Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews: Synthesis of findings

Andrew Thomas
# Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. vii
The Author ............................................................................................................................... viii
Abbreviations .......................................................................................................................... ix
Summary ..................................................................................................................................... 1

1 Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 11
  1.1 Strategic context ............................................................................................................... 11
  1.2 Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews ........................................................................... 13
    1.2.1 The LPWFI process .................................................................................................. 13
    1.2.2 Types of LPWFIs .................................................................................................... 14
  1.3 Aims of LPWFIs .............................................................................................................. 15
  1.4 NDLP ............................................................................................................................... 16
  1.5 Summary of the roll-out of LPWFIs ............................................................................... 17
  1.6 Aims of the Synthesis Report ......................................................................................... 17

2 Engaging lone parents .......................................................................................................... 21
  2.1 Securing LPWFI attendance ......................................................................................... 21
    2.1.1 Sanctioning ............................................................................................................. 22
  2.2 Creating trust and rapport ............................................................................................. 23
  2.3 The content of LPWFIs .................................................................................................. 24
  2.4 Timing and frequency of meetings ................................................................................. 25
    2.4.1 Initial LPWFIs ........................................................................................................ 25
    2.4.2 Twelve month review LPWFIs ................................................................................ 26
2.4.3 Six month review LPWFIs ................................................................. 27
2.4.4 Quarterly WFIs ............................................................................... 29

3 Changing lone parents’ attitudes ................................................................. 31
  3.1 Attitudes to childrearing and parental responsibility ......................... 31
  3.2 Attitudes to Jobcentre Plus ................................................................. 32
  3.3 Work orientation ............................................................................... 32
  3.4 Attitudinal barriers .......................................................................... 32

4 Moving lone parents closer to the labour market ...................................... 35
  4.1 Enhancing motivation ......................................................................... 35
  4.2 Training ............................................................................................ 36
    4.2.1 Training Premium ......................................................................... 37
    4.2.2 Work placements ......................................................................... 37
    4.2.3 Restricted training opportunities .................................................. 38
  4.3 Part time working ............................................................................... 38
  4.4 Overcoming lone parents’ obstacles to work ........................................ 39
    4.4.1 Identified constraints to working .................................................. 39
    4.4.2 Attitudes to work ......................................................................... 40
    4.4.3 Constraints most likely to prevent entry to work ............................ 41
    4.4.4 Constraints less likely to prevent entry to work ............................. 43
    4.4.5 Childcare .................................................................................... 43
    4.4.6 Better Off Calculations ................................................................. 46

5 LPWF outcomes ...................................................................................... 49
  5.1 Increasing numbers on NDLP .............................................................. 49
    5.1.1 NDLP entry from LPWFIs ............................................................. 49
    5.1.2 Average impact of LPWFIs on NDLP case loading ..................... 51
    5.1.3 Non-participation in NDLP ............................................................ 52
  5.2 Maximising numbers of lone parents in (sustained) work ................... 54
    5.2.1 Lone parents entering employment .............................................. 54
5.2.2 Factors affecting work entry ................................................. 56
5.2.3 Types of work ..................................................................... 57
5.2.4 Sustainability ..................................................................... 58

5.3 Assessment of net impacts of LPWFI ..................................... 59
5.3.1 Impacts from initial and review LPWFIs ......................... 60
5.3.2 Combined impacts of LPWI and NDLP ............................ 62
5.3.3 Incremental LPWFI impact effects ................................. 64
5.3.4 LPWFI additionality ......................................................... 64

6 Key themes and implications .................................................. 67

6.1 Have LPWFIs been successful in meeting their objectives? .... 67
6.2 At what point are LPWFIs most effective? ......................... 68
6.3 Who benefits most from LPWFIs and who benefits least? .... 69
6.4 Have LPWFIs increased participation in NDLP? ................. 70
6.5 Have LPWFIs increased exits from benefits? ................. 70
6.6 Are review LPWFIs effective? ............................................. 70
6.7 Are more frequent LPWFIs an effective enhancement 
to the programme? ............................................................... 71
6.8 Is the LPWFI process effective? ......................................... 71
6.9 Options for future development? ........................................ 72

Appendix Policy context and changes 2002/07 .......................... 75

References ................................................................................ 77

List of tables

Table 5.1 Average impact of LPWFIs on entry to NDLP 
(percentage points) ................................................................. 51
Table 5.2 Lone parents entering work following an LPWFI .......... 55
Table 5.3 Impacts of LPWFIs and reviews on IS exits ................ 61
Table 5.4 Impacts of LPWFI and NDLP on benefit rates ............ 63

List of figures

Figure 5.1 Weekly average NDLP job starts, by entry route ........ 54
Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all those who gave their time to support this synthesis work and who assisted them in the task of interpretation. Thanks to colleagues responsible for secondary material on which this work has been based, particularly those at the Policy Studies Institute, at BMRB Social Research and within the Lone Parents and Partners Research and Evaluation Team, Family and Poverty and Work Division, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Thanks also to James Battye and the analysis team in the Disability and Work Division at DWP.
The Author

Andrew Thomas is a partner at Insite Research and Consulting.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Adviser Discretion Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOC</td>
<td>Better off Calculation (formerly In Work Benefit Calculation – IWBC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Childcare Assist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>Customer Assessment Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPM</td>
<td>Childcare Partnership Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV</td>
<td>Curriculum Vitae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESC</td>
<td>Extended Schools Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EZ</td>
<td>Employment Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACS</td>
<td>Families and Children’s Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTA</td>
<td>Failure to Attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>General Certificate of Secondary Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HBRO</td>
<td>Housing Benefit Run On</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>In Work Credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IWEF</td>
<td>In Work Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPRO</td>
<td>Lone Parent Run On</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPWFI</td>
<td>Lone Parent Work Focused Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP</td>
<td>Mandatory Action Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRO</td>
<td>Mortgage Interest Run On</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVC</td>
<td>More Voluntary Contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND+FLP</td>
<td>New Deal Plus for Lone Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>New Deal for Lone Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVQ</td>
<td>National Vocational Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWFI</td>
<td>Quarterly Work Focused Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Training Premium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFTC</td>
<td>Working Families’ Tax Credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRAP</td>
<td>Work Related Activity Premium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSP</td>
<td>Work Search Premium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Introduction

Mandatory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) for lone parents claiming Income Support (IS) have been subject to extensive evaluation since their inception in April 2001. The aims of this synthesis report are to bring together and synthesise all evaluation findings including those relating to small scale changes to delivery and provision in recent years that have been implemented to further improve a programme acknowledged as successful.

Many lone parents are reliant on IS as their primary source of income and they and their children have a much higher than average risk of being, and staying, in poverty. The majority of lone parents will be better off in paid employment than on benefit. Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (LPWFIs) are designed to bring this message to lone parents. Their purpose is to facilitate a movement into paid employment by encouraging the lone parent to seek work. LPWFIs support the job search process, inform lone parents about the support available to them, introduce them to Jobcentre Plus services via a personal adviser, and encourage participation in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). Review meetings continue the process through maintaining contact with those lone parents who continue to claim IS.

Between 2001 and 2004 LPWFIs were progressively rolled out to successive groups of lone parents according to the age of their youngest child. All new/repeat claimants have been eligible for an LPWFI (at the point of making a claim for IS) since April 2003 and all existing claimants (in receipt of IS for more than 26 weeks at the start of the initiative) since April 2004. Compulsory review meetings for lone parents remaining on benefit were introduced in 2002 at six months, 12 months and annually thereafter for new/repeat claimants, and at 12-monthly intervals for existing claimants. From October 2005 mandatory quarterly review meetings have been required of lone parents claiming benefit for 12 months or more and with
a youngest child aged 14 and 15 years, and quarterly WFIs (QWFIs) have been piloted for lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 years and over\(^1\).

Some caution is required in interpreting the available evidence concerning the effectiveness of LPWFIs. Many of the analyses are not easily generalised to the whole lone parent population which displays a wide range of diverse characteristics. Others are limited by the unavoidably short timescales available for observation and comparison and by year-on-year changes to eligibility and the operating context of the programme. Much of the available evidence also derives from the first two years of the programme.

Main findings

Lone parents constitute a broad customer group with many defining characteristics over and above being lone parents, which shape their options and priorities. The two subgroups of lone parents (existing and new/repeat claimants) are in many ways different from one another in their characteristics. They have frequently required separate evaluation and may require differently targeted policy responses.

Engaging lone parents

For each customer the approach, content, timing and frequency of meetings is important and advisers are crucial to the success of the process. Much emphasis is placed by advisers on the importance of building a relationship of trust and creating a rapport with customers that will facilitate the communication of key information, allow them to identify and respond to indications of willingness and intent to work, and to identify needs to be addressed. Advisers have been successful in this regard and lone parents are broadly very positive about the way their LPWFIs are handled.\(^2\)

Securing attendance at an LPWFI is largely an administrative procedure. However, a more proactive approach by advisers has occasionally been adopted and increased administrative resources to facilitate contact (as in New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP)) have successfully reduced failure to attend (FTA) rates.\(^3\)

There was resistance, primarily among existing claimants, to attending LPWFIs, although a tightening of procedures leading to potential sanctioning in 2002 has successfully reduced the administrative problems caused by FTA early in the initiative. Some of these lone parents see LPWFIs as irrelevant or inappropriate.

---

1. From April 2007, six-monthly LPWFIs have been introduced for lone parents with a youngest child aged five to 13 years and quarterly LPWFIs have been introduced in all ND+fLP areas for lone parents with a youngest child aged 11-13. From April 2008 all lone parents with a youngest child ages 0-4 years will become eligible for six monthly LPWFIs.
either because they feel unable to consider working (due to sickness, disability or caring responsibilities) or have made the conscious choice not to work while they have children to look after or because they have already decided to work and are taking steps independently to that end.

