

SUBMISSION FROM ONE PARENT FAMILIES SCOTLAND

Lone Parent Employability Progression Model

Introduction

The facts about lone parents

Around 92 per cent of lone parents are mothers. ("Lone parents with dependent children", January 2012, Office for National Statistics)

- Just over a quarter (26 per cent) of households with dependent children are lone parent families (1), and there are 157,000 one parent families in Scotland. (2) This figure has remained consistent since the mid-1990's
- Less than 2 per cent of lone parents are teenagers (3)
- The median age of lone parents is 38.1 (4)
- Around half of lone parents had their children within marriage – 49 per cent are separated from marriage, divorced or widowed (5)
- 59.2 per cent of lone parents are in work in Scotland, up 14.5 percentage points since 1997 (6)
- The employment rate for lone parents varies depending on the age of their youngest child. Once their children are 12 or over, lone parents' employment rate is similar to, or higher than, the employment rate for mothers in couples (71 per cent of lone parents whose child is 11-15 are in work) (7)

Lone parent families and poverty

- Children in lone parent families have a much higher risk of living in poverty than children in couple families. Around four in every 10 (41 per cent) of children in lone parent families are poor, compared to just over two in every 10 of children in couple families (8)
- Paid work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty for lone parents; the poverty rate for one parent families where the parent works part time is 23 per cent, and 18 per cent where the parent works full time (9)
- The median weekly income for working lone parent families doing 16 hours a week or more is £337, compared with £491 for couple families with one worker and £700 where both parents work (10)
- 43 per cent of lone parents are social housing tenants compared to 12 per cent of couples (11)
- 71 per cent of all lone parent renters receive housing benefit compared to 25 per cent of all couple renters (12)
- Lone parent households are the most likely to be in arrears on one or more household bills, mortgage or nonmortgage borrowing commitment (31 per cent) (13)
- 38 per cent of lone parents said that money always runs out before the end of the week/month compared to 19 per cent of couples (14)

- 63 per cent of lone parents have no savings compared to 34 per cent of couples (15)

Work and childcare

- Where lone parents are not working, this is often because there are health issues that make work difficult: 33 per cent of unemployed lone parents have a disability or longstanding illness (16) and 34 per cent have a child with a disability (17)
- Over half of lone parents are in work (59.2 per cent), up 14.5 percentage points since 1997. In the same period, the employment rate of mothers in couples has risen three percentage points to 71 per cent (18)
- Lone parents rely heavily on informal childcare. Of those using childcare, 46 per cent said it was informal. (19) For lone parents working 16 hours a week or more 34 per cent had a childcare arrangement with the child's grandparents, and 17 per cent had an arrangement with their ex-partner (20)
- Working lone parents paying for childcare are much more likely than working couples paying for childcare to find it difficult to meet childcare costs (32% compared to 22% of couples where one partner is in work, and 20% of couples where both work) (21)

1. Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
2. Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
3. Figure produced for Gingerbread by the Fertility and Family Analysis Unit, Office of National Statistic and derived from the Annual Population Survey (APS), (Labour Force Survey plus boost), 2009 data
4. Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
5. Lone parents with dependent children, January 2012, Office for National Statistics
6. Working and Workless Households, 2012, Table P. ONS Statistical Bulletin, August 2012
7. Families with children in Britain: Findings from the 2008 Families and children study (FACS), Table 3.2. Department for Work and Pensions, 2010
8. Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2009/10, Table 4.14ts. Department for Work and Pensions, 2011
9. Households Below Average Income, An analysis of the income distribution 1994/95 – 2009/10, Table 4.11ts. Department for Work and Pensions, 2011
10. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 6.3. DWP, 2010

11. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 9.1. DWP, 2010
12. Housing Survey, Household Report 2009 – 10, Table 3.6.
13. Wealth in Great Britain. Main Results from the Wealth and Assets Survey 2006/08, p.108. ONS, 2009
14. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 8.8. DWP, 2010
15. Family Resource Survey UK, 2008-2009, Table 4.10. Department for Work and Pensions, 2010
16. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 3.2. DWP, 2010
17. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 12.5. DWP, 2010
18. Working and Workless Households, 2012, Table P. ONS Statistical Bulletin, August 2012
19. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 16.5. DWP, 2010
20. Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 16.1. DWP, 2010
21. Childcare and early years survey of parents 2009, p.83. NatCen/Department for Education, 2010. Research Report DFE-RR054

This short paper provides information on a holistic Lone Parent Progression Model developed in response to mainstream welfare to work/employability initiatives, which will influence future developments around Lone Parents and Work.

