent household income for their families. Single parents also face particular challenges around securing and sustaining jobs that fit around school hours and childcare, on top of difficulties in finding and paying for childcare itself. In an increasingly precarious and competitive labour market, this report has identified the additional challenges currently facing single parents who are trying their utmost to earn their way out of poverty: endemic low pay; under-employment; job insecurity; and a relentless pressure to find and apply for any job, however unsuitable or unsustainable.

Against a prevailing policy narrative that work is the best route out of poverty, these findings show that this is just not the case for many single parents. This poses a difficult question for welfare reform affecting single parents, which has for some time been predicated on this narrative. 75 per cent of single parents surveyed had been affected by at least one welfare reform; conversely, a job in itself is often not for single parents to earn their way out of poverty and beyond precarious household finances.

Single parents face a long road to recovery. Without action, there is a risk that the labour market which has emerged in the UK will exacerbate the poor employment prospects facing many single parents, further increasing inequality between single parents and other household types. As the economy improves, now is the time for a re-balancing of the UK labour market to ensure that, as more jobs are created, single parents can play a full part in the return to economic growth. Our priorities for action are:

### ***An overhaul of support into work:***

- The ‘work-first’ approach taken by Jobcentre Plus does not promote sustainable employment outcomes; we want to see a move away from the undue focus on inappropriate job search targets and sanctions which, in many cases, actively hamper single parents’ ability to find suitable work.
- We would like to see investment in skills and training for single parents out of work, which would yield returns both for single parents and for the state, as well as the re-introduction of specialist lone parent advisers in Jobcentres who can better understand and support single parents’ specific needs.

### ***Delivering a level playing field:***

- We welcome the commitment to increase support for childcare costs to 85 per cent under universal credit. However, single parents need this help now. We recommend the urgent introduction of 85 per cent childcare support under tax credits in the interim until universal credit is fully rolled out.
- Far more needs to be done with employers to create a job market that works for single parents juggling work and childcare responsibilities. We would like to see the government play a much more active role in the development of flexible working opportunities across a greater range and level of jobs, starting with jobs across the public sector and contracted-out spheres.

**Tackling insecurity and low pay:**

- In addition to the investment in skills and training recommended above, it is imperative that the government plays a more active role in working with employers to incentivise job security – rather than a growing reliance on temporary and zero-hours contracts – and to develop clear pathways to progression for those entering work on low hours and/or wages.

**Providing genuine incentives to work through the benefits system:**

- Analysis to date of universal credit shows that it will not deliver incentives to work for many single parents as they progress up the hours and earnings scale. With a phased and gradual implementation plan for universal credit now in place, there is still time to pilot further adaptations of its current formula to maximise work incentives for single parents; these should include trialling a lower taper rate and a higher income disregard for single parents.

**Ensuring that self-employment is part of the labour market solution:**

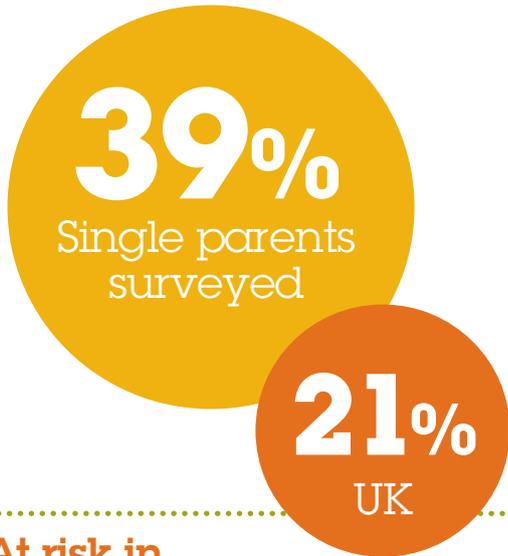
- It appears that some single parents are being inappropriately advised or encouraged into self-employment, and are risking very low incomes as a result. Looking ahead, there is a very real concern that the ‘minimum income floor’ assumed in order to calculate universal credit payments will make it harder, not easier, for those on low incomes to sustain a new business after 12 months. We recommend that the government undertakes a rapid review into self-employment for those on low incomes.
- We would also like the government to review Jobcentre Plus self-employment support – including the consistency of New Enterprise Allowance provision – and implement a clear and focused action plan to provide adequate and expert support through Jobcentre Plus for those wishing to follow this route.

Against the backdrop of economic recovery, it is worth emphasising that the gains from single parents entering employment are not just for the individual. With the prospect of a welfare cap on annual managed expenditure, there is a pressing need to ensure single parent employment is secure and provides adequate incomes. In fact, previous Gingerbread research suggests that if just 5 per cent more single parents moved into work, the government would generate £436 million savings (Brewer and DeAgostini, 2013). The imperative to meet the single parent employment challenge is therefore not just about single parents’ incomes, but also about delivering government value for money and benefits to the wider economy.

# The single parent labour market in figures

## Stuck in low pay...

Proportion who are in low paid jobs



## At risk in self-employment...

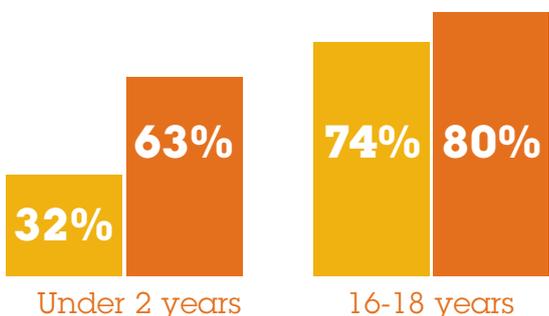


% of those with a self-employed job    % of those who are employee-only

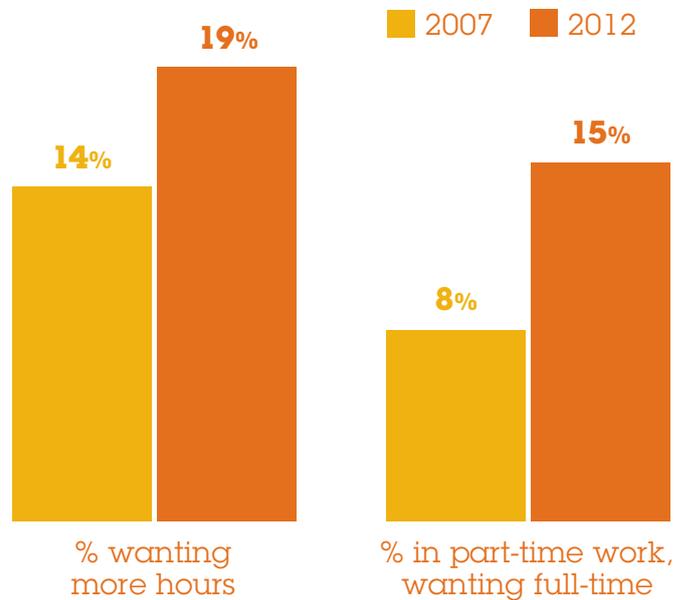
## Fighting the childcare trap...

Employment rate by age of youngest child, 2012

Single mothers    Non-single mothers

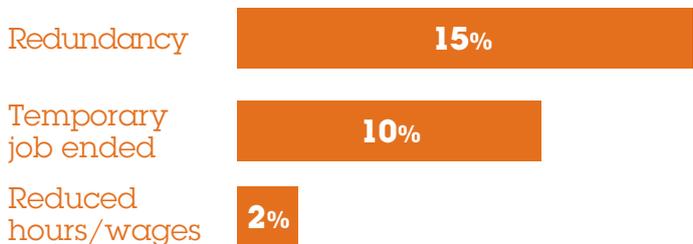


## ...and increasingly under-employed



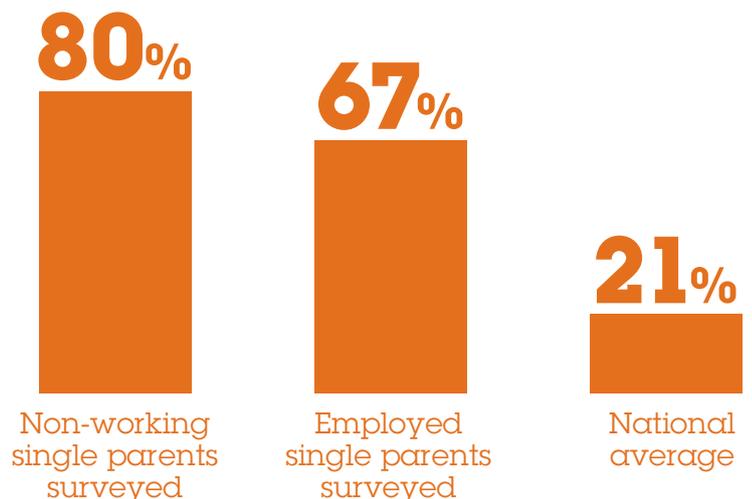
## ...and insecure jobs

% of non-working single parents who left last job due to...



## ...and struggling to make ends meet

Proportion who say managing finances is always difficult at best



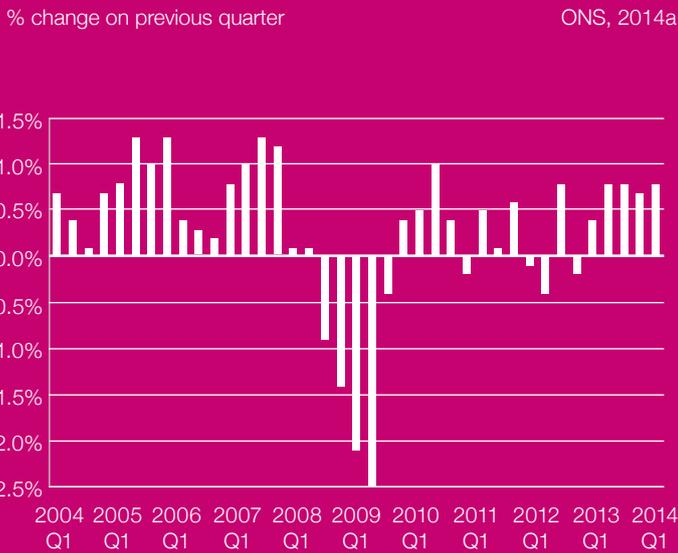
# 1 Introduction

After more than four years of economic recession and stagnation in the UK, the return to a sustained period of growth is clearly good news. However, rising gross domestic product (GDP) does not equate to rising living standards. Single parents have been hit particularly hard by austerity measures to date (Rabindrakumar, 2013).<sup>10</sup> Many single parent families are now struggling to maintain an adequate household income through employment. It is vital that we understand the financial reality for those single parents struggling to find work and make work pay to put any nascent recovery into perspective.

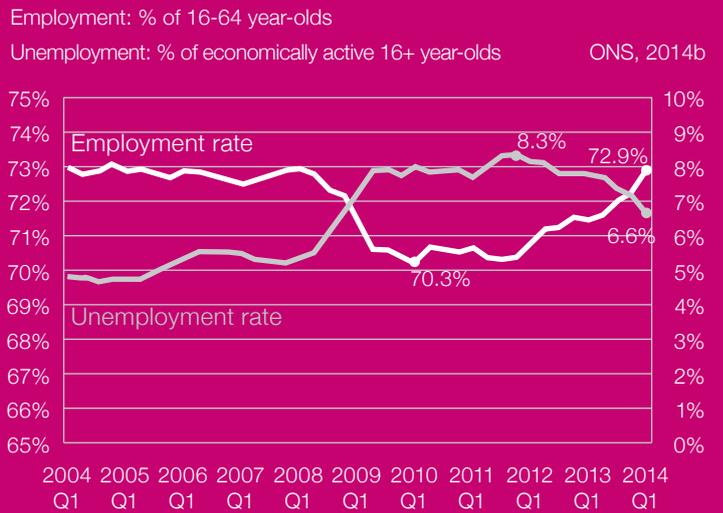
## From recession to recovery?

The UK economy has returned to growth: following the 2007-08 recession and a largely stagnant economy until 2013, we have seen five successive quarters of economic growth (Figure 1). Alongside this, employment has been increasing – the employment rate is up from a post-recession low of 70.3 per cent to 72.9 per cent of 16-64 year-olds. Likewise, unemployment is falling – the unemployment rate is now down from a post-recession high of 8.3 per cent to 6.6 per cent of economically active 16+ year-olds (Figure 2).

**Figure 1 GDP growth, 2004-2014**



**Figure 2 Labour market improvements, 2004-2014**



Note: Quarterly LFS data (Q1 is February-April), seasonally adjusted. The left hand y-axis does not start from zero to highlight annual changes; in this approach, we follow ONS presentation of historical employment rate data.

<sup>10</sup> Throughout this report, 'single parents' refers to single parents with dependent children – ie children under 16

On this basis, the economic outlook now seems positive. However, there is still ground to make up – real GDP and the employment rate have yet to match their pre-recession peaks in the UK; the unemployment rate is still above its pre-recession low. More importantly, economic growth has not immediately translated into improved living standards. Living standards have fallen sharply in recent years, with real disposable income falling more than in previous recessions (Plunkett, Hurrell and Whittaker, 2014).