Attitudes among new/repeat claimants to LPWFIs are generally more accepting. The relatively small numbers who fail to attend give reasons that generally relate to the circumstances that have led to their benefit claim, rather than any specific resistance to the idea of discussing future work options. Many see LPWFIs as a routine part of making a claim, although there have been high levels of FTA at six-month reviews among those whose circumstances have not changed since their initial meeting.\(^4\)

**LPWFI content**

Guidance as to what should be covered in meetings is broadly followed by advisers but to a greater or lesser extent is adapted to individual circumstances. Lone parents who say they do not wish to work tend to have shorter meetings. Three-quarters (73 per cent) of lone parents report their initial LPWFI as having been ‘very helpful’ or ‘quite helpful’. Those who are already looking for work at the time of an LPWFI are more likely to rate it as ‘very helpful’ than those not in work nor looking for work.\(^5\)

On average, initial LPWFIs are quite short and general in content. Research undertaken in the first two years of the initiative found the average length of meetings to be just under 30 minutes, though ranging from less than ten minutes to over an hour. The majority (87 per cent) of LPWFIs had a work focus to them, and in more than half (56 per cent) there was discussion of ways of finding work, searching for vacancies and building up work skills. Half (49 per cent) of all lone parents discussed NDLP (explicitly and by name) at their LPWFI and of these 37 per cent discussed specifically whether it was appropriate for them to enter the programme. Just over a third discussed childcare arrangements, and a better off calculation (BOC) was carried out in 30 per cent of cases (with one-third of existing claimants and one-quarter of new/repeat claimants).\(^6\)

**Timing and frequency of LPWFIs**

The degree to which LPWFIs are able to be effective depends, in large part, on their timing in relation to events and circumstances in people’s lives. There are some possible ‘trigger’ points for action towards starting work, such as events relating to the ages of children and entry points to primary and secondary school, which can be anticipated and worked with. Most factors determining good timing for LPWFIs lie in the details of personal lives and cannot be readily identified in

---


advance. The main exception is the over-riding importance of the moment of a new or repeat claim which generally coincides with major events in customers’ lives. The period following the point of making a claim is also often a period of rapid and significant change, making it fertile ground for intervention. An early initial meeting is seen by advisers as crucial in mobilising those customers who are immediately ready and willing to work. For others it is considered a good time to start a process of ongoing contact. It has also been successful in establishing an immediate connection in lone parents’ minds between claiming benefit and seeking work.

Two-thirds (65 per cent) of customers say it was useful to have first met an adviser at the time they did. The main factor affecting responses is whether customers were looking for work or not at the time of the meeting. Three-quarters (75 per cent) of lone parents who were looking for work thought the timing of their LPWFI was right.\(^7\)

The question of optimum timing for subsequent LPWFIs (review meetings) has provoked mixed responses. Most advisers consider twelve months a reasonable interval before review for existing claimants (many of whose circumstances are felt to change little in this time) and the six-month reviews to be appropriate for new/repeat claimants. Where opinions differ they tend to be in favour of shorter initial intervals for new/repeat claimants and longer intervals for existing claimants.

The exception to this has been the fairly widespread support among advisers for the idea of more frequent mandatory contact with lone parents whose youngest child is approaching the age of 16 and who thus, face the end of their eligibility for IS.\(^9\) There is no evaluation evidence for the national initiative. However, piloted QWFIs with lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 years or over, have been found, on early qualitative evaluation evidence, to have had a varied effect and their utility and flexibility to have been questioned by staff.\(^10\)

### Changing attitudes

While LPWFIs positively influence many lone parents’ views of Jobcentre Plus as a source of help and advice, they are less effective at challenging or changing deep rooted attitudes about work. LPWFIs have largely responded to lone parents who have already decided they want to work, rather than persuaded customers to seek work who previously had not wanted to.\(^11\)

As a ‘work first’ initiative LPWFI/NDLP responds effectively to those who are already committed to working, but makes little headway with the unwilling.\(^12\)

---

\(^7\) Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 166 (2003).
\(^8\) Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
\(^12\) Brewer et al., DWP Research Report No. 415 (2007).
Lone parents on the border of working, are potentially persuadable of the benefits of entering employment but require a greater input of advice and support time. The tendency for LPWFI as a work-first programme to concentrate on the ‘job ready’ and the ‘work willing’ has accentuated its weakness in changing attitudes. The piloted provision of Work Search Premium (WSP), designed to motivate and incentivise moves to work, has largely been used instead as a ‘reward’ for lone parents already committed to seeking work and engaged in the process. Even In Work Credit (IWC) which has had a very positive reception, and which was felt to tip the balance of some lone parents’ work decisions, is judged by some to have had the primary effect of making better off those who would have left benefits anyway, rather than encouraging substantially more lone parents to do so.\textsuperscript{13}

### Increasing numbers on NDLP

By making an initial meeting with an adviser compulsory, the aim of LPWFI was to expose greater numbers of lone parents to information about working and about the help and support available under NDLP. The expectation was that additional numbers of lone parents would choose to enter NDLP than would otherwise have self-referred to the programme.

The initiative has been successful in achieving this objective. Both the mandatory nature of LPWFIs and the power of face-to-face contact with an adviser appear to have strongly contributed. Furthermore, the net impact of LPWFIs on entry to NDLP have been large and strongly statistically significant, indicating that the initiative has been reaching lone parents who would not otherwise have found their way into New Deal support.\textsuperscript{14}

The biggest impact from initial LPWFIs has been for new/repeat claimants with a youngest child aged six, where LPWFI acts to enhance entry at the pre-existing ‘trigger-point’ of having a child settled into full-time school.\textsuperscript{15}

Review meetings are also making an important contribution. The conversion rate onto NDLP case load from initial LPWFIs is 18 per cent for all lone parents, and 16 per cent from review LPWFIs. However, since the introduction of LPWFIs, the number of attendees at initial NDLP interviews who drop out before being case loaded has risen from ten to 25 per cent.\textsuperscript{16} This suggests that although LPWFIs have been successful at persuading lone parents to explore further their options for working, some customers entering NDLP from an LPWFI are not yet committed to working at that stage.

Job-readiness, including the belief that they will be better off working, is the key factor in whether a lone parent goes on to participate in NDLP. Other factors include having only one child, especially if under five years of age, an educational

\textsuperscript{13} Brewer \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 415 (2007).
\textsuperscript{14} Knight \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 182 (2004).
\textsuperscript{15} Knight \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 182 (2004).
level of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or above; and being motivated to receive help and advice. The work orientation of non-participants is low.

**Moving lone parents closer to the labour market/overcoming work constraints**

LPWFIs are seen as positively motivating by around a third of participants (in particular younger customers already seeking work and longer-term existing claimants lacking in confidence). However, two-thirds of those not wishing to work say that an LPWFI makes no difference to how they feel.

Training is talked about at roughly half of initial LPWFIs, most frequently with younger lone parents. It is less likely to be discussed at review meetings. Although most training undertaken is in IT and basic skills, training at more skilled levels, including the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 courses available from 2004 in some pilot areas (since ceased), may be more successful in moving people into work.

Uptake of Training Premium (TP) has been very low and has not been given a high profile. There appear to be particular problems with the lack of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. Over time the availability of training has become more problematic as greater emphasis has been placed on the ‘work first’ nature of LPWFI/NDLP.

Part-time work under 16 hours as a step towards full-time employment is discussed at LPWFIs primarily with lone parents who have been out of the labour market for several years, and with those with very young children. For other customers it is not generally considered appropriate.

Problems faced in considering working are discussed at most LPWFIs. Existing claimants are slightly more likely to perceive that they have such constraints (93 per cent) than are new/repeat claimants (86 per cent). Constraints cited by both existing and new/repeat claimants include: health problems and disabilities; and availability and cost of suitable childcare. In addition to these, new/repeat claimants frequently mention labour market constraints such as a lack of jobs with sufficiently flexible hours. Existing claimants are more likely to cite their own lack of confidence as a problem.

Lone parents with literacy and numeracy difficulties, additional care responsibilities or long-term illness or disability have been found to be much less likely than average

---

to start work following an LPWFI. Those citing other factors enter employment at rates close to the average, although they take longer to do so.²²

Childcare is an underlying issue in one form or another for all lone parents. It is not, however, seen by all of them as preventing them working and many manage to start jobs despite having childcare problems to cope with. Most customers with very young children are unwilling to work.²³ However, it is not a simple case of childcare issues diminishing as children grow older. There is a perceived problem among many parents with children in their early teens that this age group requires close supervision out of school hours, which has its root in wider social issues.²⁴ Childcare for such older children has been found to be a general provision gap.

Often, lone parents’ perceptions of childcare constraints are related to their willingness to work. A crucial role for advisers in LPWFIs lies in tackling perceived difficulties in how to combine work and childcare as well as the more practical issues such as childcare cost and availability. Around half of lone parents in ND+FLP areas say they feel more confident about dealing with childcare after having an LPWFI.²⁵

Financial considerations are an important factor in guiding most lone parents’ decision-making regarding work. BOCs are used by advisers to challenge perceptions held by lone parents that they will be worse off working. Overall, 30 per cent of lone parents had a BOC during their initial LPWFI: one-third of existing claimants and just over a quarter of new/repeat claimants. Those most likely to have a BOC are those looking for work at the time of their initial LPWFI.²⁶

BOCs are more widely used in review meetings (especially six-month reviews) than at initial meetings. Although the judgement that BOCs can be a powerful tool for persuasion is echoed in the responses of many customers, assessments of the relationships between BOCs and subsequent benefits and employment outcomes present a more complicated picture.

Those who receive a BOC, those who move into work and those who leave benefits are all more likely to have been looking for work at the time of their LPWFI. A positive association exists for new/repeat claimants between work outcomes and BOC results, though not for existing claimants. For existing claimants’ health, skills, confidence and caring issues, as well as number of children and the age of the youngest child, are all significant to work entry – over-riding any relation to BOC outcomes.²⁷ This supports the view that existing claimants are more difficult to work with and to get work outcomes for, than new/repeat claimants, and that if they go on to enter NDLP they may get less benefit from it.