Lone parents are a key group and central to strategies that aim to achieve success in reaching child poverty and employment targets. Innovations that can fit with the everyday reality and priorities of lone parents' lives are vital. Welfare reform indicates a major shift to a work first approach. The Lone Parent Progression Model supports "intermediate steps to employment", employment retention and advancement and recognition of the importance of where lone parents live.

A successful delivery model will meet the needs and challenges facing lone parents as they navigate the transitions they experience while moving from benefit to training, volunteering, education or employment. The key issues facing Lone Parents include:

- High level of disadvantage amongst those out of 'work' (debt, low skills, isolation, poor health and low confidence.)
- How to navigate the transitions required to be work ready.
- Financial security in and out of employment.
- High and increasing housing and childcare costs.
- Low pay-high turnover economy
- Sole carer / Sole provider roles

- Issue of place (The majority of Lone Parents live in communities suffering deprivation as defined by the Scottish Government indicators)
- The need for support /advice/information from a trusted intermediary.

Westminster's Welfare Reform legislation, which from June 2012 requires lone parents whose youngest child is 5 years old to be available for work, will have a major impact on services provided and needed by lone parents in Scotland. An Employability Model for Lone Parents, which includes the following, has a higher chance of succeeding:

- A holistic, integrated response, which is based on an understanding of the complex factors, associated with an individual Lone Parent's capacity to obtain and sustain employment.
- A partnership approach, involving cross-sector, multi-agency working to maximise Lone Parents' access to appropriate resources through offering a continuum of support & opportunities
- The involvement of trusted intermediaries who have specialist knowledge and skills around the issues facing lone parents and who can advocate on their behalf.

This approach, which is an "assets-based " model, reflects the fact that many Lone Parents do want to take up paid employment, when the time is right for their family, but that there is a need to ensure that they in turn have access to the services and support required to help them to make choices and to progress.

Overview of Model

Lone parents furthest from the Labour Market & facing complex barriers do not easily fit a model which is target driven based on short-term into work outcomes.

Investing in support for Lone Parents who have to negotiate through a series of transitions to achieve employment will have long-term benefits both for the families and children involved and the communities they live in. Engagement, assessment, personal development and mentoring support activities followed by volunteering or training /education or pre/post employment support all target those Lone Parents who are the hardest to reach, have the highest level of disadvantage, are the least work ready and cannot afford childcare.

Lone Parents require a holistic, integrated response, which is based on an understanding of the complex factors, associated with an individual Lone Parent's capacity to obtain and sustain employment. At the core of the approach is the view that the most successful models offer an integrated continuum of

support, which creates pathways to sustainable employment. **The model offers the following distinguishing features :**

- The capability to offer **crucial interventions at the point of transitions** in Lone Parents lives.
- **Specialist services** which enable lone parents to negotiate the changes in their lives caused by separation, homelessness, pregnancy, unemployment or moving from benefit to volunteering, training, education or employment.
- Service delivery is **independent, holistic, family focused and non-judgemental** and aims to give support to children as well as parents;
- It reflects the experiences of lone parents in areas of disadvantage, by involving **trusted intermediaries**;
- Expertise which demonstrates that a **continuum of support** can lead to sustainable employment for lone parents.
- Ensuring staff employed have skills, abilities and professional training around lone parent issues.
- Through a partnership approach the model adds **value to existing provision**.
- Flexibility to offer targeted support during transitions to employment
- Support to access appropriate childcare

Lone Parent Journey

A lone parent tailored model should provide support for parents wishing to return to work or enter into education or training. Service providers should enable the development of an integrated pathways to employment for lone parents by joining up the services for lone parents, helping to ensure that information is shared across relevant partners, ensuring that childcare funding is available for parents in need of it and also enable partners to work more closely to make the progression across the services more seamless.