We know that single parents are particularly affected by the squeeze on household incomes (Rabindrakumar, 2013). Along with other groups at risk of being on low incomes, single parents tend to spend a larger share of their household budget on essential living costs, exposing them to the rising costs of food and utilities. At the same time, single parents are being hit hard by cuts in tax credits, benefits and public services as part of the government's austerity package; one estimate predicts single mothers will lose 15.6 per cent of net income by 2015/16 (Women's Budget Group, 2013).

We also found that many single parents are caught in an income trap, where they are struggling both to earn more and to reduce living costs, in order to compensate for these losses in real income. In our first *Paying the Price* report, single parents vividly described difficulties in finding work – and work that pays – to cover their outgoings. Similarly, almost all single parents surveyed for the report had already cut back on household spending in some way last year; from interviews, single parents reported that there was little room left for finding (even) cheaper substitutes or going without. This year, we find that single parents still seem to be in much the same position – last year, 77 per cent of single parents surveyed described managing finances as always difficult at best (Figure 12); this year, 71 per cent of single parents surveyed were in the same position.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, it seems, most single parent households are yet to reap the benefits of the emerging recovery. Moreover, this income trap poses a difficult question for policymakers. The logic of the current – and previous – waves of welfare reforms affecting single parent families has been predicated on the idea that the route out of poverty is through work. Yet the difficulties of maintaining an adequate income in today's labour market suggest work alone is not enough.

**“We are reforming the welfare system to help more people to move into and progress in work.”**

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**

**71%**  
of single parents  
found managing  
finances always  
difficult at best

<sup>11</sup> Neither survey used random samples, therefore changes in results do not necessarily indicate changes in the population; instead, we focus on the magnitude of financial difficulties in each year.

## This report: The state of single parent employment

This report, the second in our *Paying the Price* series, focuses on the **state of single parent employment** in a changing economic climate. We look at single parents' recent labour market experiences, both for those in work and those looking for work. The report uses a mixed method approach, drawing on:

- Analysis of secondary national data, with a particular focus on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Annual Population Survey (APS)
- An online survey, held from 14 February to 14 March 2014, with 2,486 single parent respondents<sup>12</sup>
- In-depth qualitative interviews with 23 *Paying the Price* panel members.

We should note that we used an online survey approach to elicit more in-depth data about the most recent changes to single parents' lives than is currently available from national data. We recognise that sample bias can be introduced by conducting our survey online. Nevertheless, background data provided by respondents suggests our sample broadly reflects the single parent population; most importantly, income data suggests those on low incomes – ie those who are most likely to be affected by welfare reforms and precarious employment conditions – are not over-represented (see Appendix 1). As with our first report, we use national household survey data where possible to provide context to our findings, and compare the 'direction of travel' between the data sources. While not perfect, we feel that this approach presents the best available snapshot of single parents' current lives. Appendix 1 provides more detailed information on our survey and panel research methodology.

This research was undertaken at a critical turning point for the UK economy; the report sheds light on the gap between the economic forecast as determined by official macroeconomic indicators and single parents' real-life experiences of the labour market in the current economy. By doing so, we hope it helps to improve our understanding of the distance we have to travel to reach a sustainable recovery shared by all.

<sup>12</sup> Missing data is excluded from the survey findings quoted in this report, so base numbers vary between questions. Base numbers for all survey data quoted can be found in Appendix 1. All references to single parents surveyed refers to this poll, unless otherwise stated.

## 2 Back to work

**Over the last 20 years, overall single parent employment has significantly increased. However, this growth slowed in recent years – partly explained by the difficult jobs market for single parents and the effect of welfare reforms on single parents' economic activity status. And while their employment rate appears now to be picking up again, there are concerns that work is too often not providing a route out of poverty for single parent families.**

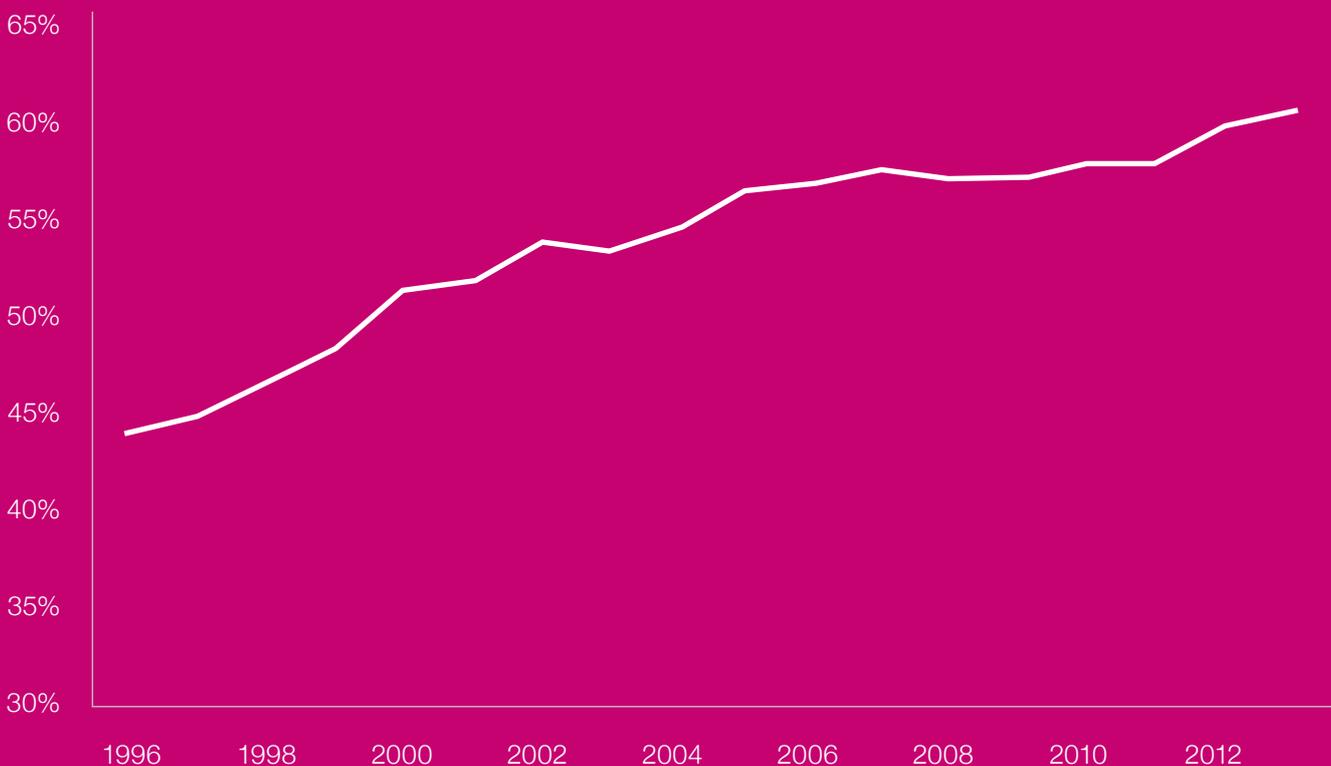
### **Single parent employment – a success story?**

Single parent employment fell sharply during the early 1980s and failed to pick up by the early 1990s; at one point, the employment rate for female single parents was just below 40 per cent, a lower rate than in the late 1970s (Gregg and Harkness, 2004). Since then, however, there has been substantial progress in single parents moving into work over the past two decades. There are over 400,000 more single parents in the workforce than in 1996 – an increase of nearly 60 per cent. Similarly, the single parent employment rate has jumped from 43.8 per cent in 1996 to 60.2 per cent in 2013 (Figure 3).

### **Figure 3 Increase in single parent employment rate, 1996-2013**

% of 16-64 year olds in employment, April-June

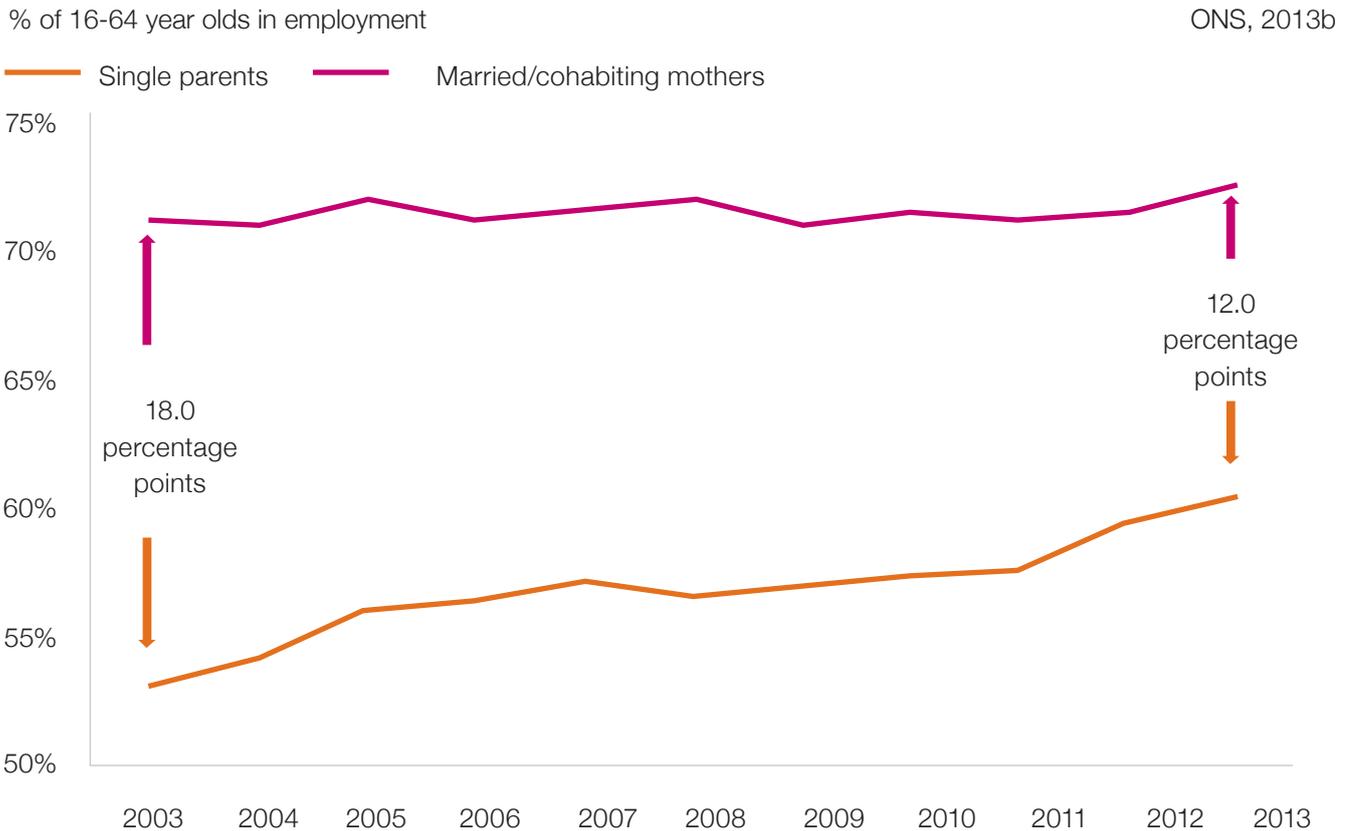
ONS, 2013b



Note: Quarterly LFS data (April-June), not seasonally adjusted. The y-axis does not start from zero, to highlight the annual changes in employment rate data; in this approach, we follow ONS presentation of historical employment rate data.

Not only has single parent employment been increasing during this period, the employment gap between single parents and married or cohabiting women with children ('couple mothers') has also gradually fallen.<sup>13</sup> Ten years ago, the employment rate for single parents was over 18 percentage points lower than that for couple mothers. By 2013, this employment rate gap was less than 12 percentage points (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 Closing the employment gap with couple mothers**



Note: Quarterly LFS data (April-June), not seasonally adjusted.

However, this long-term trend masks more complex patterns. Single parent employment varies significantly by a number of demographic factors. In particular, age, gender and the age of single parents' youngest child have a significant effect on single parent employment.

### Box 1 Understanding employment data

There are three main employment statuses we refer to in this report: employed, unemployed and economically inactive.

Simple definitions of these statuses are:

- Employed: In work
- Unemployed: Out of work and looking for work
- Economically inactive: Out of work but not looking for work.

The three rates are calculated as:

- Employment: Employed people as a proportion of all people of working age (employed, unemployed and inactive)
- Unemployment: Unemployed people as a proportion of all economically active people (employed plus unemployed)
- Inactivity: Inactive people of working age as a proportion of all people of working age.

Note: For more information, see <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-guidance/interpreting-labour-market-statistics/explaining-employment--unemployment-and-inactivity.html>

<sup>13</sup> This is an important comparison, as second earners in couples – primarily mothers – face a similar trade-off between childcare and employment as single parents.