Health status is the only factor always independently significant to achieving work entry or benefit exit by existing claimants, while the desire to work is the single factor consistently significant to achieving these outcomes by new/repeat claimants.28

Maximising numbers of lone parents into work

There was an initial increase in job entries from NDLP following the introduction of LPWFIs. However, only a minority (30 per cent) of those starting a new job said that their LPWFI had any impact on them applying for it and assessments of net impact on benefit exits (a proxy for job starts) suggests that much of this increase is a reflection of increased volumes on NDLP but not as strongly additional as conversions from LPWFIs onto NDLP caseload.29

Those more likely to start work include those with recent work experience, those looking for work at the time of the LPWFI, and lone parents in younger age groups. Those with a youngest child aged nine to 12 years are more likely than average to enter work, and those with three or more children much less likely.30

New/repeat claimants move more quickly into work than existing claimants, largely because of a greater job-readiness among this group. Overall, the rate of movement into work is most strongly related to the number of children lone parents have, the length of their claim and their work orientation. People do not typically appear to delay starting work in order to find better wages or more hours but rather in order to find a job that is more ‘flexible’.

LPWFIs have been shown to have a net impact on off-flow rates from IS of around one percentage point31 for existing claimants, although more recent analyses32 strongly suggest that this (and the non-significant result for new/repeat claimants) is an underestimate due to the short timescale available for observations. Impacts from LPWFI/NDLP are typically not immediate but delayed by several months.

Combined calculations for initial LPWFIs and reviews show positive net impacts of between one and two percentage points for both existing and new/repeat claimants.33 Net impacts are greater from initial LPWFIs than from annual review meetings for existing claimants, whereas the reverse is true for new/repeat claimants and six-month reviews.

Most of the combined impact of LPWFI and NDLP has been shown to be due to the impact of NDLP.\textsuperscript{34} However, separate analysis has looked at the additional impact for lone parents of having both an LPWFI and participating in NDLP compared to just NDLP. There is a positive incremental impact for new/repeat claimants equivalent to 14 per cent additional exits from benefit, but a large negative impact for existing claimants.\textsuperscript{35} This suggests that LPWFIs have introduced existing customers to NDLP who gain much less from participation than lone parents did who had previously self-referred onto NDLP.

Two elements underlying the marked difference that has been shown to exist between the large impacts of LPWFIs on NDLP entry and the much more modest net impacts on IS off-flows and employment, therefore, are the high levels of ‘deadweight’ (particularly among new/repeat claimants) and the apparently very difficult nature of the constraints faced by other lone parents (particularly existing claimants) being case loaded onto NDLP from an LPWFI.

Conclusions

LPWFI/NDLP clearly achieves additionality in its impacts on benefit exits/job entries. Nevertheless, the programme still carries considerable ‘deadweight’ in the form of those lone parents who would have moved into employment of their own accord without intervention. As a ‘work first’ initiative, LPWFIs work most effectively for lone parents who are closest to being job-ready and the target-driven delivery model of Jobcentre Plus appears to be accentuating this. There is little incentive within the system to focus efforts on the persuasion of those lone parents on the margins of making a decision about working, nor on those who want to work but are at a greater distance from the labour market, even though it is from these lone parents that greater additionality might be achieved.

As the stock of original existing claimants reduces in size over time, the main thrust of future policy will need to be with new/repeat claimants, despite the fact that new ‘long-term’ claimants will be created in due course. LPWFIs have so far worked well with this customer group and have been shown to have a positive incremental impact over and above the impact deriving from NDLP.\textsuperscript{36} However, LPWFIs still appear to struggle to make significant headway against the firm decision of some lone parents to choose not to work. Though the precise size of this group of lone parents has not been accurately estimated, it represents a significant minority – between 12 per cent and 50 per cent depending upon the weight given to assertions by about two-fifths of customers following an initial LPWFI that they are interested in working but only at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{37} Repeated LPWFI contact with lone parents remaining on IS will undoubtedly pick

\textsuperscript{34} Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 367 (2006).
\textsuperscript{35} Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 367 (2006).
\textsuperscript{36} Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 367 (2006).
\textsuperscript{37} Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
up some of the remaining potential for movement, particularly if in conjunction with changes in conditionality. However, further increasing the frequency of LPWFIs also presents a possible risk of undermining the effective functioning of the programme as a whole by overcrowding advisers’ time and reducing effective case load practice, which already appears to struggle with lone parents furthest from the labour market.

A further suggested direction for policy has been to increase focus on work with employers and in-work support and incentives with lone parents in order to improve job retention. Care also needs to be taken alongside any such development to facilitate and incentivise appropriate delivery practices. Improving the retention rates among those lone parents who do enter employment has been proposed as one way in which greater gains may be achievable towards the 70 per cent lone parent employment target. Following the lead of some piloted measures, further moves could perhaps also be made to address ‘attitudinal’ constraints through extending influence into the communities and peer groups of lone parents within which their attitudes to work are formed.

^{38} Harker, cm 6591 (2006).
1 Introduction

1.1 Strategic context

Lone parents are a key focus within the Government’s Welfare to Work strategy which aims to promote sustainable employment among those groups facing disadvantage in the labour market. The proportion of families headed by a lone parent rose from fewer than one in ten to almost one in four over the three decades to 2002. Two-thirds of children living in workless households live in lone parent households. Many lone parents are reliant on Income Support (IS) as their primary source of income and have a much higher than average risk of being, and staying, poor. Lone parent families have, therefore, been the subject of a number of government policy targets and goals since 1998, principally:

• a target that 70 per cent of lone parents should be employed within ten years;
• a target to halve child poverty by 2010 and to eliminate it by 2020.

Key elements in the strategy include:

• improving the financial incentive to work primarily through tax credits, though also through piloted measures such as Work Search Premium (WSP) to remove the disincentive of the costs of job search, and In Work Credit (IWC) to encourage and assist lone parents to leave benefits for full time employment;

• increasing work focus in order to translate the latent desire of many lone parents to work into a more immediate and realisable goal (through mandatory Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (LPWFIs) and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP));

• improving job search and skills through NDLP;

• improving childcare availability through the National Childcare Strategy to support work incentives;

• continuing to shift the attitudes of lone parents and employers towards more favourable perceptions of their return to the labour market;

• maintaining strong and sustainable economic growth.
To meet child poverty reduction targets there is an emphasis on the need for jobs to be sustainable and for these to be secured by lone parents who, without an intervention would not have entered employment. The strategy also aims to increase employment rates across the age distribution of children – hence, the progressive roll-out to existing claimants and the extension of LPWFIs to new/repeat claimants with a youngest child aged under five years.

The government remains committed to these targets and refreshed its child poverty strategy in March 2007, outlining additional measures to contribute to the eradication of child poverty. Increased financial support for children and working parents is estimated to lift an additional 200,000 children out of poverty. Working for Children focuses on parental employment as a central element within a strategy of working in partnership with parents, local authorities, private and voluntary sector organisations.

In relation to lone parents, the updated strategy acknowledges that while the employment rate for lone parents rose to 56.5 per cent in 2006, there is still more that needs to be done. It proposes an approach which increases lone parents’ rights and responsibilities in this area. Specific proposals include:

- a change in conditionality for claiming IS from 2008, with a move to a similar benefits conditionality as relates to Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) at the point that a youngest child reaches the age of 12 years (as opposed to 16 years currently);
- different arrangements at this point for carers and those with health problems;
- the extension of IWC to June 2008 and the raising of the credit to £60 per week in London;
- piloting the linking of IWC to adviser support to promote job retention;
- the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots to March 2011 and coverage to the whole of London;
- making key elements of the ND+fLP programme (excluding IWC) available also to coupled parents;
- increasing the amount of maintenance payments that can be retained before affecting benefit levels (from 2010/11).

LPWFIs remain an important element of strategy and will contribute to meeting the 70 per cent employment rate target, through making lone parents aware of the help available to them in getting back to work.

1.2 Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews

Since April 2001, lone parents in receipt of IS have been required to attend mandatory LPWFIs, although NDLP, to which they are intended to lead, remains a voluntary programme. LPWFIs add to the previously existing routes onto NDLP that included self-referral, referral from other agencies, outreach visits and letters of invitation. Between April 2001 and March 2006, a total of 1.76 million initial LPWFIs were booked and 1.62 million attended.  

LPWFIs consist of a face-to-face interview with a Jobcentre Plus adviser at which the lone parent is required to participate in a discussion about the circumstances of their claim, the possibility and benefits of working, their options, intentions and preferences regarding jobs and the difficulties they perceive themselves as facing in getting employment. Interviews also provide the opportunity to inform lone parents about NDLP and about the many and various forms of support available to them both from Jobcentre Plus and the wider tax credit system and to encourage moves towards the labour market.

All lone parents claiming IS are required to attend LPWFIs. New and repeat claimants are informed of this requirement at the time of making a fresh claim for IS. Lone parents who were already in receipt of IS at the start of the LPWI initiative in April 2001 (existing claimants) were informed by letter and called in to interviews on a phased basis.

Under specific circumstances such as terminal illness, an LPWI will be waived. Recent bereavement or serious illness will cause a deferment. Deferments are generally for periods of between three and six months and affect around five per cent of initial LPWFIs and two to three per cent of review meetings.

1.2.1 The LPWFI process

An appointment for an initial LPWFI is made with an adviser, usually at the Jobcentre Plus office closest to the lone parent’s home and a letter sent out with the appointment time and date. Customers who have specific reasons as to why it is difficult for them to attend a meeting at the office may be offered a meeting at their home or, exceptionally, by telephone. Reasons for this can include disability or mobility problems, perhaps combined with a difficult and lengthy travel requirement.

In the case of new and repeat claimants the initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) will take place within a few days of an IS claim being made. The processing of the claim is dependent upon the lone parent participating at a meeting, and failure to attend leads to the claim not being processed. Failure to attend a meeting by existing claimants can lead to benefit sanctions on the lone parent’s personal element of IS.