Stages on the pathway should enable lone parents to access services when they need them rather than being prescribed by a "payment by results" funding model & should include:

- Referral & Engagement
- Initial Needs Assessment
- Specialist Interventions /Peer Mentor /Family Support
- Group Work/PSD/Pre –Employment Courses
- Vocational Courses & Accredited Training
- Work Placements/CJF Placements
- Job Brokerage & Job Matching
- In work & aftercare

Lone Parent Offer

Any offer to lone parents should bring about meaningful change and outcomes which can be measured in various ways. There should be a core offer to all lone parents in the target group & target area which can be supplemented by service to meet the needs of particular sub-groups of lone parents (e.g. young parents) **It should be based on an asset not a deficit model.** Agencies should come together to provide a holistic offer to lone parents regardless of what stage they are at on their journey towards employment (diagram below) The project should include a core offer to all lone parents in the target group (**lone parent specialist information, advice & support**) & practitioners working with lone parents (e.g. **lone parent awareness training /welfare reform training**) to be supplemented by one or more of the following:

- Guidance tailored to meet lone parent's specific needs
- Employability skills development in one-to-one and group settings (including confidence building, CV writing, interview preparation)
- Life coaching
- Be-spoke training
- Work placements
- Childcare funding support to enable clients to access training
- Family Finance Service (Welfare Rights Advice; Debt & Financial Capability Advice)
- Job search and referral to specialist job brokerage and employment agencies



Conclusion

This Progression Model targets Lone Parents who are experiencing social and economic exclusion and who wish to increase their skills for future employment but who initially do not feel ready to enter into a more structured programme. It seeks to re-engage with Lone Parents in preparation for entry to the labour market and to encourage them to progress to engagement with the more employment focused activities by first introducing robust person centred holistic support mechanisms in the form of Mentoring Support and Personal and Social Development, followed by a focus on employability

Satwat Rehman
Director
One Parent Families Scotland
6 February 2013

One Parent Families Scotland: Flexible Childcare Services

One Parent Families Scotland offers a comprehensive flexible childcare package that recognises the move away from traditional hours employment. This creates a demand for more flexible childcare provision, both in terms of opening hours and the facilities/services provided. Research published by the Day Care Trust shows that in the UK: -

- **41% of lone parents could not take up available jobs due to their unsuitable hours**
- **22% of working families include a parent working shifts**
- **30% of parents are working long hours**
- **34% of parents are working weekends**

A variety of families use our childcare services, including parents working unsocial hours, in fluctuating seasonal employment, students and families with several children. We can also support families needing a short break or respite care and families whose children have special needs. For families registered to use our service we try where possible to be able to offer emergency care.

Childcare@home services operate from early morning to late evening seven days a week. Our services complement other childcare services, filling in any gaps in hours or service provision. Families can use the service on a regular, occasional or one off basis. We operate an inclusive and supportive service, working to ensure our services are flexible for families with children requiring additional support.

Issues

Such flexible childcare is not cheap to deliver and support available to help families with childcare costs can still leave a gap between the cost of the care and financial support available to families – this is the most acute for families on a low income.

As a service, flexible childcare does not sit neatly in either early years or economic development and as such suffers from a lack of financial support (e.g. to support management and overhead costs) which would allow for a subsidised rate to be offered to families.

OPFS Flexible Childcare Case Studies

Teenager with complex disabilities

Lone parent in employment with a 17 year old son with complex needs (severe learning difficulties, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, hearing and visual impairment) and a ten year old daughter. Referral from Children with Disability Team.

Childcare provided – 7am – 9am, Monday – Friday during school holidays to care for 17 year old in family home until 8.30am, then accompany him in a taxi to a local Out of School Club.

Grandparents care for grand-daughter, but are unable to meet their grandson's complex needs on a daily basis.