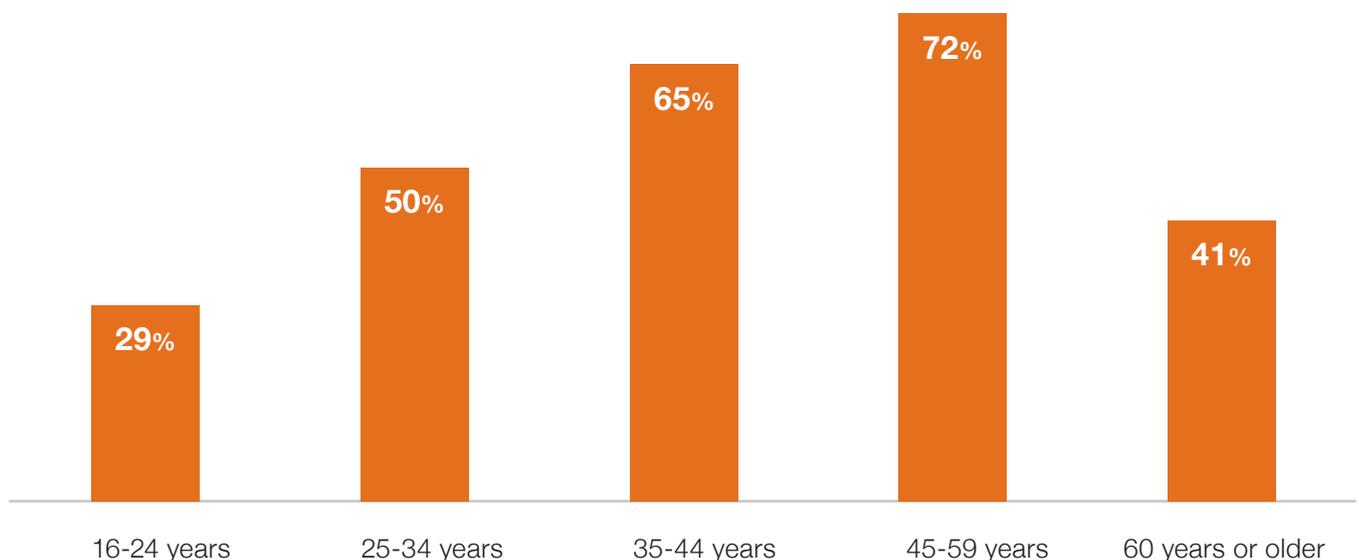
## Behind the headlines

The employment rate for young single parents is relatively low compared to older single parents (Figure 5). Of course, some young single parents may be in education and not looking for work. However, the 16-24 year old single parent unemployment rate – which is a proportion of the economically active – was nearly twice the single parent average at 34.1 per cent in 2012. The relatively low employment rate for young single parents is perhaps unsurprising (Figure 5), given that the rate of all 16-24 year-olds not in employment, education or training (NEET) was persistent at around 15 per cent even in the years before the recession. Young people were then hit hard by the recession and economic stagnation, with the NEET rate peaking at over 20 per cent in 2011 (DWP, 2014c). Given the additional barriers to work facing single parents, the low employment rate for 16-24 year-old single parents makes sense. Evidence also suggests that current employment support for young single parents is currently lacking. For example, at December 2013, the cumulative Work Programme job outcome rate was just 7 per cent for 18-24 year-old single parents, compared with 23 per cent for other 18-24 year-olds (DWP, 2014b).

### Figure 5 Single parent employment rate by age, 2012

% of 16-64 year olds in employment

ONS, 2014c



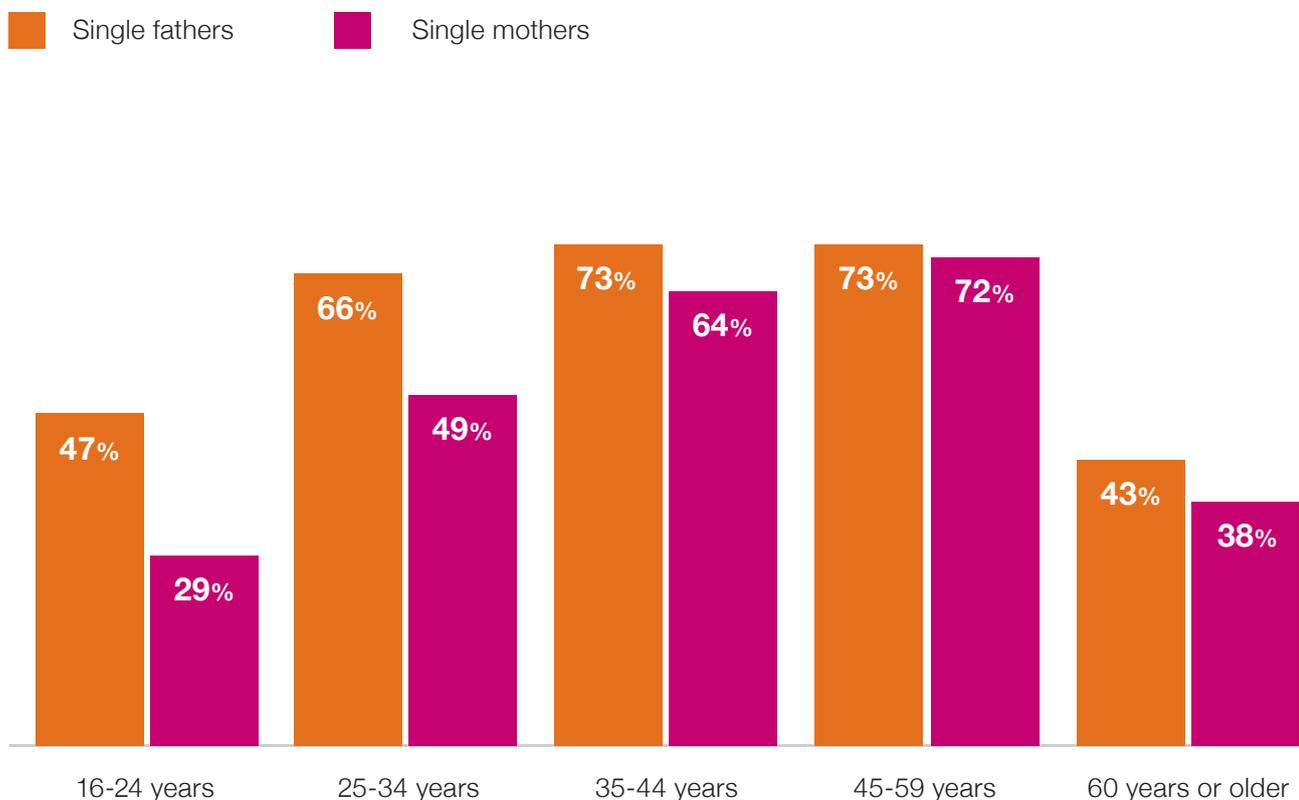
Note: Annual APS data.

The gender of single parents also affects employment rates. According to APS data, the employment rate for single fathers was 69.2 per cent, whereas it was 57.0 per cent for single mothers. While both male and female single parents obviously take on childcare responsibilities which are so often a barrier to employment, there are other differences that affect employment. Age is one factor, with male single parents tending to be older than female single parents; however, as Figure 6 shows, age does not explain all of the difference. Male single parents are less likely to have never married and twice as likely to have been widowed (ONS, 2012); as a result of being in a couple, single fathers are therefore more likely to have been able to work full-time and develop an employment history.

### Figure 6 Single parent employment rate by age and gender, 2012

% of 16-64 year olds in employment

ONS, 2014c



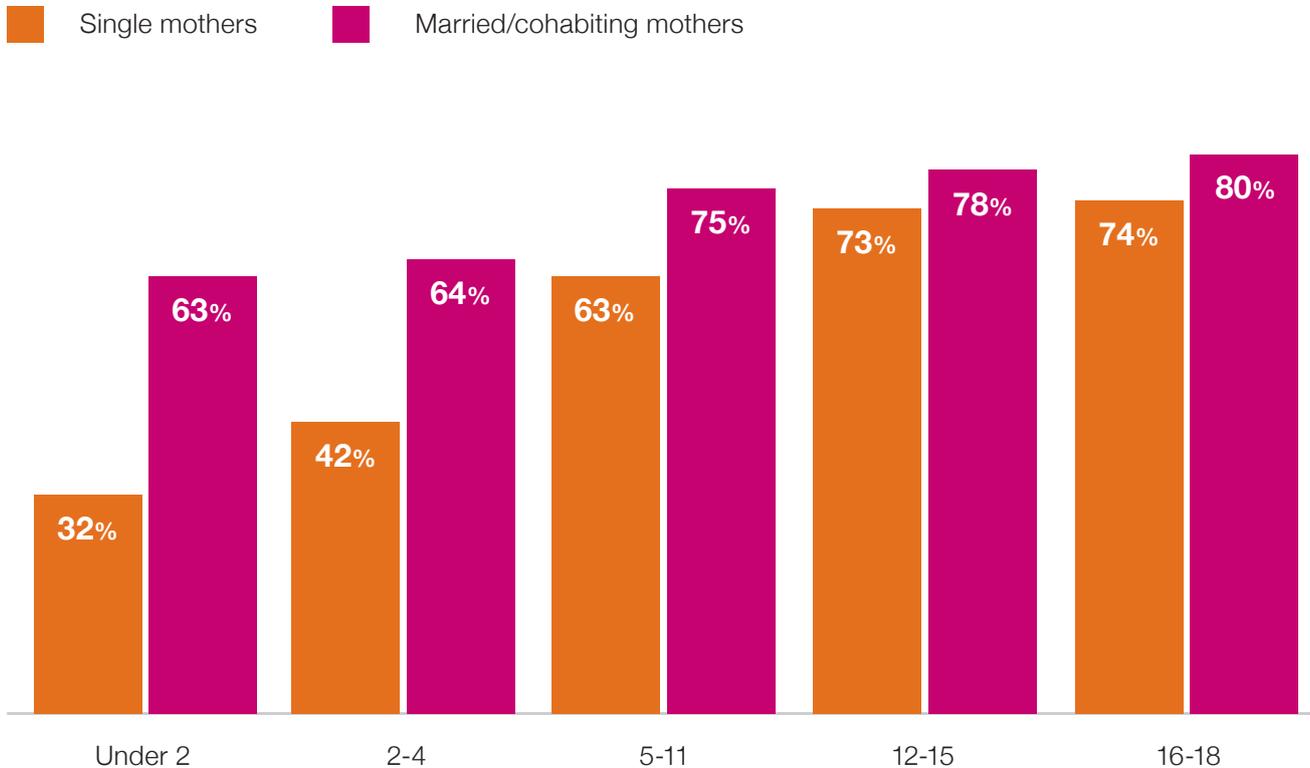
Note: Annual APS data .

As has already been mentioned, childcare responsibilities also have an effect on employment – this effect is most pronounced when children are younger. Given the differences in employment rates by gender, comparing maternal employment rates by the age of a mother’s youngest child is particularly illustrative here (to reflect the comparable fertility and childcare implications for employment facing single parents, Figure 7).

### Figure 7 Maternal employment rates by age of youngest child, 2012

% of 16-64 year olds in employment

ONS, 2014c

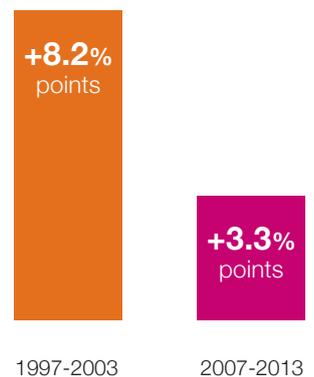


Note: Annual APS data.

These demographic differences in employment have persisted over many years, and serve to tell a more nuanced story of the overall improvement in the single parent employment rate. What is most interesting in the context of the UK's emerging economic recovery, however, is that the positive historic trends overshadow more worrying recent employment patterns. As Figure 3 shows, the gains in single parent employment were steepest in the late 1990s and early 2000s, whereas the increase in the single parent employment rate was much less marked in the years between 2007 and 2011.

This recent relative stagnation in single parent employment points towards a changing labour market for single parents in recent years and warrants closer analysis. Possible reasons for this pattern – particularly the struggling economy and single parent policy reform – are explored in more detail in chapter 4. Here, we turn to other significant changes in the labour market for working single parents that have accompanied this period of slow single parent employment growth.

### Single parent employment rate growth



### 3 A changing jobs market

**Employment levels are not the only indicator of a healthy labour market. Earnings, hours and job security are equally important markers of the state of single parent employment. And while policymakers emphasise the importance of work and getting people back to work, it is now clear that having a job is not enough. Single parent families are already at a disadvantage as single-earner households. Now, many single parents are dealing with cuts to real wages and less secure working environments. While working single parents are doing all they can to keep their head above water, for many, this is not enough to make ends meet.**

#### **No pay, no gain**

Single parents face a difficult labour market – as sole carers, they need work that fits alongside caring responsibilities; as sole earners, they need a job that pays enough to support their family. In reality, this balance has often proved difficult to achieve. Single parents tend to enter lower wage jobs than average. Median employment income for single parent households was around £110 in 2011/12, compared with around £390 for all UK households (DWP, 2013).<sup>14</sup> This is in part because single parents tend to be less employed than the average worker (Newis, 2012). We also know that some single parents ‘bump down’ in the labour market, sacrificing higher pay in order to accept jobs which are lower paid but offer more flexibility (Gingerbread, 2012).