Under regulations adopted in October 2003, it is the responsibility of the lone parent to make contact with the adviser to rearrange a meeting if they miss an appointment. Cessation of the claim process can be applied at this point to new/repeat claimants if no good cause can be shown for failure to attend. Existing claimants and customers with known mental health issues will receive a home visit before the sanctions process is initiated.

Appointments for LPWFIs are generally set up by district or regional level administrative staff who have access to advisers’ electronic diaries. They are usually not ‘block’ booked but fitted in on the basis of the first available, suitable timeslot. The WFIs are carried out by specialist lone parent advisers.

If a lone parent chooses to be case loaded on NDLP, they will have further regular contact with the adviser (guidelines suggest once a fortnight, though most participants have a relatively small number of face-to-face meetings) and be assisted with all aspects of job preparation, job search and job entry, and offered help with in-work benefits and tax credits. Customers are told that if there is no further contact with the adviser and they continue to claim IS, they will be called to a review meeting.

1.2.2 Types of LPWFIs

LPWFIs fall broadly into two categories: initial LPWFIs and review LPWFIs. Reviews take place at different times after the initial meeting according to whether a lone parent is an existing claimant or a new/repeat claimant, and whether they fall into a recently targeted subgroup according to length of claim and the age of their youngest child.

Following an initial interview, lone parents are required to attend follow-up or review meetings if they continue claiming benefit and do not choose to participate in NDLP. At the start of the initiative, lone parents making a new or repeat claim for IS and existing claimants of IS were all recalled for review a year later if still claiming benefit. From April 2002, policy altered with regards to new and repeat claimants such that they were required to attend a review meeting after six months and annually thereafter. Existing claimants who remained on benefit were required to attend a review meeting twelve months after their initial meeting, and annually thereafter.

More recent changes have seen a further intensification of the frequency of review meetings for lone parents who have been on benefit for at least a year. In Extended Schools Childcare (ESC) pilot areas, lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 years or over were required to attend quarterly review meetings from September 2004 to April 2007 (when the pilots ended). QWFIs are attended by lone parents with a youngest child aged 11-13 in ND+fLP areas. From the end of October 2005, quarterly LPWFIs were extended nationally across all Jobcentre Plus districts for lone parents with a youngest child aged 14 or over. From April 2007, six-monthly WFIs have been introduced for those with a youngest child aged 5-13 years and from April 2008 they will be introduced for those with a youngest child aged 0-4 years.
1.3 Aims of LPWFIs

The premise behind the introduction of LPWFIs is that the majority of lone parents will be better off in paid employment than on benefit. Two-thirds of children living in workless households live in lone parent households. The purpose of LPWFIs is, therefore, to facilitate a movement into paid employment by encouraging the lone parent to seek work, supporting the job search process, informing lone parents of the support available to them, introducing them to Jobcentre Plus services via a personal adviser, and encouraging participation in NDLP.

Review meetings are designed to maintain contact with lone parents who continue to claim IS. They are intended to update lone parents with details of available help and support, and to pick up on any changes of circumstances, attitudes or decisions relevant to considering entry into employment (or to considering an increase in the number of hours worked). An important, and more specific, role of review meetings has been to alert lone parents to the change in benefits conditionality that accompanies their youngest child reaching the age of 16 and to help them to prepare for that transition.

Most lone parents say they would like to work.\textsuperscript{41} LPWFIs, therefore, place emphasis upon reassuring customers that they can work, and helping them to overcome the constraints preventing them from getting work. It is recognized that both working and non-working lone parents face similar numbers and types of constraints, (lack of childcare, distrust of ‘unknown’ carers, lack of skills, financial worries, low morale and self esteem and health issues), and that it is their ability to manage in spite of these difficulties, rather than their complete removal, which is important.

Mandatory meetings are expected to play a vital role in communicating work-related information, in affecting attitudes and expectations about working, and in conjunction with NDLP, in helping to ensure that the whole complex of available support measures work effectively together. The intention is that they will facilitate moves into paid employment by:

- encouraging more lone parents to seek work and supporting them in their efforts to do so; and/or
- encouraging them to take up education and training opportunities aimed at improving their chances of moving into paid employment at some point in the future.

The aims and objectives for mandatory LPWFIs mirror those of the interviews provided for participants who voluntarily self-refer to the NDLP programme.

\textsuperscript{41} Among respondents to the quantitative customer survey of lone parents on IS – Coleman et al. (2003) – only 12\% said they were not interested in working either at the time (12-17 months after an initial LPWFI) or in the future, whereas a further 40\% said that although not looking at the time, they might be interested in doing so in the future.
1.4 NDLP

Although it is possible for a lone parent to go into employment directly from an LPWFI, the more usual route is via NDLP. Increased entry to NDLP is a key outcome objective for LPWFIs. Lone parents who choose to be case loaded on NDLP receive further support from an adviser, including face-to-face voluntary meetings where appropriate.

Participation on the New Deal programme brings access to a wide range of advice, support, incentives and transitional and in-work benefits. The ‘core’ of NDLP provision comprises:

- support and guidance on job search;
- a back-to-work action plan;
- information on Jobcentre Plus programmes and services;
- assistance with education and training programmes and funding;
- help with in-work benefits and tax credits;
- better off calculation (BOC) to show the financial effect of working;
- information on local childcare;
- offer of in-work support;
- financial help with the costs of training courses and interviews.

The package of support provided through NDLP has been amended and added to over the lifetime of the LPWFI initiative, and a number of new measures piloted for inclusion. Key recent changes include the following:

- childcare tasters and childcare chats were available in Extended Schools pilot areas from April 2004 to assist in overcoming lone parent reservations about formal childcare (these pilots have now ended);
- a new £20 per week WSP was introduced in eight pilot areas in October 2004 to incentivise job search behaviour (these pilots have now ended);
- a new £40 per week (for 12 months) IWC has been available in the seven ND+fLP pilot areas since October 2004 to lone parents who have been on IS for a year or more, and is now available in 22 areas and has been extended until June 2008;
- the In Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) has been piloted in ND+fLP pilot areas since October 2004 to provide crisis payments in situations arising during the first 60 days of employment that might otherwise lead to lone parents leaving jobs;
- National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3 training provision in childcare was available on a pilot basis at this time (but has since ceased);
Childcare Assist (CA) has been available nationally since April 2005 to provide a week of ‘familiarising’ childcare prior to a lone parent starting a job.

1.5 Summary of the roll-out of LPWFIs

Mandatory LPWFIs were introduced in April 2001 for all lone parents making new or repeat claims for IS whose youngest child was aged at least five years and three months, and for lone parents already in receipt of IS on a phased basis, according to the age of their youngest child and the length of their IS claim (those with longer claims being called first within each group).

In 2003/04, those with a youngest child aged from five to eight years were included, and from April 2004 LPWFIs were extended to existing claimants with children aged 0-5 years. Initial LPWFIs and subsequent review meetings, were progressively rolled out, up to 2003, for lone parents claiming IS, as follows:

- national introduction in April 2001 of a single LPWFI for new and repeat claimants with a youngest child aged over five years and three months, and existing claimants with a youngest child aged 13-15 years;
- roll-out from April 2002 to new/repeat customers with a youngest child aged three and above and to existing customers with a youngest child aged 9-12 years;
- LPWFIs extended from April 2003 to new/repeat customers with a youngest child aged under three years and to existing claimants with a youngest child aged between five years and three months and eight years;
- LPWFIs extended from April 2004 to existing claimants with a youngest child under five completing the roll-out to all lone parents claiming IS.

Recent years have also seen an increased requirement for review meetings, constituting a greater frequency and intensity of contact with lone parents who remain on benefits for 12 months or more (see Section 1.2.2).

1.6 Aims of the Synthesis Report

Since the inception of LPWFIs in April 2001 they have been subject to extensive evaluation through a number of research strands, both qualitative and quantitative. Findings from the evaluation of the first 18 months of the initiative were reported both separately and within an integrated report that presented an overview of all the available evidence at that stage.\(^{42}\) This forms the effective ‘baseline’ for this synthesis report which looks at research findings published between 2003 and 2007. Two synthesis reports on NDLP evaluation findings were also produced, the second of which was published in 2003.\(^{43}\) These provided the broader background

\(^{42}\) Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 184 (2004).

of research work about lone parents against which the LPWFIs initiative was undertaken. A full list of the research reports on which this synthesis draws can be found in the References.

It is important to note that the research findings synthesised in this report were based on work undertaken between 2002 and October 2006 and indeed, a great deal of the evidence relates to the earlier rather than later years of LPWFIs. Some of the effects of changes made over the years will, therefore, not be reflected here. For example, the report cannot take account of the effects of the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus Standard Organisational Model recently introduced. This model has strengthened advisory management with the introduction of Advisory Service Managers with the remit of improving quality and productivity of services and ensuring a consistent approach to recording.

Insite Research and Consulting was commissioned to update the integrated reporting on LPWFIs. The aims of the synthesis report are to bring together and synthesise all findings including those relating to small scale changes to delivery and provision in recent years that have been implemented to try to make further improvements to an already successful programme. Recent research has included consideration of:

- sub-groups of lone parents that have become newly eligible for LPWFIs\(^{44}\);
- evaluation of review meetings\(^{45}\);
- evaluation of measures under ND+fLP and Extended Schools Childcare pilots\(^{46}\);
- changes and additions made to the support package available to lone parents and delivered through LPWFIs (and NDLP).\(^{47}\)

Within the parameters of the research questions underlying the evaluation programme, the aims of this synthesis report are to:

- bring together all research evidence on LPWFIs for reference within a single document;
- capture any significant additions or changes to the assessment of LPWFIs as presented by previous reports;


• update the information available to Ministers and policy makers concerning the implementation of LPWFIs;

• interpret recent findings in the light of previous understanding and in conjunction with other research to help inform future policy development.
2 Engaging lone parents

Lone parents constitute a broad and disparate group with many other defining characteristics over and above being lone parents, which determine their options and priorities. Different types of difficulties and constraints exist for different lone parents at each stage of the Lone Parent Work Focused Interview (LPWFI) process, from initial attendance through decision-making about employment options, to engaging with support and moving into work. For each customer the approach, content, timing and frequency of meetings is important, and advisers are crucial to the success of the process.\(^\text{48}\)

2.1 Securing LPWFI attendance

Securing attendance at an LPWFI is largely an administrative procedure, although a more proactive approach by advisers has occasionally been successfully adopted involving a variety of additional contacts and reminders by telephone or personalised letter.