By providing this care, it has allowed the parent to remain in employment, and provided consistency of care for the child.

Working Lone Parent

Lone parent in full time employment working varying shifts in a Residential Care for the Elderly; one child aged 6.

Childminder collects child from school at 3.15pm and cares for her until 6pm. Childcare @ Home then collect child from Childminder at 6pm and return to family home and cares for child until Mum returns from work at 9pm.

This Mum would not be able to remain in employment if this service was not available to her.

Lone parent nurse with two children.

Parent works shift work and cannot access any other childcare within her area, not only due to the hours she works but also due to the ages of her childcare as her eldest is at Secondary school.

"I could not find childcare before childcare @ home provided a service in the area. I had to rely on family friends, which was not good for myself, or the children as I had to pay them privately with no help from the Inland Revenue."

Lone parent who has to work back shift every three weeks.

Parent who only uses the service every three weeks due to shift pattern.

"If I had not found childcare @ home I would have had to leave my employment when my partner left me and the kids"

Lone parent with two children

Parent uses the service twice a week.

"If it was not for childcare @home then I would have had to give up my work when my employer changed my hours to work until 6.00pm I could not get home to get the kids from the child-minder."

Lone parent student

Single parent currently having childcare to allow her to attend college. She quotes " I would not be able to study at college anymore as I would not have access to childcare facilities" she further states "My youngest child always has paintings and art and crafts to show me what activities she has done."



OPFS Briefing on Welfare Reform

Lone Parent Conditionality Sanctions

January 2013



OPFS Briefing on Welfare Reform Lone Parent Conditionality Sanctions

January 2013

Thousands of lone parents at risk of sanction under universal credit

The Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2012 will leave thousands of children and families even further away from being able to meet their essential costs of living.¹ As an organisation concerned with their wellbeing, OPFS is increasingly worried that the Statement may worsen already alarming projections that absolute and relative child poverty are forecast to be 23% and 24% in 2020-21².

With essential living costs mounting, OPFS knows many families have to make difficult choices; and the freeze on benefits and tax credits will make these choices even harder. Analysis of the chancellor's decision to impose a three year real-term cut to benefits by the Resolution Foundation reveals that the losses for lone parents are more than ten times as large as for single people without children.³ Far too many families on low incomes live well below the poverty line. We know that nearly a quarter of the poorest families can't even afford to warm their homes⁴. Failing to uprate benefits in line with inflation, and making other cuts to social security for families and disabled people will push the poorest into deeper poverty.

In addition to these changes thousands of lone parents could be at risk of losing family benefit as the government removes vital protection from sanctions for job-seeking lone parents.

Regulations that allow lone parents to search for jobs that fit with school hours so that they can be there for their children, or to turn down a job if they can't find childcare are being weakened to 'guidance' under Universal Credit. OPFS in Scotland & Gingerbread in England report that calls to their Helplines from lone parents who have been wrongly sanctioned are already all too frequent and that the proposed changes will only worsen the situation. (See Appendices)

Finding a job that enables lone parents to balance work with supporting their family is crucial. The existing Jobseeker's Allowance regulations recognise this and give lone parents clear grounds to appeal if they are unfairly sanctioned.

If you are a lone parent and so have childcare responsibilities, you must be available for work to qualify for JSA. However, some special rules can apply. You may be able to restrict your hours to less than 40 a week. If you have a child under 13, you only need to be available for work during your child's normal school hours.

If you have caring responsibilities, you can restrict the total hours you are available to less than 40 hours a week if: you are available for employment for at least 16 hours a week and for as many hours as your caring responsibilities permit; *and* you have a reasonable chance of securing employment despite the restricted hours you are available. You do not have to show this if you have caring responsibilities for a child under 16 and an EO decides that you would not satisfy this condition because of the type and number of job vacancies within daily travelling distance of your home.