Our research illustrates just how inadequate wage levels can be for single parents. Almost four in ten (39 per cent) working single parents surveyed had a low paid job, according to the standard EU definition of low pay.<sup>15</sup> Nationally, 21 per cent of UK workers were low paid in 2012 (Whittaker and Hurrell, 2013). Despite the long-term increase in single parent employment, single parent families still face a relatively high risk of in-work poverty.

**“A combination of low wages and high childcare costs means that single parents...frequently struggle to find jobs that lift them above the poverty line”**

**(Gingerbread, 2012)**

Worryingly, child poverty in families where parents work has in fact *increased* recently. The proportion of children in single parent families where the parent worked part-time increased from 23 to 31 per cent between 2010/11 and 2011/12, and has remained at this level (DWP, 2014a). And even full-time work is no guaranteed route out of poverty for single parent families; the relative poverty rate for children whose single parent works full-time is now 22 per cent, up from 17 per cent in 2011/12 (DWP, 2014a).

Median employment income



<sup>14</sup> Household income was estimated from total employment and self-employment income and equivalised using the household level OECD equivalence scale (before housing costs).

<sup>15</sup> The EU definition of low pay is two-thirds of the national median gross hourly wage. At the time of the survey, the median gross hourly pay was £11.62 (ONS, 2013a); the threshold for low pay was therefore taken as £7.75. Figures quoted exclude those stating ‘Not sure’ in relation to wage levels.

These figures point to one of the most concerning changes that has arisen in the UK labour market in recent years – the fall in real wages. In January 2014, ONS figures showed real wages had been consistently falling since 2010 – the longest drop in wages in 50 years (ONS, 2014a). Our research suggests this shift is still affecting many single parents, with 25 per cent of working single parents surveyed experiencing a reduction in wages by their employer in the last six months.

**“The single most striking feature of today’s UK jobs market is an unparalleled collapse in real wages.”**

*(Plunkett, Hurrell and Whittaker, 2014)*

A common theme from working single parents’ interviews and survey responses is the lack of any pay rises in recent years. For single parents already on low wages in particular, pressure on real earnings makes it even less likely that rising living costs can be met. Worryingly, weak wage growth has been sustained for an unexpectedly long time and looks set to continue for the time being: this year, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts real earnings will not reach pre-recession levels until the end of 2016 (Office for Budget Responsibility, 2014).

**“Times are more difficult as I am earning £100 less a month than two years ago due to work cutting my wages.”**

**“I am earning less per hour now than I was four years ago.”**

*Paying the Price survey respondents*

## **Making up lost income**

One consequence of this wage crisis is that many working single parents have tried to increase their working hours to make up for the losses incurred through stagnant wages and increasing pressure on their finances. Indeed, 26 per cent of working single parents surveyed had increased their working hours in the last two years due to financial necessity, and 12 per cent worked overtime in order to increase their income.

**“I have to work two jobs, day/night shift patterns [and] find appropriate childcare.”**

**“It’s been so hard to work enough hours in two jobs just to pay the bills and look after the...kids – always exhausted and the boys left on their own far more than is good for them.”**

*Paying the Price survey respondents*

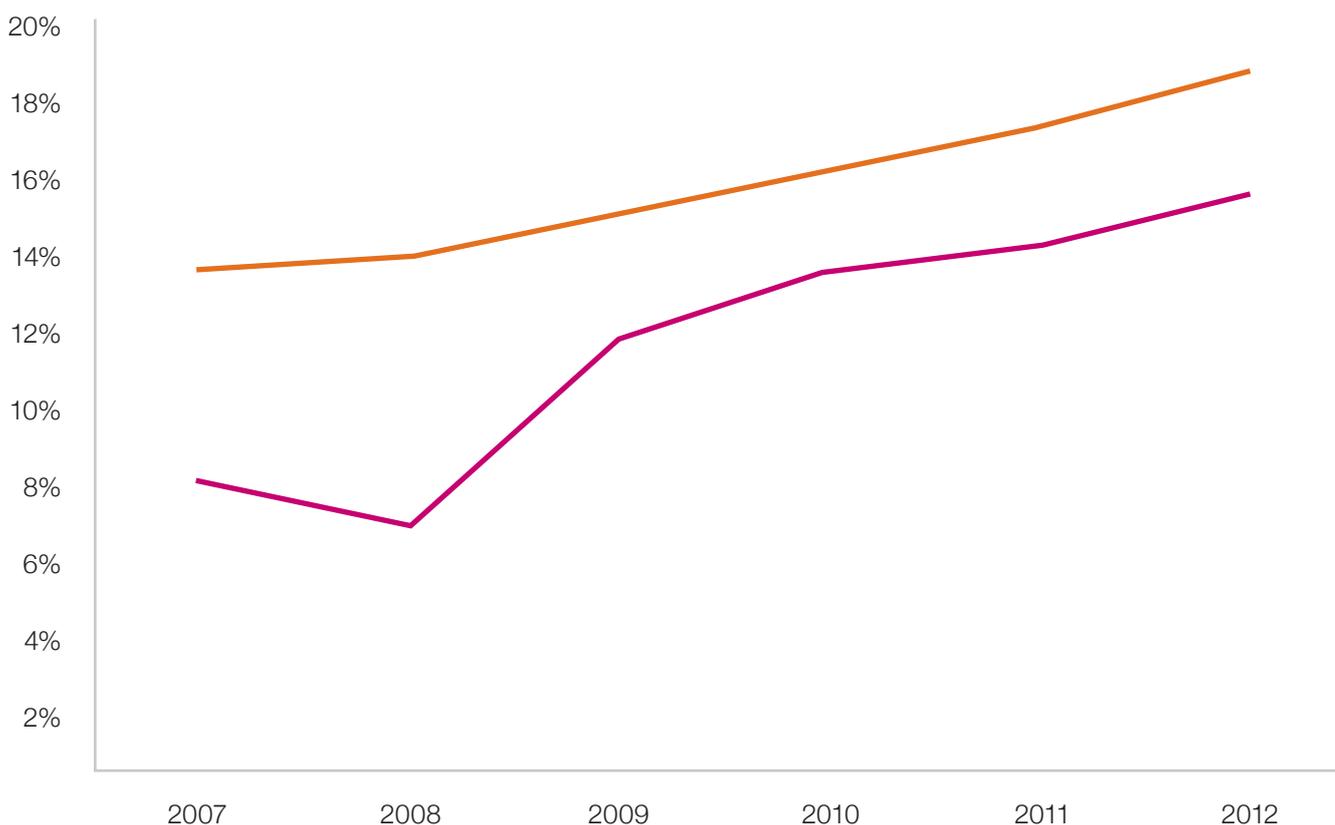
Even with these increases, there are marked signs of ongoing under-employment among single parents. 23 per cent of working single parents surveyed would still like to work more hours. This reflects national trends (Figure 8), where the proportion of single parents who would like to work longer hours at their current basic pay rose from 13.5 per cent in 2007 to 18.5 per cent in 2012 (ONS, 2014c). However, this option is increasingly not available for many single parents. The proportion of single parents who are involuntarily working part-time (ie they would like a full-time job) has doubled in just five years, going from 7.6 per cent in 2007 to 15.2 per cent in 2012 (ONS, 2014c).

### Figure 8 Rising under-employment, 2007-2012

% of single parents aged 16 or over

ONS, 2014c

- Single parents wanting to work longer hours
- Single parents in part-time work, wanting full-time job



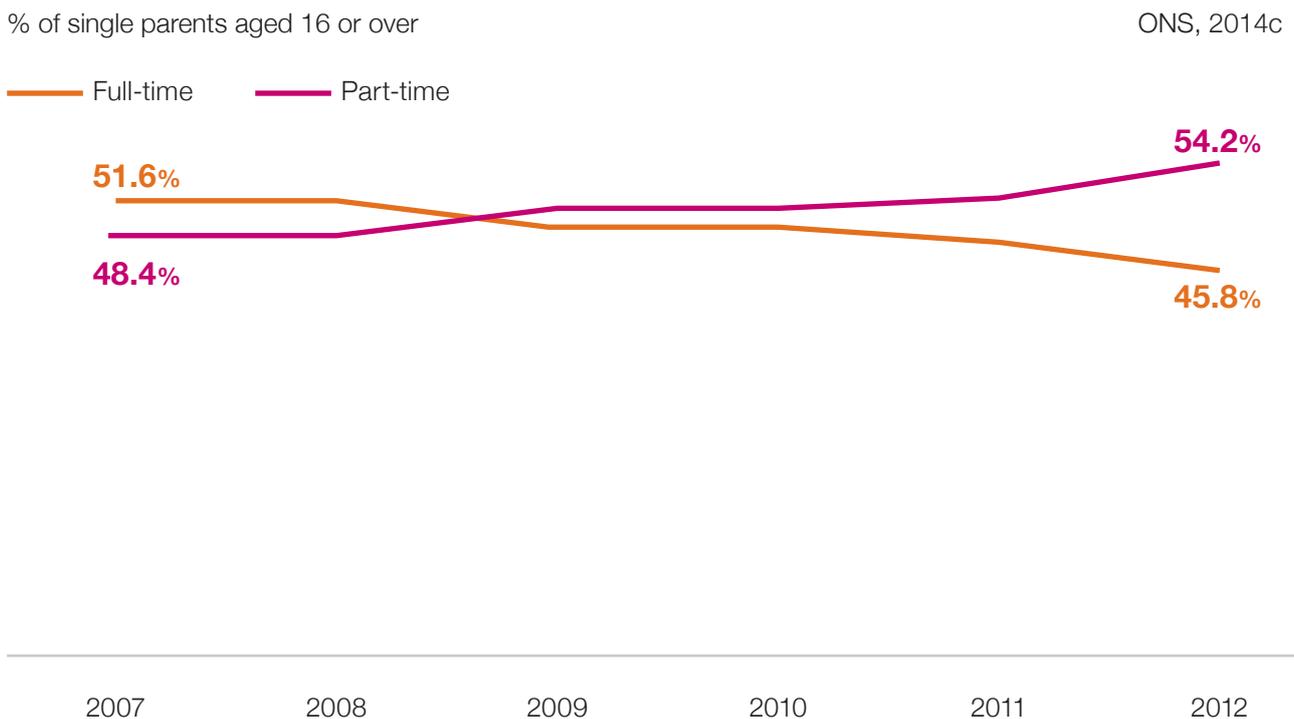
Note: Annual APS data.

## Into work – but for how long?

Under-employment among single parents has also been accompanied by decreased stability while in employment. 56 per cent of working single parents surveyed have become more concerned about their job security in the past two years. This reflects the increasing lack of income reliability; in our first *Paying the Price* report, we found that nearly a fifth (19 per cent) of working single parents surveyed had experienced falling income due to cuts in wages or hours worked, or through redundancy. This trend has continued, with the same proportion of working single parents reporting lost income due to employers' cuts in wages or hours and through redundancy. 30 per cent of working single parents surveyed had also experienced unpaid overtime in the past two years, for the first time – effectively losing out on pay for additional hours worked.

This income insecurity might in part be explained by changes in employment terms offered by employers in recent years. The full-time employment rate has fallen among single parents, dropping from 51.6 per cent in 2007 to 45.8 per cent in 2012 (Figure 9).

**Figure 9 Fall in single parents employed full-time, 2007-2012**



Note: Annual APS data.

There has also been an increase in the proportion of single parents whose job is not permanent (for example, due to temporary contracts or seasonal work) from 4.5 per cent to 5.3 per cent. While this change may seem small, it equates to a 27 per cent increase in the numbers of single parents in temporary work – over 11,200 single parents (ONS, 2014c). Our survey also suggests that many single parents are experiencing these less secure contracts for the first time: 12 per cent of working single parents said they had experienced a temporary or fixed term contract for the first time in the past two years; 6 per cent said they had experienced a ‘zero-hours’ contract for the first time in the same period.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> With a lack of a consistent definition of ‘zero hours’ contracts, this was defined as a contract without specified minimum hours with no standby time paid.

**“They didn’t keep any of the staff on at all that they took on for Christmas, so they let us all go on 11 January.”**

**“Christmastime there seems to be a lot more [jobs]...And that’s the thing, with having a child...I do need something which I can rely on.”**

*Paying the Price panel members*

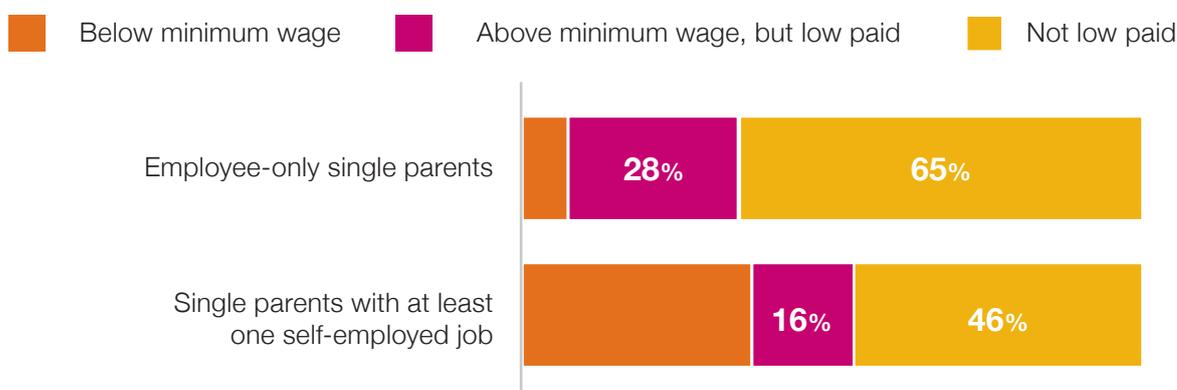
## Self-employment – problem or solution?