There has been resistance among some lone parents to attending LPWFIs. This has primarily been among existing longer-term claimants who have seen them as irrelevant or inappropriate to their circumstances, either because they feel unable to consider working, due to sickness, disability or caring responsibilities or have made the conscious choice not to do so while they have children to look after.

Attitudes among new and repeat claimants to having to participate in LPWFIs were generally more accepting. Many saw it as a routine and necessary part of making a claim and, while not having any particular expectations or strong feelings about it, were untroubled about having to attend. The fact that an Income Support (IS) claim can be terminated if a new/repeat claimant fails to attend an initial LPWFI provides a very strong incentive for customers to comply. Those relatively small numbers who do fail to attend a first appointment tend to give as reasons: difficulties with travel (especially in rural areas) and clashes with other urgent matters. These generally relate to the circumstances that have led to their benefit claim, rather than any specific resistance to the idea of discussing future work options.

In the early months of the initiative, administrative difficulties were caused in some areas by high failure to attend (FTA) rates, especially among existing claimants. Policy regarding FTA changed in October 2003 to address this problem, placing the onus upon the lone parent to ensure attendance after one missed appointment.

Failure to attend appeared to contribute to a view among advisers of existing claimants as ‘difficult’, ‘reluctant’ and ‘time-consuming’. There was some indication that this labelling, in turn, led to a pre-judging of customers in some cases, such that their meetings, when they did take place, were short and formulaic with little attempt made to explore, challenge or persuade. Accounts from lone parents of meetings they felt were inadequate suggested a degree of missed opportunity as a result.\(^{49}\)

A number of areas reported surprisingly high levels of FTA at six-month review LPWFIs by new/repeat claimants who were not looking for work and who felt the six month interval to be too short because their circumstances had not changed since their initial LPWFI.\(^ {50}\) Most customers, however, reported feeling more relaxed and more willing to attend a review meeting after having had a positive experience at their initial LPWFI.

These differences in responses by existing claimants and by new/repeat claimants signalled early on in the initiative that the two subgroups of lone parents were in many ways systematically different from one another in their characteristics and frequently required separate evaluation.

Additional, ring-fenced advisory and administrative staff resources have been made available to the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots and judged to have been ‘pivotal’ to effective delivery. In particular, additional administrative resource has allowed advisers to focus on better quality dialogue with lone parents.\(^{51}\) Claims have also been made, in some districts, of falls in FTA rates following additional administrative checks and chase-up telephone calls.

### 2.1.1 Sanctioning

The bulk of evaluation evidence relates to lone parents who were participants in LPWFIs. For this reason there is little or no direct information available about the views, motivations and perceptions of lone parents who, despite having adviser meeting appointments made for them, subsequently failed to attend all those appointments. Regulations allow for home visits following FTA LPWFIs.

---


\(^{50}\) Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 178 (2003).

\(^{51}\) Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).
These were initially conducted by advisers but the role, where it is carried out, has since fallen to benefits home visiting officers.

Since the tightening of regulations regarding FTA LPWFIs in 2003 there has been an increase in the number of sanctions applied (by removal of up to 20 per cent of the personal element of IS). The number of sanctions has continued to rise each year, and the total at March 2006 stood at 39,920, although this remains less than five per cent of the number of initial LPWFIs booked.\(^{52}\)

2.2 Creating trust and rapport

Advisers place considerable emphasis upon the importance of building a relationship of trust and creating a rapport with customers that will facilitate the communication of key information, allow them to identify and respond to indications of willingness and intent to work at some time in the future and to identify needs to be addressed. Creating a good rapport with customers is seen as crucial in encouraging them to return for help and advice in the future even if they are not ready to join the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) immediately.\(^{53}\) There is much evidence that advisers have been successful in this regard. Lone parents have been broadly very positive about the way their LPWFIs have been handled and have had much praise for their advisers.

The role of the adviser in the way meetings are conducted is crucial to their success. Advisers assert that effective meetings are based on an ability to observe and listen closely to customers and to pick up on ‘clues’ in their manner and comments as to how far, how fast and to what depth of detail to pursue matters. Guidance as to what should be covered in meetings is broadly followed but is adapted to individual circumstances. Lone parents who say they do not wish to work tend to have shorter meetings. Judgements are frequently required to be made in relation both to customers’ fundamental beliefs and attitudes, and to their receptiveness to information and persuasion at a time when many are experiencing personal difficulties that need careful and sensitive handling.

Lone parents have responded positively to the approach adopted and much praise has been expressed for both the sensitivity and supportiveness of advisers. The majority of customers wish to see the same adviser if they have subsequent meetings or make further contact with the Jobcentre Plus office.

Over a third (36 per cent) of respondents to the participants’ survey\(^{54}\) found their initial meeting to have been ‘very helpful’ and a further similar proportion (37 per cent) found it ‘quite helpful’. The remaining quarter of respondents found it either ‘not very helpful’ (16 per cent) or ‘not at all helpful’ (ten per cent). There were no significant differences between stock and new/repeat claimants in these responses, though among those who had a Better Off Calculation (BOC) carried

---

\(^{52}\) Parliamentary Questions: Written answers, 19 April 2007.


\(^{54}\) Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
out, there was some correlation between the result obtained and the customer's view of how useful the meeting had been. For further evidence relating to BOCs see Section 4.4.6.

Those who were already looking for work at the time of the meeting were more likely to rate it as being ‘very helpful’ than those not in work nor looking for work, whereas negative responses to LPWFIs came primarily from lone parents who did not have immediate work aspirations or who perceived themselves to have essentially insurmountable problems preventing them from working, such as severe health problems and caring responsibilities. Some lone parents reported having their hopes and expectations regarding work raised but then disappointed by their meeting with an adviser.

2.3 The content of LPWFIs

Some LPWFIs are clearly more work-focused than others. In many cases, for example, advisers may respond to customer needs and decide to spend much of the meeting dealing with benefits issues and other practical problems in order to ‘clear the ground’ for work-focused discussion, perhaps at a future meeting or review. Overall, 43 per cent of respondents to the survey of participants said they had discussed their IS claim and 30 per cent had discussed other benefits. Despite this, 87 per cent of LPWFIs were described as being work-focused.55

Within Jobcentre Plus the distinction between assistance with benefits eligibility and processing and the LPWFI has been formalised. All new benefits claimants now see a financial assessor separately from a personal adviser, which should ensure that LPWFIs do not concentrate on benefit issues.

On average, initial LPWFIs are quite short and general in content. The original planning assumption was that meetings would take up to one hour, and appointments were initially booked on this basis. In practice the average length of meetings was just under 30 minutes, though they can range from less than ten minutes to over an hour.

Most meetings (87 per cent) have a work focus to them. Over half (56 per cent) of respondents to the participants’ survey (and 65 per cent of male lone parents) said they discussed ways of finding work, including CV writing, looking at vacancies and building up skills. Training was talked about by 51 per cent of all respondents, and by 56 per cent of those in the younger age bracket (25-35 years), though only half this number (25 per cent) discussed the childcare costs they could receive when on a training course.

55 Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003). ‘Work-focused’ is defined as a meeting in which there was some discussion of at least one of the following: ways of finding work; training and education; types of jobs/particular jobs; NDLP; in-work benefits.
The same participants’ survey\textsuperscript{56} found that half (49 per cent) of lone parents, both existing and new/repeat claimants, explicitly discussed NDLP at their LPWFI and of these 37 per cent discussed whether it was appropriate for them to enter the programme. Whilst advisers were not explicitly inviting lone parents to join NDLP in every case, this did not mean they were not inviting customers to take up the services and provision under NDLP, merely that they did not use the NDLP brand in every case. Advisers were using NDLP as intended to move lone parents closer to the labour market and into work. Just over a third discussed childcare arrangements if they were to work or enter training. A BOC or In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) was carried out in 30 per cent of cases (one-third of stock claimants and one-quarter of flow claimants). The most likely to have a calculation were those looking for work at the time of their initial LPWFI (40 per cent).

Mandatory Action Plans (MAPs) have been introduced on a national basis, and are currently a required element of LPWFIs. Advisers report some improvement in continuity of information as a result.\textsuperscript{57}

### 2.4 Timing and frequency of meetings

#### 2.4.1 Initial LPWFIs

The responses of lone parents to having to attend a mandatory LPWFI strongly suggest that the degree to which LPWFIs are able to be effective depends, in large part, on their timing in relation to events and circumstances in people’s lives.\textsuperscript{58} There are some possible ‘trigger’ points for action towards working, such as events relating to the ages of children and entry points to primary and secondary school, which can be anticipated and worked with. However, most factors lie in the details of personal lives and cannot be readily identified in advance. Chance plays a considerable role in deciding whether meetings fall at auspicious moments for lone parents. There is only a limited amount that can be ‘programmed’ in, especially for existing claimants.

The main exception to this general picture is the over-riding importance of the moment of making a new or repeat claim. Not only is this the pre-eminently identifiable administrative moment, but it will have been occasioned by and coincide with major events in customers’ lives, that play a key role in their subsequent decision-making. The period following the point of making a claim is also a period of rapid and significant change in many customers’ lives, and places a spotlight on the questions of when and how often further LPWFIs should be undertaken. The proximity of an initial LPWFI to the time of making a benefit claim marks one

\textsuperscript{56} Coleman \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).

\textsuperscript{57} Thomas \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 319 (2006).