¹ http://www.ifs.org.uk/conferences/PTAB_SA.pdf

² http://www.ifs.org.uk/pr/poverty_pr_1011.pdf

³ http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/media/downloads/Resolution_Foundation_AS_Reaction.pdf

⁴ <http://www.consumerfocus.org.uk/news/six-million-households-will-cut-back-on-heating-this-winter-while-free-help-goes-unclaimed>



However OPFS & Gingerbread Advisors regularly hear from lone parents who have been wrongly sanctioned or threatened with sanctions by the Job Centre or their private sector Work Programme Advisor. If the regulations, that are already providing scant protection, are downgraded to guidance, there is a fear that many more parents and children will lose vital money and find it harder to appeal.

The changes have now been laid before parliament as the government publishes more detail on its plans for Universal Credit.⁵ Lone parents who are sanctioned will lose £71 a week for a minimum of three months— money that is absolutely essential for paying gas and electricity bills and the weekly food shop for their families – and can have the money stopped for six months or three years for repeat ‘offences’.⁶

More than 140,000 lone parents in the UK⁷ are currently in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance and OPFS & Gingerbread predicts a similar number will move onto the job-seeking element of universal credit, starting next year.

The following regulations for lone parents are among those weakened under new universal credit proposals⁸:

- Limiting job searches to school hours (including travel time) if their child is under 13: **under new regulations lone parents will only be able to do this if they can prove that jobs within school hours are available in their local area.**
- Being able to turn down a job if there is no suitable or affordable childcare available: **downgraded from regulation to guidance.**
- Being able to leave their job if their childcare arrangements fall through and they are unable to make alternative arrangements: **downgraded from regulation to guidance.**

OPFS has had a number of cases where lone parents have been negatively impacted by changes to the benefits system. Some of the issues include:

- Parents are unclear about their rights e.g. at what age can a parent leave their child on her/his own to go to work. Can a parent take travel time into account. Can a parent refuse a job if they are not better off? Parents feel that they are unsure of their rights leaving them in a vulnerable position and often unable to challenge decisions.
- Lone Parent Flexibilities are not being adhered to, in that lone parents are being told to apply for jobs which they would find difficult to sustain given their existing caring commitments.

⁵ New universal credit regulations (December 2012):

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/9780111531938/pdfs/ukdsi_9780111531938_en.pdf

⁶ JSA claimants currently receive £71 a week and will receive a similar amount under universal credit.

⁷ ONS (2012) Labour Market Statistics, November 2012. Statistical Bulletin. London: ONS. Available at:

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_284362.pdf Out of work lone parents with a child aged five and over are eligible for Jobseekers Allowance. Unemployed lone parents with a child aged under five are eligible for Income Support.

⁸ Jobseeker’s Allowance Regulations 1996 as amended by Regulation 11 (8) of the Social Security (Lone Parents and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2008



- OPFS staff have been told by JCP Advisers anecdotally that JCP have targets for sanctions. Also sanctions are automatically applied if rules are breached e.g. someone not turning up for an appointment, so a valid excuse is no protection. Sanctions can be a percentage of benefit but in some cases benefits are suspended altogether.
- JCP centrally don't record people's status as parents or lone parents so they can't give us figures on sanctions which might affect children (note- lone parents have to actively look for work once their children are 5 and this is when sanctions could apply)

Gingerbread & OPFS are urging MPs & MSP's to lobby the government to reinstate the full flexibilities for lone parents under Universal Credit to ensure that they are protected from unfair sanctions. Even though the current flexibilities for lone parents are not working and causing problems, having the regulations is still better than leaving it to guidance alone.

Conclusion- Policy Issues

Two sets of issues recur time and again in the case studies detailed in the appendices:

- The system and how it is applied;
- Advisers getting things wrong.

First, there is often little or no consideration given to a lone parent's need to fit their hours of work around their child-care responsibilities. This involves JCP (and Work Programme agencies) requiring the lone parent to pursue jobs that are inappropriate or incompatible with their childcare needs. Not recognising this, leads to sanctions being imposed which in some cases means no money at all coming in to the home. This is bringing people into severe financial hardship.