The other significant phenomenon we have witnessed in the UK labour market in recent years is the increase in self-employment.<sup>17</sup> Around a fifth of working single parents surveyed were self-employed (18 per cent), compared with 15 per cent of people in work nationally (ONS, 2014a). Moreover, a small but significant proportion of single parents surveyed (around 5 per cent) had more than one self-employed job. About a third (32 per cent) of single parents who are currently self-employed said they had moved into self-employment for the first time in the past two years.

While the high rates of self-employment can signal a strong motivation to generate income, this has come at a personal cost for many who are newly self-employed. Resolution Foundation analysis suggests median earnings of self-employed people fell by 20 per cent in real terms between 2007 and 2012. Our survey paints a similar picture – self-employed single parents face a higher risk of being low paid than employee-only single parents surveyed (Figure 10). Worryingly, self-employed single parents made up over half of those who reported being paid below the minimum wage. These findings are reflected in single parent experiences – particularly among those attempting to move into self-employment at the moment (Box 2).

**Figure 10 Single parent pay in their main job, by employee status**

% of employee single parents, n=1,328  
% of self-employed single parents, n=295  
Gingerbread survey, 2014



Note: Data excludes those not sure of their wage. It is difficult to judge how accurately single parents have recorded their pay; the question was expressed as categories (below/above stated amounts) rather than requesting precise pay, which may be harder to recall. We also included alternative monthly and annual estimates, for those who recall salaries over different time periods. For context, national estimates suggest 4.3 per cent of all employees were paid at or below the national minimum wage (Low Pay Commission, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26255865>

## Box 2 “I probably paid to go work”: Karen’s story

**Karen recently completed a master’s degree in psychotherapy. She has started to secure clients but it has proved a slow and difficult process. Part-time work as an employee has helped to make ends meet, but money is still tight and she feels she is currently running at a loss in her self-employment work.**

Karen was seeking part-time employment that could fit around children of different ages. She developed an interest in psychotherapy through evening classes and recently completed a master’s degree to practise professionally. While studying, her partner left the household, meaning her new profession would be the sole income to support herself and her four children. This placed a lot of pressure on Karen to find work, but she is keen to try to persevere in a field for which she has a strong interest and the required skills.

**“[Studying] blew the cobwebs off my brain...I really, really love my job, and loving my course made me want to do the job and work.”**

A Jobcentre Plus adviser was aware that Karen had just finished a master’s and wanted to set up her own practice, and recommended she went on the New Enterprise Allowance (NEA) scheme for support. Karen made good use of information sheets provided, following up other online sources to develop a business plan that helped her plan and forecast cash flow. It should be noted, though, that the support received fell far short of the NEA’s advertised provision. DWP states NEA clients could get a mentor to develop a business idea and write a business plan, and ongoing mentor support in the early months of trading. Karen received one session that lasted two-three hours, after which there was only limited telephone contact.

**“The training was very efficient, but after that you couldn’t really get hold of her...it felt more like a box-ticking thing...[I]n terms of actual one-to-one mentoring, that wasn’t hugely useful.”**

Setting up a private practice has been difficult. She has two or three clients rather than her projected ten clients; colleagues have also found it difficult to get clients at the moment. Despite relatively few clients, Karen must still pay room hire fees for each client seen and monthly professional association and clinical supervision fees. These fees would be more manageable with a higher caseload – she has too few clients at the moment to hire rooms for blocks of time at potentially cheaper rates, and the minimum supervision she must pay would cover around eight clients. As clients tend to prefer evenings, she must also pay childcare costs.

**“I saw one client for an hour [in the evening]...so I paid a babysitter. So I went out and earned £30, then had to pay the babysitter £8.50 an hour for two hours and I had to pay £7.50 to rent my room. So by the time you take petrol...I think I probably went to work for nothing or paid to go to work.”**

Karen’s income difficulties have been compounded by problems with Jobcentre Plus processing benefits in line with her evolving employment situation. For example, she has taken on agency work with the Employment Assistance Programme to increase her income. However, this work is ad hoc, which has led to her benefits being stopped through misunderstandings over earnings. As a result, Karen is now very wary about increasing her workload and feels less confident about going further down the self-employment route.

**“I was doing what, hopefully, everyone on jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) should be doing, which is trying to increase the amount of paid employment that I did...that’s what infuriated me most.”**

**“It feels like a minefield between here and the ultimate goal as being entirely financially self-supporting...my recent experiences with JSA haven’t filled me with confidence [about] people that perhaps should be there to support and encourage you as you gradually get more work.”**

## Making ends meet

Single parents are doing all they can to maintain an adequate income for their families. Many are working multiple jobs and long hours. Around one in six working single parents surveyed have more than one job, and a third of single parents surveyed worked 35 hours or more per week.

**“I have to work two jobs just to keep us ticking over however the rate of pay on these two jobs is not enough to live on.”**

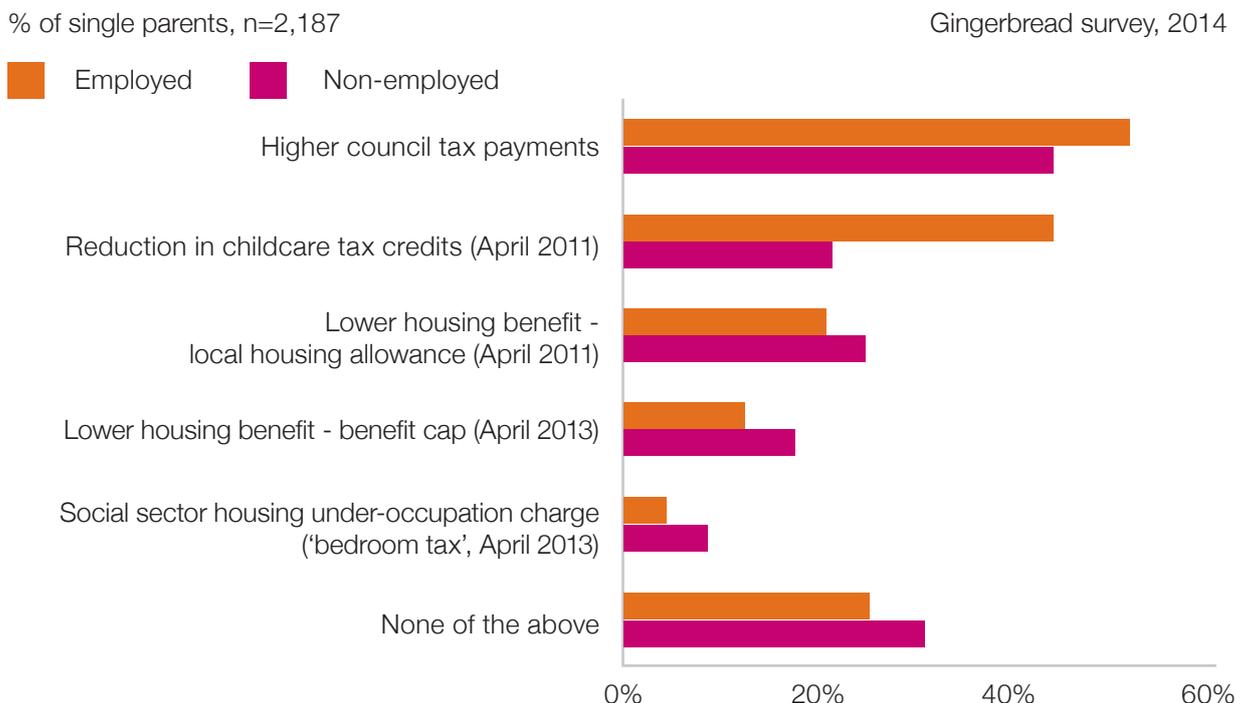
**“I have to [work] long days, sometimes up to 14 hours a day just to earn enough to live.”**

**“I work twice the hours of a year ago on a decent wage but struggle to make ends meet.”**

*Paying the Price survey respondents*

However, the combination of under-employment and income insecurity has emerged against a backdrop of high living costs and reduced levels of both in-work and out-of-work state financial support. In fact, according to our survey, employed single parents were as likely as unemployed single parents to have been affected by tax and benefit cuts since 2011. 75 per cent of employed single parents surveyed had been affected by at least one reform, compared with 69 per cent of unemployed single parents. The reforms affecting employed single parents were more likely, to be tax credit cuts and council tax localisation (Figure 11).

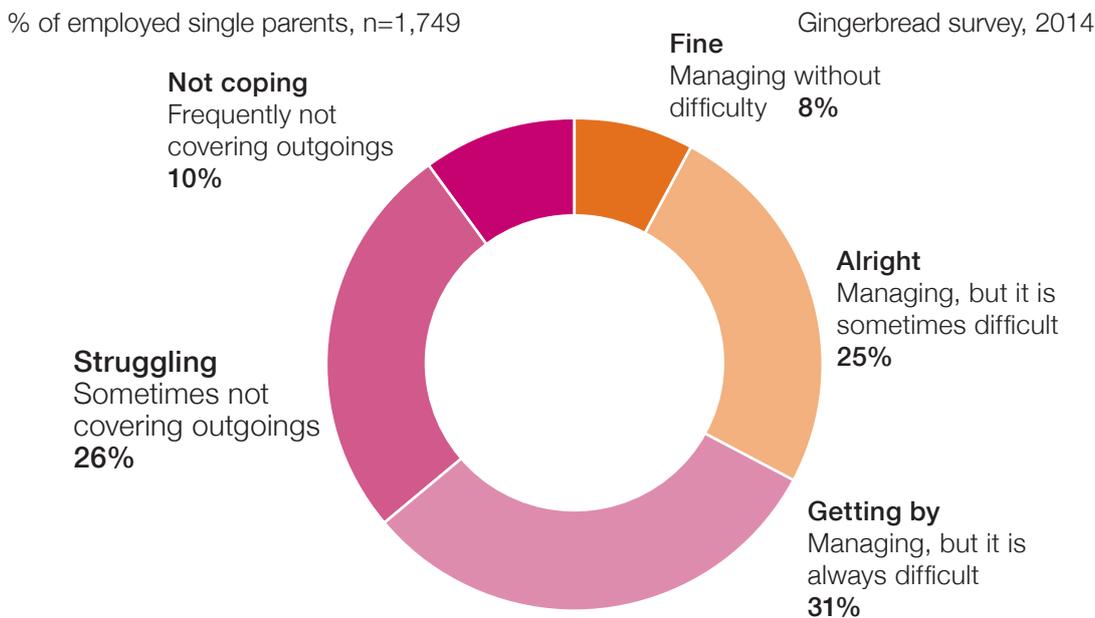
**Figure 11 Single parents affected by welfare reforms, by employment status**



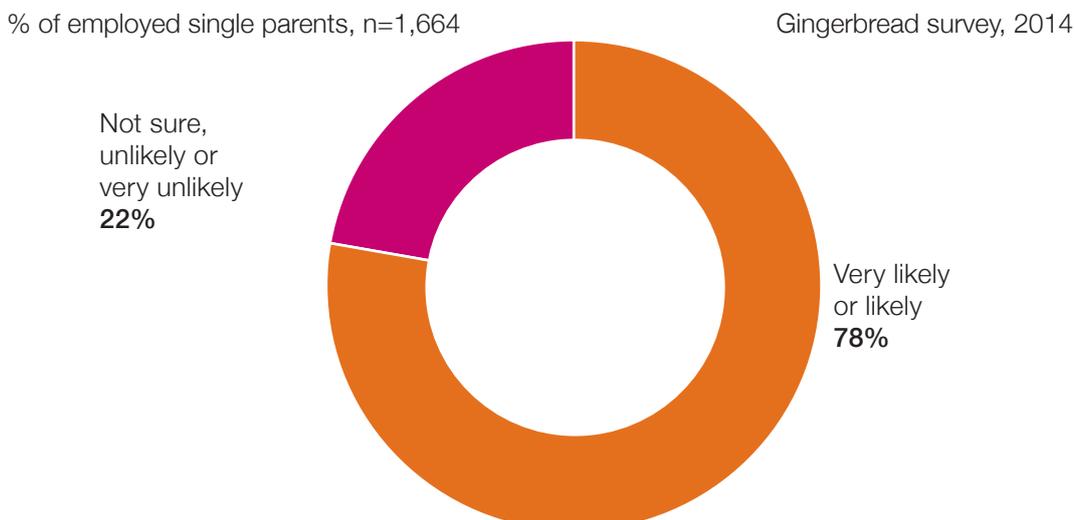
Inevitably, these conditions have a significant effect on the household budgets of single parent families. 71 per cent of single parents surveyed described managing finances as always difficult at best<sup>18</sup>; worryingly, even for employed single parents, this figure still stood at 67 per cent (Figure 12). In light of these figures, it is clear that employment in the current labour market, cannot be the only answer to tackling poverty and driving up incomes. As the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission recently showed, under current conditions of low pay and income inequality, even full parental employment will not be enough to meet national poverty reduction targets (Reed and Portes, 2014).