\textsuperscript{58} Thomas \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 166 (2003).
of the key differences between the LPWFI experiences of existing claimants and new/repeat claimants.\textsuperscript{59}

In spite of the difficulties around customers being frequently preoccupied with priorities other than work at the time of making a claim for IS, the majority of advisers feel that an early initial meeting, prior to benefit processing, is the right timing for an LPWFI for new/repeat claimant lone parents. It was seen as crucial in mobilising those customers who were immediately ready and willing to work.\textsuperscript{60}

With other customers it was considered to be a good time to establish contact and build rapport. It was also seen as successful in establishing an immediate connection in lone parents' minds between claiming benefit and seeking work.

As might be expected, surveyed customers were divided in their opinions as to the optimum timing of an initial meeting but a majority (52 per cent) said they felt it was the right time for them to be talking about work and training and 65 per cent felt it was useful to have met an adviser at that time. The main factor affecting responses was whether customers were looking for work at the time of the meeting. Three-quarters (75 per cent) of lone parents who were looking for work thought the timing of their LPWFI was right.

Customers with a health problem or disability were less likely than average to think the timing was right. New/repeat claimants were more likely to say that they could not see the point of the meeting. This may reflect the fact that some were making what they saw as a short-term claim and therefore, did not think an LPWFI was necessary.

\subsection*{2.4.2 Twelve month review LPWFIs}

The question of optimum timing of subsequent LPWFIs (review meetings) has provoked a more mixed set of responses.\textsuperscript{61}

Twelve months is considered by most advisers to be a reasonable interval before a mandatory review meeting for existing claimants whose circumstances are felt often to change little in this time. Some advisers suggested a longer delay and a monitoring process of some kind (perhaps telephone contact) to ascertain whether there are new circumstances, needs or aspirations to be discussed.

Annual review meetings for existing claimants are sometimes reported as being no more than repetitions of the initial LPWFI. A number of advisers admitted to feelings of awkwardness about the process when circumstances remain constant.

\textsuperscript{59} It should be noted that the processing of the stock of existing claimants at April 2001 was completed in March 2006, by which time all existing claimants had participated in an initial LPWFI. From this date all initial LPWFIs will have been with new/repeat claimants.

\textsuperscript{60} Thomas \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 319 (2006).

and the passing of time has not brought any new information or support incentives into play. Most felt it difficult to conduct annual reviews in a way which genuinely builds upon the contact 12 months earlier. Existing claimants were more likely to report that they found their review ‘much shorter’, ‘less detailed’ and less productive than their first LPWFI.

The very fact of a review being a second meeting with an adviser makes many lone parents feel it to be more productive than their original LPWFI. Customers often reported feeling better able to take an active role at an annual review because they know what to expect and have specific questions to ask and interests to pursue. Advisers report many customers to be more receptive to information at a review, and more open to argument and persuasion.

**2.4.3 Six month review LPWFIs**

Experience with new/repeat claimants showed that for these lone parents circumstances could, and often did, change very quickly. For this reason, more regular review meetings were seen as appropriate and most advisers felt that six months was the better interval. Where opinions differ they tend to be in favour of shorter intervals for new/repeat claimants.

For new/repeat claimants, a review meeting is often longer and more detailed than their initial LPWFI, and they are more likely to report the review as having been the more useful of the two. Review LPWFIs tend to be more clearly work-focused than initial meetings, with advisers targeting selected aspects of customers’ circumstances as they see fit. Advisers like to be able to introduce new elements of information and advice at review meetings, which have not been covered or were not available or applicable at the first meeting. Rather than feeling they have to cover all the ground with everyone, advisers look to identify quickly the area in which they might have the greatest impact, identifying ‘blockages’ and working intensely with lone parents around that particular issue, whether it is challenging ideas that work could never pay, addressing problems of self-confidence, or simply providing an updated BOC.

Mandatory six-monthly review meetings were introduced from April 2002 for all new/repeat claimants of IS who remained on benefit and advisers were generally positive about this timing. A six-month interval for new/repeat claimants was seen as providing less time to ‘settle in’ to a life on benefit, but allowing sufficient time for customers to progress beyond the problems surrounding their claim. It was also seen as preventing any dissipation of momentum from a first LPWFI and reinforcing the notion of LPWFIs as part of an ongoing process of customer contact.

Customers have mixed feelings about the six-month review, though most find it useful. Those with the most positive views include: those closest to the labour market; those with aspirations to work in the short and medium term; and those approaching key ‘moments of opportunity’ such as children starting full-time
schooling or turning 16 years of age. Those holding negative views of the six-month review are predominantly those facing multiple problems in considering work, including serious or long-term health problems and caring responsibilities for more than two children.\textsuperscript{62}

The fact that IS claimants become eligible for a number of additional support measures and benefit run-ons after six months of a claim\textsuperscript{63} is seen by advisers to enhance and give purpose to six-month reviews, making them easier to deliver and less likely to run the risk of a mere repetition of initial meetings. Six-month reviews tend to be strongly work focused and purposeful and are seen by advisers as a good opportunity for motivating customers whose circumstances have often changed relatively quickly in the months following their IS claim.

Most advisers actively case load all lone parents who express an interest in either work or training at review LPWFIs, with an emphasis on re-contact within weeks—something often not possible at initial LPWFIs. The main difficulties advisers report with six-month reviews are with customers who have serious health problems. In these cases many advisers say they would like greater discretion over making deferrals to review meetings in a greater number of cases.

In some areas proactive measures have been taken to contact selected customers prior to a six-monthly review. Lone parents judged to be likely to give work serious consideration before this time (though not ready to do so at the initial meeting) are contacted after two to three months, reportedly with good levels of success in case loading them onto NDLP. In most areas, however, the knowledge that contact will be made automatically at six months means that such additional activity is not carried out, to avoid adding further stress to adviser workloads perceived as already under strain.

LPWFIs and reviews are frequently seen by advisers as constituting a long-term process with the initial meeting more as a starting point for the LPWFI process (‘planting the seeds’) than an opportunity for immediately working on changing lone parents’ attitudes and intentions regarding work.

For this reason more frequent contact, especially with new claimants, is seen by many as a way of minimising the chance element in the best timing of LPWFIs and


\textsuperscript{63} After a continuous IS claim period of 26 weeks lone parents become eligible to receive the following additional support: Lone Parent Run On (LPRO) of two weeks benefit after starting work, even though in paid employment; Housing Benefit Run On (HBRO) which will pay their rent/council tax for the first four weeks they are in work provided they were entitled to Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit before starting work; Mortgage Interest Run On (MIRO) which will pay their mortgage interest/housing cost elements for the first four weeks they are in work provided they were entitled before starting work.
preventing the development of benefit dependency. Indeed, the precise timing of reviews is seen as less important as long as contact is maintained.

If, however, a claim is due to redundancy, or the lone parent has left a job for other reasons, advisers are anxious not to lose any work momentum they might have. Lone parents with very recent experience of the labour market are more likely to have additional contact immediately after their initial LPWFI.

2.4.4 Quarterly WFs

There is widespread recognition that a degree of flexibility is required with the lone parent customer group to meet the diversity of their needs. Although advisers believe that for the majority of customers better outcomes result from more frequent contact, pressures on adviser time were seen to put limits on this in practice. The conducting of quarterly work focused interviews (QWFIs) for lone parents with older children, along with efforts at More frequent Voluntary Contact (MVC) supported by additional administrative resources, has been carried out under ND+fLP. However, initial qualitative evaluation of these measures has not indicated major gains in effectiveness, and advisers’ expectations of success with more frequent LPWFIs may not have been borne out in practice.64

To date there are no available quantitative data on the effectiveness of QWFIs. Qualitative evaluations that have included consideration of QWFIs for lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 and over report the feeling among advisers that while they are working to some effect with the lone parents of children aged 14-16 years and approaching an enforced switch to JSA, they are only effective for certain customer groups.

Advisers delivering QWFIs had mixed views as to their utility and many expressed the wish for greater flexibility over how frequently they saw lone parents, and more say in deferring meetings for customers ‘unable or unwilling to work in the foreseeable future’. The high FTA rates being experienced with QWFIs may lend some weight to these adviser opinions. QWFIs were perceived to be most effective with participants with older children who were already or were becoming, receptive to work and least effective for those furthest from the labour market, from whom they perceived diminishing returns. QWFIs for lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 were felt to be too far removed from the IS cut-off at 16 to be particularly effective.65

Some ‘push’ effect from QWFIs was acknowledged for lone parents who had started to think about work and they were seen to have helped in signposting these customers to work preparation. However, QWFIs were judged to have had little impact on work receptiveness and not to be effectively engaging those who

were unreceptive to the idea of work, or who had more challenging employment constraints.

Impact assessments of the pilots which include QWFIs report overall small, positive impacts after 12-24 months on the number of lone parents in work and no longer receiving out-of-work benefits. However, it is not possible to make a separate assessment of the contribution that QWFIs make to this impact, and it is further suggested that impacts will be predominantly accounted for by the impact of IWC payments.

Despite much appreciated increased adviser resource and administrative support in the ND+fLP areas (described as ‘pivotal’ to pilot success), the numbers of QWFIs being booked has led to the re-emergence of accusations that LPWFI workloads are affecting case load activity and leading to a tension between quality of engagement and the pressures of fitting large volumes of interviews into diaries. Observed adviser activity has shown that their time could be very “fractured”, making it difficult to accommodate dedicated tasks and that very full adviser diaries could lead to loss of momentum with case loaded customers due to lengthy time delays to follow up meetings.\(^{66}\) LPWFI effectiveness was clearly affected by many different factors of which frequency (even targeted frequency) was merely one.

---

\(^{66}\) Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).
3 Changing lone parents’ attitudes

One aim of the Lone Parent Work Focused Interview (LPWFI)/New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programme is to influence lone parents’ attitudes to working and their perceptions of the help available through Jobcentre Plus. Whilst there is much evidence to suggest considerable success in the latter objective, the same cannot be said in relation to changing lone parents’ fundamental attitudes to working.