The second set of issues is around wrong advice, bad advice and incomplete advice. The common feature of all the case studies is that people are living at the margin. A missed payment or sanctioned benefit means no money coming in to the house – directly affecting the children as well as the parent. Further, the system appears to have no flexibility to take account of the impact of sanctions on children. Research shows many lone parents and their children already suffer poor health. Where lone parents are not working, this is often because there are health issues that make work difficult: 33 per cent of unemployed lone parents have a disability or longstanding illness⁹ and 34 per cent have a child with a disability¹⁰ These are highly stressful situations for lone parents, and it is no surprise that mental health issues have been mentioned several times.

JCP say they don't have sanctions targets and DWP deny it. However reports say the DWP released a statement confirming the practice had been going on in some offices due to a misunderstanding between the department and some jobcentre managers.¹¹ Whilst it was

⁹ Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 3.2. DWP, 2010

¹⁰ Family and Children Survey 2008, Table 12.5. DWP, 2010

¹¹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2011/apr/08/jobcentres-benefits-sanctions-targets>



possible to obtain statistics on the number of sanctions imposed on lone parents claiming Income Support, these details are no longer collected in relation to sanctions imposed on lone parents claiming JSA or ESA.

In August 2012 DWP published updated statistics on sanctions for lone parents claiming Income Support.¹² They show that in 2011-12, 62,000 sanctions were applied to lone parents in receipt of Income Support. In terms of reasons, for the sanction the only requirement placed on a lone parent on Income Support is to attend/participate in a mandatory Work Focused Interview. So these sanctions would all be applied for this failure. The sanction is open-ended until the claimant re-engages.

JSA sanction statistics are published via the DWP Tabulation Tool, which enables you to provide breakdowns by reason but doesn't allow you to break the volumes down by lone parent status.¹³

Again, DWP published updated ESA sanction stats in August but they don't hold data on the lone parent status of ESA claimants.¹⁴

To allow for proper monitoring and review of the implementation of Universal Credit, including the use of sanctions, it is essential that data is collected in a way that allows for analysis by different claimant groups, including lone parents.

Marion Davis
Policy, Development & Training Manager
Choices - One Parent Families Scotland
100 Wellington Street, Glasgow, G2 6DH
Tel: 0141 847 0444
marion.davis@opfs.org.uk

Lone Parent Helpline: 0808 801 0323
www.opfs.org.uk

Find us on  and 

¹² http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/is/lone_parent_regime/index.php?page=lone_parent_regime

¹³ <http://83.244.183.180/sanction/sanction/LIVE/tabtool.html>

¹⁴ http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_sanc/esa_sanc_aug12.pdf



Appendix A: Case studies from Scotland

Case Studies are from calls to OPFS lone parent helpline & parents attending OPFS services. Parents have been anonymised. All rules are based on the existing regulations, not the new Universal Credit guidance.

1. Find a job of at least 25 - 30 hours or may face sanction

Ann called the Advice Line as she was very worried & stressed as had been told by Job Centre that she must find a job of at least 25 - 30 hours and may have to travel 90 minutes or she may get her benefit cut. She has an 8 year old child.

The rules:

Lone parents with children aged under 13yrs can limit their availability for work to fit with school hours. Not being able to find suitable childcare is also accepted as good cause to turn down a job. In addition, while regulations do say that lone parents in receipt of JSA have to be available for work within school hours, travel time must also be taken into consideration.

2. Parent advised its okay to leave 10 year old on own after school to take up employment

Barbara called the Helpline in distress. She is taking part in the Work Programme and she reported that the Employability Advisor at the private company that delivers the work programme said a 20hr job was not enough. Her daughter is 10 and she wants to work part time to fit with school hours. She said the Work Programme Advisor also gave her an appointment at 9.30am and she wanted a later appointment as she needed to travel on 2 buses and she takes her daughter to school. The Advisor told her to get her child into after school care even though the local service is full and also it was alright to leave her a couple of hours on her own. The parent said she didn't want to leave her daughter alone as she was too young.

The rules:

Lone parents with children aged under 13 can limit their availability for work to fit with school hours. Under current regulations, being unable to find childcare to enable you to take up a certain job protects lone parents from being sanctioned.