Single parents are well aware of the increasingly precarious position they have faced within the workplace in recent years. There is still significant ground to make up to get single parent employment back on track. And for many, the future feels uncertain; around a fifth of working single parents surveyed are not sure, or thinks it unlikely, that they will be able to stay in work for the next 12 months.

**Figure 12 How are working single parents managing their finances?**



**Figure 13 Single parents' view of likelihood of being able to stay in paid work for the next 12 months**



<sup>18</sup> This refers to those who are 'getting by', 'struggling', and 'not coping'.

## 4 Getting a foot in the door

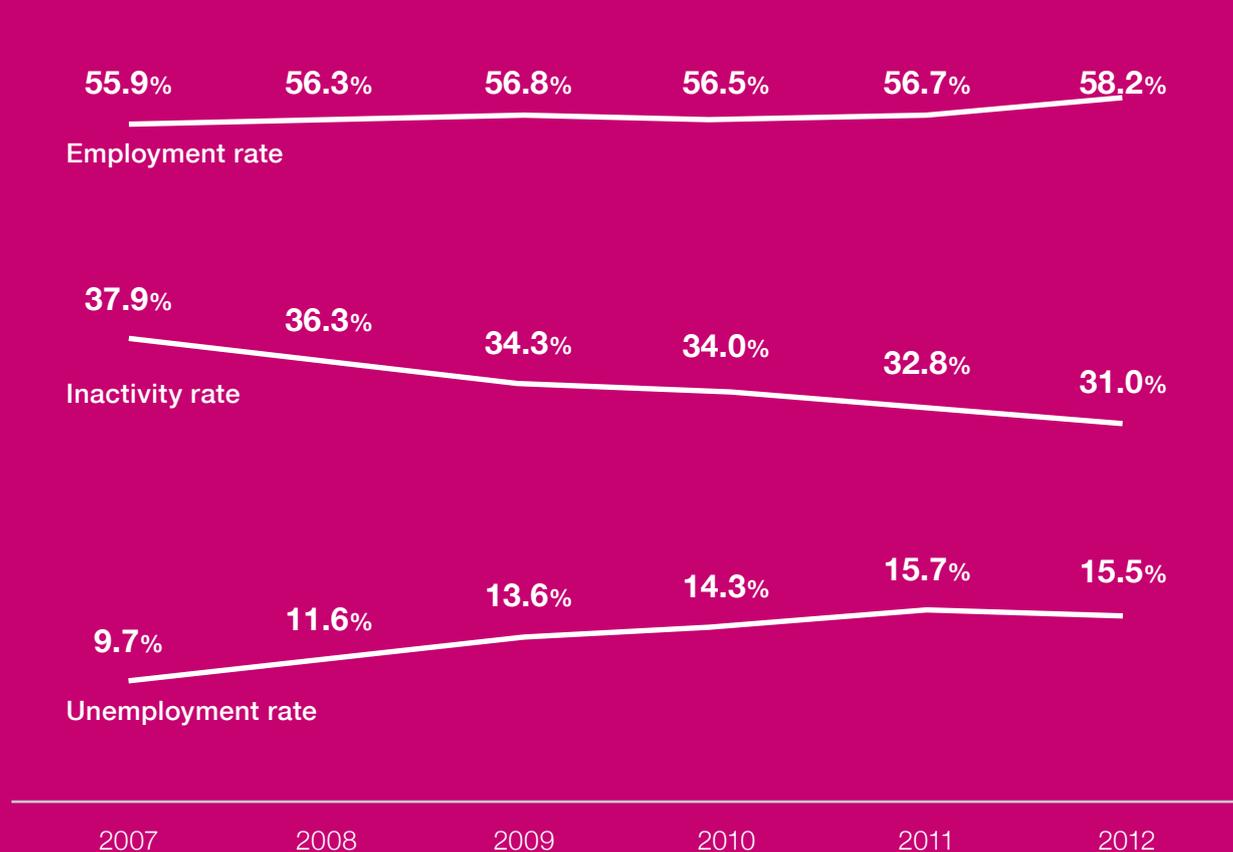
Our survey results suggest many single parents are concerned about job security. This is borne out by national labour market indicators, with the rate of single parent unemployment increasing over the past five years even as employment has gone up. Welfare reforms and the economic climate have played their part in exacerbating an already difficult labour market for single parents. These trends mean single parent employment is still a long way off matching that of couple mothers, and too many single parents are left feeling trapped and demoralised in their search for work.

### Larger labour force, higher unemployment

Slow employment growth is not the only worrying single parent labour market story in recent years. While the rate of economic inactivity among single parents fell between 2007 and 2012, meaning the share of single parents active in the labour market has grown, there was also an increase in the unemployment rate between 2007 and 2012 (Figure 14).

**Figure 14 Single parent employment stagnation, 2007-2012**

ONS, 2014c



Note: Annual APS data. Employment and inactivity rates refer to 16-64 year olds; unemployment rate refers to those aged 16 or over.

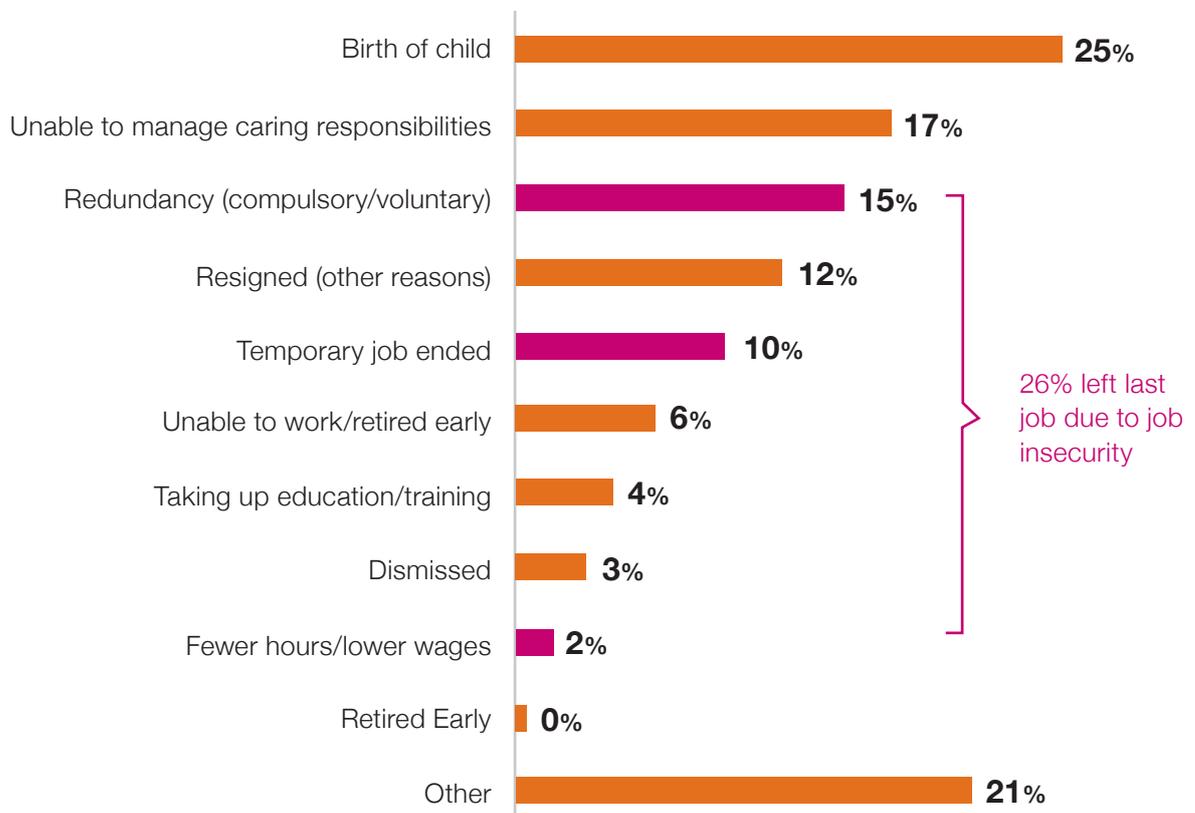
This period saw the implementation of lone parent obligation (LPO) reforms, which lowered the age of the youngest child for whom single parents can claim income support (IS) solely on the basis of being a single parent. The reforms were introduced in phases, reducing the age of the youngest child from 12 years in 2008 to five years by 2012, meaning many single parents of younger children were moved from IS to JSA. The increase in the number of single parents with younger children who are required to find work helps to explain part of the fall in the economic inactivity rate among single parents and some of the increase in unemployment (Avram, Brewer and Salvatori, 2013). Alongside this increase in the number of single parents needing to look for work, continued failings in the provision of adequate employment support have restricted single parents' ability to enter the labour market (Whitworth, 2013).

The recession and subsequent economic stagnation also help to explain the recent increase in single parent unemployment. As discussed above, the evidence suggests single parents have experienced an increase in insecure employment; our research suggests this has had a knock-on effect on unemployment levels. 15 per cent of non-working single parents surveyed are currently unemployed due to redundancy; 23 per cent of employed single parents said they had experienced redundancy in the past two years. 10 per cent of non-working single parents surveyed are currently out of work due to a temporary contract coming to an end. These findings suggest many single parents have been pushed out of work by the lack of stability in the labour market.

### Figure 15 Reason for leaving last job

% of non-working single parents, n=712

Gingerbread survey, 2014



Note: Respondents could choose more than one reason if there were mixed reasons for leaving their last paid job. To avoid double-counting, the proportion that have left their last job due to job insecurity measures those whose reason(s) for leaving their last job included at least one related to job insecurity – ie redundancy, temporary job ending or fewer/lower wages.

## Competing in today's job market

Most single parents do not lack motivation in getting back to work – far from it. 84 per cent of non-working single mothers would like to get a paid job, become self-employed or study (Barnes and Tomaszewski, 2010). Likewise, throughout our panel interviews with single parents, the motivation to work has been a strong theme – to set an example for their children, because they have always worked, to follow in their parents' footsteps, to provide for their family or to fulfil their own ambition.

**“I want to get back [into work] and show [my daughter] that this is the way.”**

**“A single mum on benefits who has not worked, not doing anything, it's just not me. That's never what my life was going to be. I know I can do better than this.”**

*Paying the Price panel member*

However, there is a strong feeling of frustration among single parents trying to find their way back to employment. Many expressed frustration at the lack of responsiveness from employers after submitting applications; around a third (34 per cent) of unemployed single parents said they had never been asked for an interview after making a job application. Most felt this was linked to competition in the current job market; 88 per cent of unemployed single parents surveyed said they felt job competition was quite or very high when they have made applications. This is an ongoing issue, echoing concerns about job competition in our previous Paying the Price report (Rabindrakumar, 2013).

**“The jobs are very competitive with younger people and jobs [are] few and far between.”**

**“Apparently they had 148 applications for a ten-hour administrative job...I can't hide who I am and my circumstances, and I know damn well they'd rather employ a 24 year-old who has an administrative background but isn't a single parent.”**

*Paying the Price panel members*

This level of concern over competition for jobs reflects the perception that there is an inherent labour market disadvantage to being a single parent. A number of single parents out of work thought they would readily be passed over for jobs by employers if competing with people without childcare responsibilities or with another partner to share this burden. This was particularly true of those who had been out of the workforce for a longer period of time – these parents were particularly worried about the gaps in their CVs due to taking time out of the workplace to raise children (often while still partnered).

**“So when you are the only person responsible, the kids are sick, how do I explain that to an employer?”**

**“They are not going to choose you because there’s always going to be someone else that does say that they are [flexible].”**

*Paying the Price panel member*

This might seem surprising from looking at the national picture – post-recession labour market growth has been relatively consistent, in terms of both employment and the number of jobs. However, our evidence suggests this growth hasn’t necessarily been in jobs that work for single parents – many single parents report difficulties in finding jobs that allow them to juggle childcare duties and school hours, particularly those that are local enough to meet these childcare responsibilities without incurring unmanageable extra cost (eg to drop and pick up children from school or nursery without having to pay for additional travel costs). Of non-working single parents surveyed, 56 per cent said that inflexible working hours stopped them from applying for jobs most or all of the time.