3.1 Attitudes to childrearing and parental responsibility

A majority of LPWFI customers say that having participated in an LPWFI has not affected their attitude to work, and fundamental attitudes to childrearing and parental responsibility lie behind much of this observed ‘inertia’. New/repeat claimants are more likely than existing claimants to say that their initial LPWFI has not affected their attitude to work. In their case it appears that in addition to such basic attitudes that predispose some not to work, are added a significant number of lone parents who have already decided they will go to work, and a further number for whom the trauma and disruption surrounding the circumstances of their claim start has meant that their initial LPWFI has been primarily concerned with addressing short-term issues of financial and personal well-being rather than a work-related agenda.

Greater impact upon work attitudes has been expressed by some existing claimants, though frequently for them, the determining factors in whether they pursue employment or not lie primarily in objective difficulties such as ill-health or caring responsibilities or in poor and outdated knowledge of support and tax credit opportunities rather than in set attitudes regarding working or not working.

3.2 Attitudes to Jobcentre Plus

While LPWFIs successfully influence many lone parents’ views of Jobcentre Plus in a positive direction and encourage the use of its resources for help and advice, they are a less effective vehicle for challenging or changing deep rooted attitudes about work. LPWFIs have largely responded to lone parents who have already decided they want to work, rather than persuaded customers to seek work who previously had not wanted to.

3.3 Work orientation

Advisers are particularly reticent in challenging work orientations they perceive as based on strong cultural values. Pettigrew (2003) has revealed that different ethnic groups have different perceptions of work that advisers need to be aware of. For example, whereas a strong work ethic exists among many Black African and Afro-Caribbean lone parents, the same is not true in some Asian cultures where the idea of mothers working is held by many to be socially unacceptable.

In practice, advisers class lone parents into three groups:

- those committed to working;
- those unable or unwilling to work;
- those on the ‘border’ of working.

As a ‘work first’ initiative LPWFI and NDLP responds effectively to those who are already committed to work, but makes little headway with the unwilling. Lone parents in the third category, on the ‘border’ of working, are potentially persuadable of the benefits to themselves and their children of entering employment but require more intense and extensive input of advice and support. The additionality for LPWFI in terms of exits from benefits is likely to have come primarily from this third group, and appears, from impact analysis, to be mostly from among existing claimants (see Table 5.4).

3.4 Attitudinal barriers

It is particularly difficult to evaluate the effect and impact of LPWFIs on the ‘attitudinal barriers’ which some lone parents have in relation to work. A work focused interview (WFI) alone appears to be able to have only a very modest effect. Certain aspects of advice and support in conjunction with financial incentives have been seen as more powerful, though for many of these to have their desired effect requires a lone parent first to undergo a change in their basic attitude to working.
Qualitative evaluation of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP)\textsuperscript{68} concludes that the package in these pilots ‘works best for those lone parents who are more job-ready or who are undecided,’ but places the emphasis on financial incentives for any persuasive effect that might tip the balance in decisions about work, rather than on LPWFIs, Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) or pre-employment measures such as Childcare Assist. Impact analysis of pilots, which include consideration of ND+fLP and QWFIs for some lone parents, has been even more sanguine about the net impact of LPWFIs. Although it suggests the pilot package as a whole has ‘sustained job outcomes that would otherwise have dipped’ it states that ‘the main achievement of the pilots was to make better off those lone parents who would have left benefits for work had the pilots not been in operation, rather than to encourage substantially more lone parents to do just that.’ Financial work incentives such as In Work Credit (IWC) were felt to provide some persuasive leverage, although indications of a possible lack of knowledge about IWC among lone parents who had not yet decided to look for work suggests that this leverage is perhaps not being obtained early in the LPWFI process, or prior to participation on NDLP.

The tendency for LPWFI as a work-first programme to concentrate on the ‘job ready’ and the ‘work willing’ has thus, accentuated its weakness in changing attitudes. For example, elements designed to motivate and incentivise moves to work such as WSP were found, especially early in pilots,\textsuperscript{69} to have been used instead as ‘rewards’ for lone parents already committed to seeking work and engaged in the process. The qualitative evaluation of WSP noted that ‘all participants said that they had decided to look for work prior to finding out about WSP, and some were already job-searching.’ Impact was seen to be on intensifying existing work-related behaviour such as job search, and providing greater structure to it, rather than on changing attitudes to working, per se. Increased uptake of these measures (under explicit encouragement from management) may indicate that with time adviser behaviour is changing in this regard.

Lone parents’ attitudes to working, therefore, appear to have proven difficult to change through the LPWFI process, and some of the more potentially persuasive elements available to advisers under NDLP cannot, in any case, be brought to bear if initial resistance to participation prevents lone parents from making the transition to New Deal. A recent qualitative report\textsuperscript{70} looking at this issue found non-participation in NDLP to be the result of multiple and overlapping factors, but separated out those more fixed and apparently insurmountable ones from those more amenable to challenge and persuasion. In addition to certain types of personal circumstances, such as unstable family situations, it found that in the former category were key basic attitudes to parenthood and priorities for child caring that were described as ‘non-negotiable’. Lone parents found to be more open to the programme were those facing essentially practical issues such as transport problems, financial difficulties and lack of skills and qualifications.

\textsuperscript{68} Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).
\textsuperscript{69} Brewer et al., DWP Research Report No. 415 (2007).
\textsuperscript{70} Brown et al., DWP Research Report No. 408 (2007).
While some of these factors can in theory be addressed through NDLP, evidence from elsewhere\textsuperscript{71} suggests that in many cases they are not dealt with sufficiently to move lone parents on from NDLP into employment, in spite of the support and incentives available.

\textsuperscript{71} Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 368 (2006).
4 Moving lone parents closer to the labour market

Helping customers who are at some distance from the labour market to move closer to the point at which employment becomes viable, attractive and realistic, is perhaps the most difficult of the Lone Parent Work Focused Interview (LPWFI) objectives to assess. It is a relatively long-term process. In the absence of any established measures of distance travelled it also lacks any clearly defined ‘end-product’. Evidence in respect of this objective is therefore primarily to be sought in customers’ perceptions.

In October 2006 the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) was introduced for use by advisers during interviews to help them assess how close a customer is to the labour market and to identify where the focus of support is therefore required to be.

4.1 Enhancing motivation

Many participants in LPWFIs felt that an important outcome from their initial meeting had been that it had provided them with the motivation to explore their options for working and provided the opportunity to think through the constraints they faced. Around a third (33 per cent) of respondents to the participants’ survey\(^\text{72}\) indicated that the meeting had increased their motivation to find paid work and the same proportion said it made them feel more hopeful for the future. However, half of all customers said that it had made no difference to how they felt, and this was the response of two-thirds (66 per cent) of those not working or wishing to work.

Many lone parents attributed an enhanced self-confidence and optimism about their working future to the support, help and information provided by their adviser. Existing long-term claimants in particular identified a key benefit as being ‘given a push’ or ‘nudged’ in the direction of work which might not have come from

\(^{72}\) Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
anywhere else. Knowing that the adviser would be there to help if needed in the future was mentioned by several as the greatest benefit they had derived from their meeting. Exposure to the new physical environment of Jobcentre Plus offices (often in contrast to their previous experience of Jobcentres) was also said by many to have contributed to their positive views of their LPWFIs.\textsuperscript{73}

Revisiting interviewees a year later indicated that this boost in motivation had indeed resulted in positive action in a large proportion of cases. A majority of those who said they had been motivated by their initial meeting went on to enter employment. Many of them entered work earlier than they had originally expected to do. The positive motivational effect of LPWFIs appeared to have been particularly marked for existing claimants, who were more likely than other customers to have initially seen a lack of self-confidence as a major issue or constraint for them.

Groups of lone parents most motivated by their LPWFI appeared to come from opposite ends of the spectrum: younger customers already looking for work at the time of the meeting; and older existing claimants out of the labour market for a relatively long time and lacking in confidence.

Lack of motivation and self-confidence were viewed by advisers as being key factors affecting lone parents’ attitudes to work and both customers and advisers said that LPWFIs were useful in this regard. The low number of referrals to motivational courses reflected advisers’ perception of their own pivotal role within the LPWFI in tackling these issues. Strategies included developing empathy with the lone parent and providing visible support in taking steps towards work or training. Moving lone parents successfully through self-confidence and motivation thresholds may go some way to explaining LPWFI successes with longer-term existing claimants amongst which the programme appears to get good measures of additionality in terms of movement onto NDLP.\textsuperscript{74}

The ND+fLP pilots have been furthering the concept of Discovery Events, which consist of a package to raise confidence, increase motivation and positively influence attitudes to work, which initial evaluations suggest have been quite successful. In Discovery Events, and in general adviser support, the non-financial benefits of working are also highlighted which can help make work seem less daunting.

### 4.2 Training

Although LPWFI is a ‘work first’ initiative, a number of those saying their LPWFI had motivated them went on to undertake training. For a small number of customers with disabilities or health problems the LPWFI played an important role in increasing self-confidence and raising their optimism with regard to their perceived limitations.

\textsuperscript{73} Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 166 (2003).

\textsuperscript{74} Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 184 (2004).
Training was reported to have been talked about at LPWFIs by half (51 per cent) of all respondents to the participant survey, most frequently with younger lone parents (aged between 25 and 34 years old). Discussions varied greatly in specificity, but half these instances (25 per cent) included discussion of the help that could be provided to cover childcare costs while on a training course. Training was somewhat less likely to be discussed at review meetings. Advisers admitted that the likelihood of discussing training with a customer depended, to a degree, on the level of knowledge that they (the adviser) had about local training opportunities in any particular field.

The great majority of training undertaken following LPWFIs was in the areas of computing and IT and basic skills. Other occupational areas included childminding, teaching and healthcare. A number of lone parents had undertaken higher level educational courses and degrees which they had not accessed via NDLP. Full training outcomes were generally too long-term to have been captured in the evaluation. Less than ten per cent of those in the participant survey had stopped their training by the time of their second interview. In broad terms, training courses at more skilled levels, and training undertaken with very clear and specific ideas as to where it would lead, were most successful in moving people into work within the timescale of approximately a year. Many courses were at a basic level of skills and were likely to be only a first step towards greater employability.