In addition, while regulations do say that lone parents in receipt of JSA have to be available for work within school hours, travel time must also be taken into consideration, so, depending on the school hours of Barbara's daughter, stipulating 9am to 3pm is also likely to be in breach of current regulations.

There is no legal age limit for leaving a child on their own, but it's an offence to do so if it places them at risk. Parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health".

3. Fear of Benefit Sanction

Christine was offered a job of 30 hours per week and was happy at first but is now worried as it turns out it means leaving her 11 year old son, who is on the autistic spectrum, on his own some nights and weekends. She reported that she was told by her Employability Advisor based at her Work Programme provider not to worry as her son will be ok on his own. Although she is only required to work 16hrs because of her child's needs she was worried about telling her Advisor she didn't want to take the job at these hours as she had heard about the threat of a benefit penalty.



The rules:

Lone parents with children aged under 13 can limit their availability for work to fit with school hours. Not being able to find suitable childcare is also accepted as good cause to turn down a job. If a child is aged under 13, you cannot be required to leave them on their own after school. There is no legal age limit for leaving a child on their own, but it's an offence to do so if it places them at risk. Parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health".

4. Must take a job or face losing benefit

Debbie had always worked but had to stop due to youngest child's health. Her children are 8yrs & 10yrs. She had been moved from IS to JSA and was told by JCP that if a job came up she must take it or face losing benefit. Her after school club is full and there is no family to help out. She was advised that in Scotland you can leave you child on their own so she can go to work.

The rules:

Lone parents with children aged under 13 can limit their availability for work to fit with school hours. Not being able to find suitable childcare is also accepted as good cause to turn down a job. There is no legal age limit for leaving a child on their own, but it's an offence to do so if it places them at risk. Parents can be prosecuted for neglect if they leave a child unsupervised "in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health". If a child is aged under 13, you cannot be required to leave them on their own after school.

5. Worse off in Work

Eileen has a long work history, but moved to Glasgow (mother's home) to escape domestic violence in England. She eventually moved into unfurnished accommodation, with a furniture package (£200mthly), which was paid by Housing Benefit. She has two children, 5yrs & 6yrs. Mother recently diagnosed with terminal cancer. She is also now acting effectively as her mother's carer. As she is on JSA she is mandated to continually apply for jobs, but not made aware by JCP that help with the furniture package would stop if she moved into work. This means in most low paid jobs she would be much worse off in work. JCP requiring her to consider jobs up to 90 minutes travel time away from home but she needs to get child to school – breakfast clubs not open in time to accommodate 90 minute travel time. Eileen is under constant threat of being sanctioned if she doesn't comply.

The rules:

JCP decision makers need to consider whether someone had good reason before imposing a sanction, ie it shouldn't be automatic. The rules are not that unclear about what hours and when a lone parent is expected to be available for work – only expected to be available during school hours and allows for travel time, when child under 13.

6. Transition from Income Support to JSA

Fiona has one daughter 6 yrs. old. She is unemployed, and has mental health issues. She also has a key worker. Fiona had to move out of her flat to stay with her mother as she couldn't afford to heat it. She didn't pick up her mail as she was unwell and therefore missed appointments to transition her from Income Support to JSA which meant that her Income Support was stopped. She called the JCP new claims contact line and they gave her an



interview/appointment at JCP for the following week and was told that it could take 2 weeks for her to receive a payment.

She then called JCP Social Fund Crisis Loan Line. After explaining that she had absolutely no income for herself or her 6 year old daughter she was told that she had already received her quota of 3 crisis loans. She was refused the Crisis Loan. Now frantic Fiona called JCP for an Alignment Payment from JCP whilst claim was processing she received £32.12 for herself and her 6 year old daughter to live on until her full JSA claim was processed. Fiona has now abandoned her daughter with her mother who has had to give up work & is now in the situation of being a Kinship Carer.