**“I have noticed that a lot of jobs are full-time...it’s like every single one you have to be completely flexible to work all week.”**

*Paying the Price panel member*

## **Any job will do?**

Compounding this frustration is pressure from the welfare system to find jobs that are too often not available or out of reach – a repeated theme from interviews was single parents feeling ‘stuck’. ‘Claimant commitments’ with Jobcentre Plus to apply for a particular number of jobs per week or per month have created perverse incentives for some single parents to apply for any job – indeed, some single parents have been advised to do so explicitly – even if there is no realistic chance of actually being able to undertake the job (eg due to a lack of flexibility, or distance from home).

**“I found myself just applying for jobs in Tesco, jobs that I’d already been rejected for, just to meet the quota that they had set me.”**

*Paying the Price panel member*

The relatively new Universal Jobmatch system was also particularly criticised by some for impairing single parents’ job search – either due to failings in its functionality, or because the system overstated the actual number of jobs available due to jobs being posted multiple times.

**“There might be, like, ten jobs in a row but six of them ... will take you to the exact same website.”**

**“It’s the most unhelpful jobsite ever... And you get the same answer [from the Jobcentre Plus adviser] – ‘oh yeah, it’s useless’.”**

*Paying the Price panel member*

### Box 3 “We won’t be needing you”: Steph’s story

**Steph has recently moved from IS to JSA. She has been proactive in trying to update her skills and find job opportunities. However, finding work that is feasible with a young child has been a frustrating process. Furthermore, advice and support from Jobcentre Plus has often been unhelpful.**

Steph has a five year-old child and has therefore recently moved onto JSA. She has a long employment history and has a strong motivation to work. She has worked hard to update older qualifications and regularly carries out job searches, often staying up late into the night to complete searches while her child is asleep. Despite these efforts, she feels under pressure that her benefits might be stopped for not meeting Jobcentre Plus criteria.

**“You are panicking, thinking maybe today I get the wrong adviser and they think I haven’t done enough and they stop my money – how am I going to feed my child?”**

Steph has been actively looking for opportunities to update her skills. However, she feels the job market has changed, with ad hoc opportunities more limited – particularly in the face of competition and increasing numbers of jobs offering only atypical hours. She has been frustrated by the conflict between the lack of available jobs and Jobcentre Plus pressure to make a certain number of applications regularly – she is directed to use a number of job websites, but these frequently advertise the same jobs. She has had mixed experiences of employment support – one employment adviser had helped her write a new CV, which was then found to be poorly written by another adviser.

**“I asked around the schools, I went into the course, I renewed my CRB [Criminal Records Bureau check] to work with kids...And my son’s school said they could use some help. And then last week they phoned me and said, ‘Well, at the moment, we won’t be needing you because we are getting a student from the local college that’s doing a proper course’.”**

**“You go into the criteria, the perfect job, you tick all the boxes...then it says 7[am] til 7[pm] or 7[am] to 9 o’clock at night...The perfect job, but I can’t do them hours.”**

She has managed to get interviews, but often comes up against long or atypical hours that would mean incurring high childcare costs. While she has checked local childcare provision, Jobcentre Plus advisers do not seem to understand the burden of costs. And when presented with these costs, one adviser suggested asking others to help – despite months of explaining that, since her mother passed away, she did not have any informal childcare to rely upon. Steph feels this lack of understanding has increased since moving off IS, when she used to have a lone parent adviser whom she felt was more considerate in taking her situation as a single parent into account.

**“[The employer] said, ‘We like your CV and how you answered the questions...There’s no negotiation on the hours. You have to do all your weekend, Saturday and Sunday, and you do one day in the week’...My adviser said to me, ‘Oh, you shouldn’t have told them you had childcare problems; you should have waited until you got to the interview to see if you could negotiate’. It doesn’t make sense for me taking up somebody’s space and going to an interview when I can’t take the job.”**

In spite of these setbacks, Steph is still determined to find a job in any area where she can fit the hours around childcare. In the meantime, though, she struggles to cover her bills and has had to rely on loans to make ends meet.

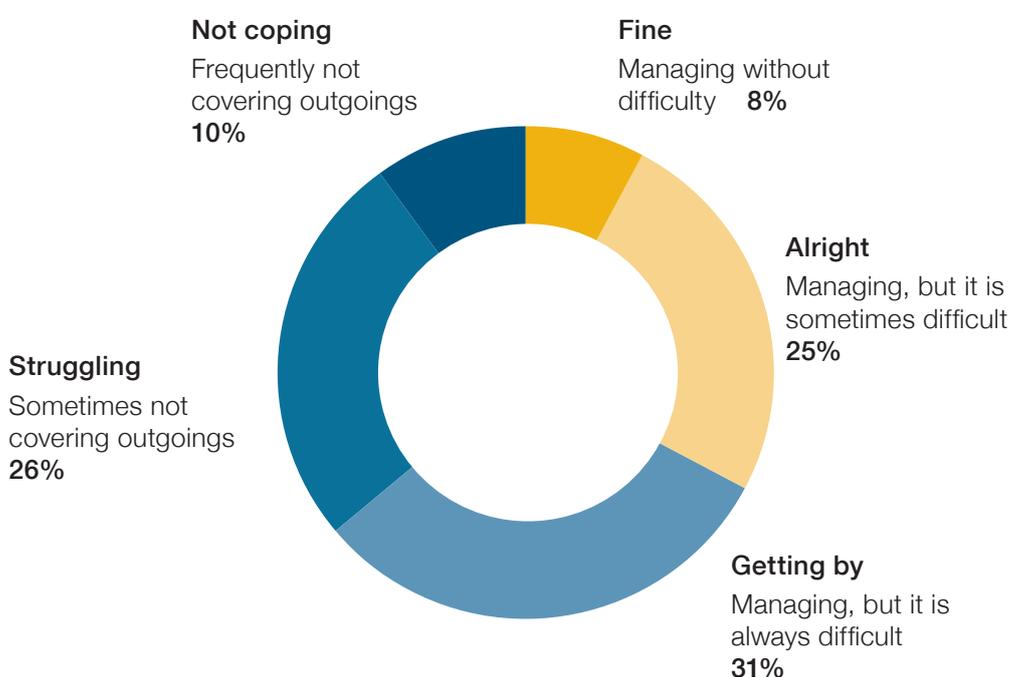
**“I’ve always wanted to work...even [when] I wasn’t working full-time, I’ve always been doing something...I wasn’t one that just sat at home.”**

Of course, it is not just the welfare system that compels many single parents to take any job. Managing financial outgoings is not easy when reliant on income from benefits, particularly with recent cuts. 80 per cent of non-working single parents surveyed found managing household bills as always difficult at best (compared with 67 per cent of employed single parents surveyed). Around one in six were frequently running into arrears. Consequently, there is a significant imperative to find work that might ease single parents' financial burden. Yet, as we have seen, to find work that covers these bills, moving into an insecure and low paid job isn't a good enough answer.

### Figure 16 How are non-working single parents managing their finances?

% of non-working single parents, n=630

Gingerbread survey, 2014



### Taking action

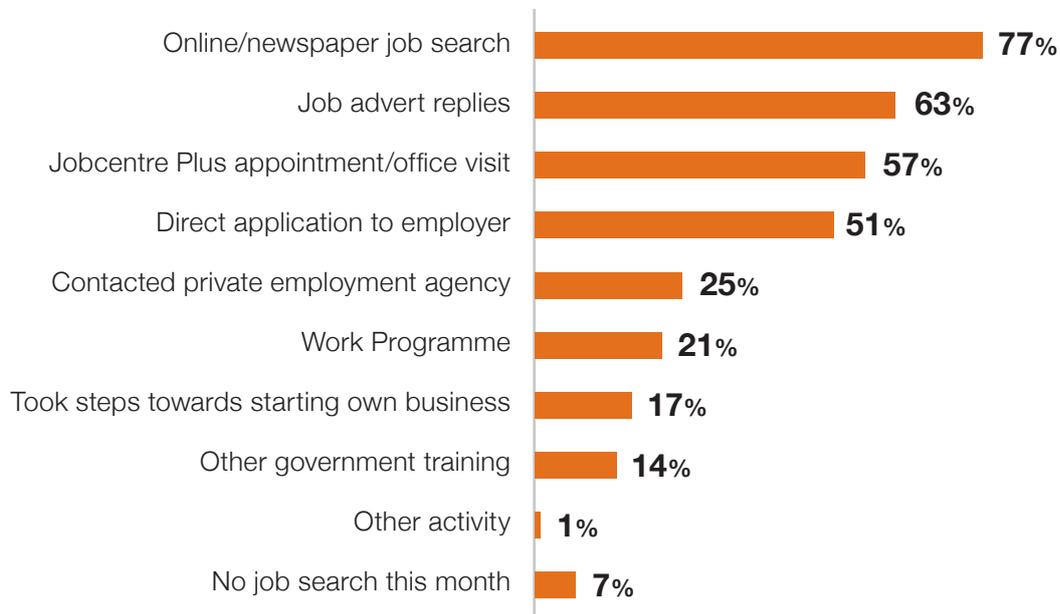
Single parents' strong motivation to work, in spite of the frustration and often limited prospects within today's job market, is reflected in single parents' job search efforts. 29 per cent of unemployed single parents had increased the time they spent on job search activities in the past month, signalling their persistence in job searches.

Our research shows single parents are both thorough and intensive in their search for work (Figure 17). Our interviews suggested single parents are structured in their job searches, with many single parents using a regular time of day for job search activities; this was often out of necessity due to childcare duties, with searching often carried out when their children were at school or in bed. In panel interviews, some single parents described detailed knowledge of particular sector advertising – for example, knowing what time new jobs are uploaded online in order to time job searches most effectively. From discussing employment histories, single parents both in and out of work have been proactive in looking for work – seeking out opportunities with local employers or friends, for example – rather than relying on Jobcentre Plus employment support.

## Figure 17 Job search activity rate in the last month

% of non-working single parents, n=364

Gingerbread survey, 2014



Note: This data excludes those single parents who are no longer actively looking for paid work – principally due to caring responsibilities, health reasons and being otherwise occupied with studying.

Single parents are also realistic – they are well aware that they may be pushed into low paid and insecure jobs rather than sustainable employment and have sought to undertake training that would allow them to enter more secure professions. Some have sought advice from other services or done their own research to find a route back to work which is sustainable for them as single parents. However, as we found in our previous *Paying the Price* report, many single parents who are out of work feel frustrated that there are limited opportunities for training support via the welfare system which is relevant to their skill levels.

**“I don’t want to look back in three or four years and just have a job, I want to get a career and I want to do something for the rest of my life...”**

*Paying the Price* panel member

Many single parents felt that in spite of this evident wish to find work, there was a strong perception from others that single parents preferred to rely on out-of-work benefits. They were keen to dispel this myth and convey both the difficulties of managing on out-of-work benefits alone (as shown in Figure 16) and their strong desire to work.

**“There’s all these things, the programmes on TV...everyone’s on benefits. And you just think, I wish I was at work, I wish I could have a job, you don’t understand.”**

*Paying the Price* panel member

## 5 **Where next – recovery or further austerity?**

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**For the UK to achieve a sustainable recovery, economic growth cannot be isolated from an equitable labour market for much longer. At the moment, too many single parents are struggling in low paid and insecure jobs. Those who are out of work are also at risk of being pushed towards similar jobs, resulting in a vicious circle. Without action now, we risk undoing the positive progress that has been made on single parent employment and child poverty over the past two decades.**

### **Sustainable futures**

GDP is still 0.6 per cent below its 2008 peak – we are yet in the early stages of economic recovery. This is an opportune time to take stock to ensure that all individuals benefit as much as the overall economy from growth. Single parents are already at risk of entering low-paid, insecure employment – over two-thirds (68 per cent) of single parents enter the three lowest paid occupational groups (Newis, 2012). At the moment, there is a risk that the labour market that is emerging in the UK – with increased income insecurity and a continued squeeze on real earnings – will exacerbate the poor labour market prospects facing many single parents, increasing inequality between single parents and other household types even as the economy continues to grow.

Single parents are doing all they can to mitigate these changes. They take on additional jobs and work extra hours. They sacrifice time with their children – despite being sole main carers – to gain extra income. Those out of work are resourceful and motivated in their search for employment. However, work in itself is not the only answer. The employment situation for many single parents has deteriorated against a background of higher living costs and cuts to tax credits and out-of-work benefits.

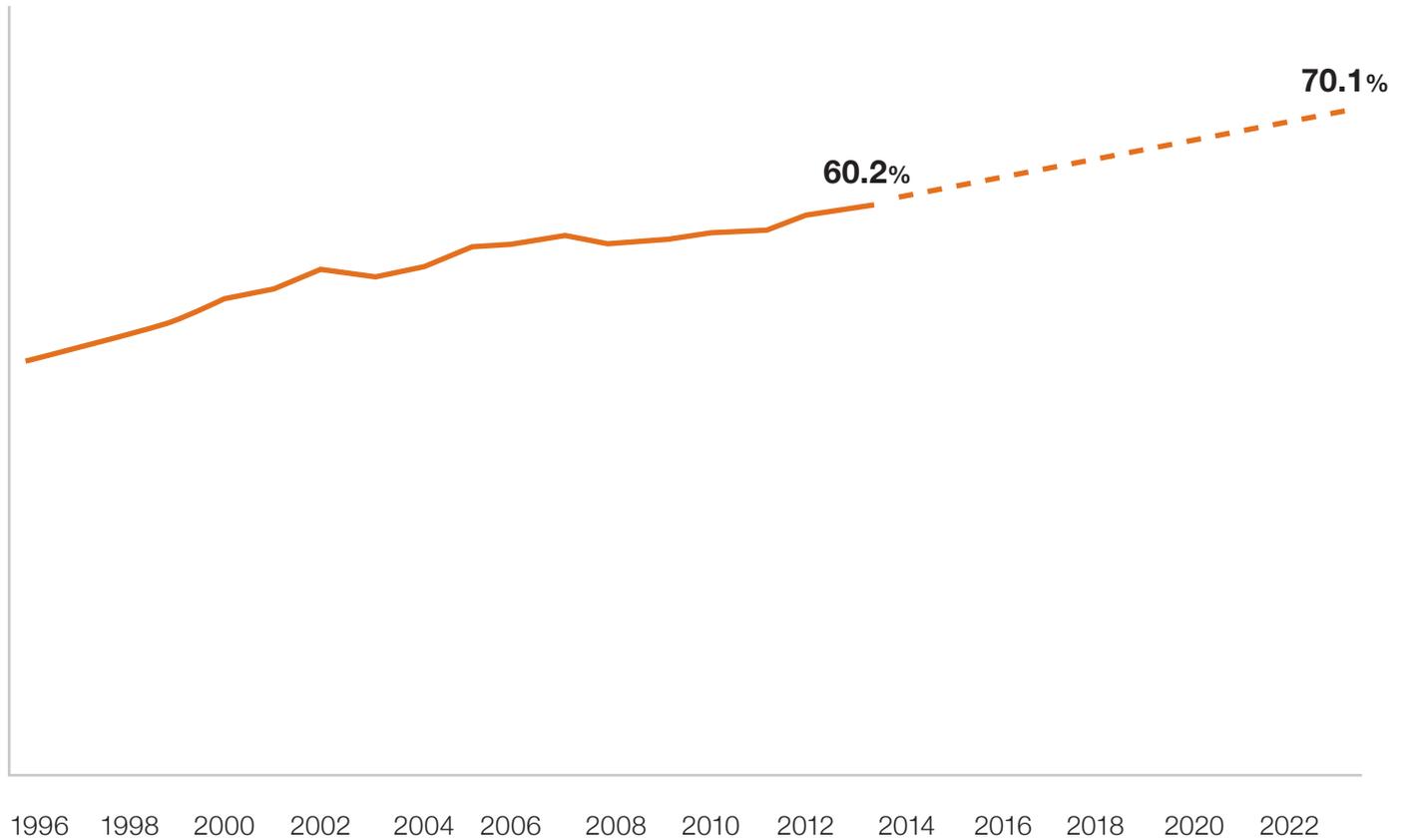
There is still a long way to go for the single parent employment rate: on the current trajectory, it will be at least another ten years before single parent employment catches up with couple mothers' employment (Figure 18).<sup>19</sup> Worse still, if we do not address the challenges currently facing single parent employment, even the gains made to date may be lost, and equality in the labour market for single parents will remain a distant aspiration.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, this rate of improvement assumes couple mothers' employment rate remains static. While this was true in the recent past – couple mothers' employment rate remained at around 71 per cent between 2000 and 2010 – the rate has since risen to 72.2 per cent (ONS, 2013b).

### Figure 18 Projected timeline to reach 70 per cent single parent employment rate

% of 16-64 year olds in employment

ONS, 2013b and internal projection



Note: Quarterly LFS data (April-June), not seasonally adjusted. Crude straight-line projection based on latest three-year average of percentage-point growth in employment rate.

In the context of economic recovery, it is worth noting that the gains from single parents entering employment are not just for the individual. Previous Gingerbread research suggests that if just 5 per cent more single parents moved into work, the government would generate £436 million savings (Brewer and DeAgostini, 2013). The imperative to meet the single parent employment challenge is therefore not just about single parents' living standards and equality, but also about government value for money and benefits to the wider economy. And with the prospect of a welfare cap on annual managed expenditure, the need for action on single parent employment becomes all the more pressing.

## Support into work

In the long-term, we would like to see reforms to universal credit that will allow greater financial incentives for working single parents to progress in employment, ideally by reducing the taper rate progressively from 65 to 55 per cent. Single parents already face lower incentives to work due to high childcare costs. Reducing the taper rate will allow households to keep more of any additional wages earned, which will be critical to improving household incomes and reducing child poverty for low income single parents (Reed and Portes, 2014).

In the short-term, support is urgently needed for single parents now, as they progress in work. While universal credit is meant to address these issues and ensure work pays for each additional hour worked, single parents are still a long way off from entering the system. In the meantime, pre-existing support mechanisms such as in-work credit have been withdrawn, leaving single parents currently without any transitional support into work. We recommend re-instating job grant and in-work credit provision while single parents wait for universal credit to be rolled out.

We also recommend that the 85 per cent of childcare costs to be provided to single parents under universal credit be introduced under the current tax credit system, in order to secure benefits for low income single parents now.

## A single parent-friendly labour market

Employment conditions do not just stop at basic contractual terms of pay and hours. Our single parent panel highlighted the impact that understanding – or the lack thereof – can have on single parents' ability to work effectively. Employers have a role to play in creating a job market that works for single parents juggling work and childcare responsibilities. With nearly 20 per cent of working single parents surveyed stating they would like some form of flexible working arrangement, but do not have any, there is much more that can be done to make workplaces family-friendly for all households.

Progression at work is another critical issue to address. Again, the 'work-first' approach taken by Jobcentre Plus does not promote sustainable employment outcomes. We know that over a fifth (22 per cent) of single parents who start a job are back on JSA within 12 months. We would like to see investment in skills and training for single parents out of work, which would yield returns for both single parents and the state (Newis, 2014). We would also like to see further work into how to enable low paid workers to move out of low paid jobs over time.

With tax and benefit cuts hitting both employed and unemployed single parents alike, on top of insecure jobs and low pay, these families have a lot of ground to cover before they experience a recovery. Moreover, for this to be meaningful, more systematic change needs to be in place. Cycling in and out of work cannot be a permanent feature of the UK labour market – there are no winners in this scenario, whether single parents, employers or the state. If we want to avoid growing inequality as the economy recovers, and we are committed to reducing the barriers to work for single parent families, these trends need to be reversed. While these structural problems with regard to the labour market may be more challenging to address, we cannot escape their importance in ensuring a sustainable recovery.

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# Appendix 1 Methodology

## Online survey

We conducted our survey online between 14 February 2014 and 14 March 2014, using SurveyMonkey survey software. We used convenience sampling to get our response base. The survey was promoted via Gingerbread's social media outlets and membership newsletter. The survey was also shared online by a number of other voluntary sector organisations.

We have excluded responses from those who are not single parents – we define single parents as those with at least one dependent child, who do not currently live with a partner and who are the main carers for their children (ie whose children stay with them for at least half the week). As a result, non-resident parents without equal shared care are not included in our sample of single parents.

We are conscious that our convenience sampling approach can introduce bias to the results. For example, single parents without internet or computer access or skills would be unable to complete the survey – we are likely to risk excluding those most vulnerable or 'hardest to reach' from our analysis. On the other hand, the self-selecting nature of completing online surveys risks over-representing those with strong opinions.

For reference, we have compared the demographic data we collected in our survey with that of the single parent population to provide context to our sample. Critically, the income profile of the sample broadly reflects the income profile of the wider single parent population. This is important, as it indicates that our survey sample does not over-represent single parents on low incomes – in other words, those most likely to be affected by difficulties in the labour market.

Sex	Survey sample	Population
Female	96%	90%
Male	4%	10%
<b>Base</b>	<b>2,211</b>	

National data: ONS (2013) Table KS107EW: Lone parent households with dependent children, local authorities in England and Wales. Available: [http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data\\_finder](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data_finder)

Age	Survey sample	Population
16-24 years	2%	11%
25-34 years	23%	26%
35-44 years	48%	38%
45-59 years	26%	23%
60 years or more	0%	1%
<b>Base</b>	<b>2,197</b>	

National data: ONS (2011) Age of lone parents with dependent children in the UK, 2009. Unpublished analysis of the Annual Population Survey.

Ethnic background	Survey sample	Population
White	90%	84%
Mixed	3%	3%
Asian	2%	4%
Black	5%	8%
Other	0%	1%
<b>Base</b>	<b>2,147</b>	

National data: ONS (2013) Table DC1201EW: Household composition by ethnic group of Household Reference Person (HRP). Available: [www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data\\_finder](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/data_finder)

Income	Survey sample	Population
Less than £15,000	47%	51%
£15,001 - £20,000	19%	28%
£20,001 - £30,000	18%	17%
More than £30,001 - £50,000	12%	4%
<b>Base</b>	<b>536</b>	

Maplethorpe, N, et al. (2010) Families with children in Britain: Findings from the 2008 Families and Children Study (FACS). DWP. Available: [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/214426/rrep656.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214426/rrep656.pdf) Annual figures are estimated from weekly income, assuming 50 working weeks.

Due to the non-random nature of the sample, we cannot assess how reliable our results are in relation to the whole single parent population. We therefore take efforts to ensure we only apply our findings to those single parents surveyed, and use these results to raise caution about the potential effects of a difficult labour market on the wider single parent population that are indicated by these findings.

## Panel research

For this second Paying the Price report, our panel research included 23 out of 28 remaining panel members.

We originally recruited 31 panel members between April and July 2013. We used a purposive sampling approach to recruit members, applied to Gingerbread's 'online membership' population (those we can contact by email). We developed a list of sampling characteristics which would enable us to generate qualitative data that covers a range of circumstances for which austerity had implications, while broadly reflecting the characteristics of the single parent population. The factors we considered were: single parent demographics (age, sex, ethnic background and disability), number of children, age of children, employment status, formal childcare use and benefits received.

In order to provide a comprehensive yet coherent qualitative analysis of single parents' experience of austerity, we also decided to focus our panel membership on four areas. We hoped that this would provide sufficient geographic coverage, while allowing us to draw out any common themes that arose in each of the different areas. As current austerity reforms affect single

parent families in both England and Wales, our panel includes members from both countries. We knew single parents in London would be acutely affected by changes to housing benefit due to high house prices, and were the first to be affected by the benefit cap (the four pilot areas were all London boroughs). We therefore decided to weight our panel towards London, with around half of the 30 members to be recruited from the capital. We then chose two sub-regions in England, and one sub-region in Wales, with the largest proportion of families with children who were single parents. These areas were Birmingham, Liverpool, and the Central Valleys.

The sampling process involved a number of stages:

- Screening: A screening questionnaire was sent to all online members living in the four chosen case study areas (based on their home postcodes), to obtain the information required by our chosen sampling frame
- Filtering: Screening responses were assessed against the sampling frame to identify a smaller pool of potential candidates
- Selection: A pre-selection telephone interview was conducted with prospective members to explain the research in more detail and get a better sense of how well the families met our sampling criteria and the demands of the proposed research
- Consent: A process of informed consent was used, with consent discussed during pre-selection interviews, clear written information provided for prospective members, and written consent given by final panel members.

Panel members were offered a research 'incentive' in recognition of the time and commitment required. Incentives are staggered over the course of the project to take into account the longitudinal nature of the research.

A summary profile of our panel is presented in the tables below.

<b>Panel members: Location</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
London	15	54%
Birmingham	6	21%
Liverpool	2	7%
South Wales	5	18%
<b>Base</b>	<b>28</b>	

<b>Panel members: Sex</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	26	86%
Male	4	14%
<b>Base</b>	<b>28</b>	

<b>Panel members: Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
18-24 years	2	7%
25-34 years	7	25%
35-44 years	15	54%
45 years or more	4	14%
<b>Base</b>	<b>28</b>	

<b>Panel members: Miscellaneous</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
From a Black or Minority Ethnic background	9	32%
With a self-reported disability	5	18%
Unemployed and looking for work	13	46%
<b>Base</b>	<b>28</b>	

Of course, our panel does not aim to be statistically representative of all single parents in the way we might with our online surveys. The purpose of qualitative research is not to draw statistical conclusions, but to understand different perspectives in more depth – often described as understanding the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of circumstances, rather than just the ‘what’, ‘how many’, and ‘when’.

We do, however, seek to minimise the risk of relying heavily on atypical cases by ensuring a range of characteristics are incorporated in our panel and comparing the traits of the panel with what we know of the wider single parent population. This approach does mean, though, that single parents at either extreme of family circumstances – either the most vulnerable or the most comfortable – are not included in our panel. Not including those most comfortable is less critical given our research focus on the experience of financial vulnerability. We might, though, be more concerned that the ‘hardest to reach’ single parents may not be included in our panel. However, with two reports from the project now complete, we know we are hearing from single parents who are extremely financially and emotionally vulnerable. If these are not the most extreme cases, this only lends strength to our findings on the detrimental impact of austerity on single parents.

# **Gingerbread**

Single parents, equal families

## Gingerbread

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