The rules:

Since May 2012, changes have be phased in so that lone parents with a youngest child aged 5 or above are unable to claim Income Support and are expected to look for paid work. While looking for work, they are entitled to claim JSA, or Employment and Support Allowance if they are not able to work due to a health condition or disability. Parents are notified 8 weeks before Income Support will be stopped. They are asked to attend a voluntary interview where Jobcentre Plus discusses the changes with and what needs to happen next. Jobcentre Plus will then arrange a New Jobseeker Interview at the local office after the initial voluntary interview. At this interview, the parent will meet with a personal adviser and together they will decide the steps the parent need to take in order to improve their chances of finding a job.



Appendix B: Case studies in England

Calls to the Gingerbread single parent helpline within the last three months. Callers have been anonymised. All rules are based on the existing regulations, not the new universal credit guidance.

Caller A: Your child must change schools

Caller A moved onto Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) this year; her advisor at the job centre told Caller A that she had to get a job working from 9am to 3pm and that if there wasn't a breakfast club and afterschool club for her daughter that would enable her to work those hours, she would have to find a child-minder. If she couldn't find a child-minder, then she would have to move her daughter to a different school where childcare could be arranged. If she did not do any or all of these, she would have her Jobseeker's Allowance stopped for six months.

The rules:

Under current regulations, being unable to find childcare to enable you to take up a certain job protects single parents from being sanctioned. Claimants are not expected to move their child to another school in order to find childcare.

In addition, while regulations do say that single parents in receipt of JSA have to be available for work within school hours, travel time must also be taken into consideration, so, depending on the school hours of Caller A's daughter, stipulating 9am to 3pm is also likely to be in breach of current regulations.

Even if a claimant is in breach of their JSA agreement, the first sanction lasts three months, not six.

Caller B: Leave your job and face three year sanction

Newly single mother Caller B is struggling to balance her shift work job with caring for her two children. She is struggling to find childcare for them, and is having to call in sick to work to deal with issues arising from her separation and to look after her 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 job centre for advice and they told her if she left her job she may be sanctioned for three years. The advisor at the job centre told her to call social services to arrange childcare for her children.

The rules:

Social services do not arrange or provide childcare. Not being able to find the right childcare to enable her to work would protect Caller B from sanctions under current JSA regulations.

Sanctions of three years are only applied if the JSA claimant has been in breach of their job-seeking agreement multiple times in the last year, which would not be the case for this caller.

Caller C: sanctioned for turning down night-shifts

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

The rules:

Single parents with children aged under 13 can limit their availability for work to fit with school hours. Not being able to find suitable childcare is also accepted as good cause to turn down a job.



Appendix C: Comparison table of flexibilities in current regulations and the provision of flexibilities in Universal Credit draft regulations

Provision for flexibilities in current regulations	Provision for flexibilities in Universal Credit draft regulations
Regulations that have no comparable Universal Credit regulation	
Single parents with a dependent child under 13 can limit the hours they work to their child's usual school hours, even if there are no reasonable prospects of finding work.	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could be sanctioned for three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.
Single parents with a dependent child aged between 13 and 16 can limit the hours they work according to their caring responsibilities, even if there are no reasonable prospects of finding work.	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could be sanctioned for three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.
Refusing a job offer or to follow an instruction from an advisor when there is no affordable or appropriate childcare available	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could be sanctioned for three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.
Leaving a job because of a lack of available and affordable childcare	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could be sanctioned for three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.
Allowing up to seven days to attend a job interview to take account of caring responsibilities	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could be sanctioned for three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.



Limiting work search requirements when a child has been excluded from school	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.
Limiting work search requirements when there is no affordable, appropriate childcare available during the school holidays	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.
Limiting work search requirements when a claimant is subject to a parenting order or contract	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.
Regulations that have been limited in Universal Credit regulations	
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a death involving a close friend or family member	Regulation 99 (3) (d) only applies to the death of a claimant's partner or a claimant's child
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a serious illness involving a close friend or family member	This may be covered in guidance relating to regulation 99 (5) (b) under temporary circumstances
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a domestic emergency involving a close friend or family member	This is covered regulation 99 (5) (b) however timeframes are not stipulated
Regulations that are being matched in Universal Credit	
A single parent can take up to one month to take up paid work and be treated as fulfilling the work availability requirement	Equivalent regulation: 96 (3) (b)