### 4.2.1 Training Premium

Uptake of the enhanced Training Premium (TP) under NDLP has been very low nationally and has not been given a high profile by advisers. Some concern was expressed that it could lead to provision-led and provider-driven demand for training that would not be linked to proper action plans and have little realistic connection with future employment prospects. Where the premium has been used by advisers and integrated within work-targeted action plans, levels of subsequent job entry appear to be high. Most recipients of the TP viewed it as a ‘bonus’, but found the extra money particularly useful for paying for transport and other costs.

### 4.2.2 Work placements

A small number of lone parents had undertaken unpaid work placements, some (but not all) with voluntary organisations. On the basis of a very small qualitative sample, these placements appeared to be highly likely to lead on to paid employment. Advisers were reported to be supportive of voluntary work decisions made by lone parents, and in a few cases to have been instrumental in setting them up. However, voluntary work activity was generally the result of clear ideas from customers as to what they wished to do and a strong determination to follow what was often a longer-term career goal rather than to take the first job that might be available.

---

4.2.3 Restricted training opportunities

Over time the provision of training has become more problematic as greater emphasis has been placed on jobs first. Courses available appear better suited to lone parents who are more job ready and have existing skills. The raised expectations of those further from the labour market may not be being met. Combined with a high level awareness amongst advisers that initiating training entails a much longer period of preparation for work, an increased workload because of the set-up and monitoring required and delays in any job outcome, training as a whole under NDLP appears to be decreasing.

Additionally, although there has been an increase in training provision with flexible hours there appears to be a shortage of training opportunities with enough flexibility to meet the manifold needs of lone parents. Processing flexible provision under the ND+fLP pilots has been seen as complex and time consuming by advisers who have been deterred from making full use of this resource. There have been particular problems with the lack of suitable English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses for lone parents from ethnic minorities, access to which constitutes an important stepping-stone towards work. Other issues restricting access to training opportunities have included travelling time and distance, poor coordination between advisers and providers and reductions in the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF).

However, the development of NVQ3 for up to two years that was piloted from 2004 (and has since ceased) was seen as meeting important demand from both lone parents and employers. In some districts there were already good job outcomes from such training, reinforcing earlier findings that training at higher skill levels could be more successful at moving lone parents into work than basic training alone. However, these successes were considered relevant to a small minority of lone parents and not the ‘mainstream’.

4.3 Part time working

There have been mixed messages from advisers regarding work of less than 16 hours per week. They recognise that a modest number of hours working can serve a useful purpose in reacquainting lone parents with the world of work, overcoming a lack of self-confidence or fitting around other commitments and priorities. However, because such hours mean that a lone parent remains on Income Support (IS), and because the offset rules mean they cannot be better off by more than £20 from working, many advisers are reluctant to pursue this as an option with most customers. This reluctance on the part of advisers and the fact that for many lone parents the better off margin of £20 is an insufficient incentive.

---

to start work has been suggested as one reason for the very low levels of take-up of the Childcare Subsidy available to those working fewer part-time hours.\(^{81}\)

There appear to be two groups of lone parents with whom advisers are happier to suggest working less than 16 hours as an option, than with other customers. One is existing customers who have been out of the labour market for several years and do not feel ready to jump directly into full-time work. The other is lone parents with very young children (aged between three years and five years and three months) for whom the first priority is to be at home before and after school/nursery hours.\(^{82}\) In each case the demand for work of very restricted hours comes from customers. Advisers are happy to go along with these needs on the understanding that it is a ‘half-way house’ and encourage customers to think about extending their work hours in the future as their circumstances change or their confidence grows.

Research with lone parents of children aged three years to five years and three months found a predominance of low part-time hours (an average of around 11 hours per week) among those who started work within eight to ten months of their LPWFI.\(^{83}\) There was no indication from these customers that they were gradually increasing their hours. Expectations were for a ‘step-change’ to full-time working at some point in the future, though many did not expect this to happen within the next year or two.

4.4 Overcoming lone parents’ obstacles to work

4.4.1 Identified constraints to working

Evaluation has confirmed that in helping lone parents into work, advisers are faced with a range of perceived constraints, some of which are harder to overcome than others. Difficulties cited by both existing and new/repeat claimants include: health problems/disabilities; and availability/cost of suitable childcare. In addition to these, new/repeat claimants frequently mention labour market constraints such as a paucity of local jobs and a lack of jobs with suitable and sufficiently flexible hours. Existing claimants perceive age discrimination by employers to be a problem, as well as their own lack of confidence.

A majority of lone parents continue to identify specific difficulties preventing them from working, although some see no constraints and enter work within 12 months. Existing claimants are slightly more likely to perceive problems (93 per cent) than new/repeat claimants (86 per cent) and the types of problems also differ between the two customer groups.

\(^{81}\) Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 166 (2003).

\(^{82}\) Thomas et al., DWP Research Report No. 184 (2004).

\(^{83}\) Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 315 (2006).
Existing claimants are most likely to experience (in order of frequency):

- health problems;
- lack of skills and qualifications;
- additional care responsibilities;
- age discrimination;
- lack of confidence;
- financial difficulties (debt).

Whereas new/repeat claimants say they experience:

- difficulty in finding work with suitable and/or flexible hours;
- health problems;
- childcare cost and availability difficulties;
- lack of skills/qualifications;
- paucity of local jobs.

4.4.2 Attitudes to work

Attitudes to working among lone parents have generally been found to be positive, although it is difficult to judge the degree of commitment amongst the large proportion (approximately 40 per cent) who declare the intention to work at some indeterminate point in the future. The longitudinal survey of participants found only 12 per cent of respondents who said they were not looking for work after their LPWFI and were not interested in working in the future either. Even those who felt they had no realistic chance of entering employment in the foreseeable future mostly expressed the view that they would rather be working than claiming benefit despite the fairly widespread belief, especially among existing claimants, that leaving benefits for paid work carried risks and that there was a high chance of ending up worse off.

Evaluations since 2003 have reinforced earlier findings related to the attitudes of lone parents at their initial LPWFI. In particular, the existence of immovable attitudinal barriers for a minority of lone parents and an indeterminate, but long term, work horizon for many more.

A clear sub-group of lone parents was identified that felt working was simply not compatible with their priority of being available for their children. Nevertheless, for most lone parents this was a question of finding the right compromise between all the aspects of having a job (travel time and cost, working hours, flexibility and pay) and the minimum perceived requirements for looking after their children. The primary requirement from advisers was seen to be whether they could help put

---

together a ‘package’ of support that was viable and practicable. While in many cases lone parents felt that such a package of support was successfully delivered to them, there was evidence that specific attention to overcoming particular constraints – such as language difficulties and limiting health conditions – was sometimes felt to be lacking in the support offered by advisers.

4.4.3 Constraints most likely to prevent entry to work

Lone parents with certain perceived constraints have been found to be much less likely than average to have started work since their LPWFI. This is particularly the case for those with literacy and numeracy difficulties (only eight per cent of those citing such difficulties in the participants’ survey had started work compared to the average of 23 per cent), those with additional care responsibilities for other adults or for children with special care needs for health or behavioural reasons (11 per cent starting work) and those with long-term illness or disability (12 per cent starting work). These last two types of constraint are more likely to affect existing claimants than new/repeat claimants. Lone parents with long-term illness or disability include a relatively high proportion (20 per cent) who say they do not want to work. Whether a customer agrees to be case loaded onto NDLP, or has other voluntary meetings with an adviser after an initial LPWFI is also strongly related to whether they have a health or disability problem. Although some claimants are offered the option of a referral to a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) only a small number appear to take up this option.

Despite this, 57 per cent of customers with a health problem or disability, 52 per cent of those with a child requiring additional care and 55 per cent of those with other caring responsibilities, describe themselves as ‘not looking for work but would like to work in the future.’ These findings, and the fact that a small number of surveyed lone parents in these categories had moved into work over the period of the research, suggest that there is some scope for advisers to challenge aspects of customers’ attitudes towards their own situation and possibilities. What was also clear is that those with a health problem or disability who did move into work required, on average, a longer period of support and preparation. Half the lone parents in this situation (50 per cent) took more than six months to enter work after an initial LPWFI, compared to just over a third (38 per cent) of all customers.

The restrictions on working associated with caring responsibilities and ill-health remain particularly difficult constraints for advisers to alleviate. The unpredictable nature of caring for someone or the nature of a lone parent’s illness impinged on the question of LPWFI timing for lone parents affected by these constraints.

Survey analysis found that 38 per cent of lone parents with health problems found the work focus of the LPWFI to have been inappropriate but further research suggested that it is the amalgamation of health problems with issues associated with being a lone parent (such as affordable and flexible childcare and finding a

---

suitable job) which can make the health condition more constraining\textsuperscript{86}. A focus on the restrictive nature of such constraints is clearly needed to provide advisers with a greater understanding of the issues, particularly as the 2003 Families and Children Study (FACS)\textsuperscript{87} found that lone parents were twice as likely to describe their health as ‘not good’ compared to mothers in couple families.\textsuperscript{88}

Advisers did not consider customers from ethnic minorities to necessarily face greater constraints than other lone parents, and could point to successful job outcomes that had been achieved. The key exception was felt to be those for whom English was not their first language, especially if this meant that they also had literacy difficulties. Lone parents with these specific constraints are the least likely to enter work following an LPWFI (only three per cent compared to an average of 23 per cent). They also make up a relatively large proportion (nearly one in five) of those lone parents who have never previously worked, and those without qualifications.\textsuperscript{89} The language problems apparent among minority ethnic groups of lone parents were still apparent at annual review meetings, with customers saying they were still not ready for work and did not expect to work for some time.

Results from the participants’ survey reinforce this picture. While the job entry rate following an LPWFI of all lone parents from non-white ethnic groups was found to be significantly lower than the overall average (12 per cent compared to 23 per cent), this was found to be most importantly related to whether or not English was their first language. The job entry rate for non-white ethnic groups for whom English was their first language was found not to be significantly lower than average, suggesting that, on the evidence available, not having English as a first language is a more important factor in the lower proportions entering work than is being from a non-white ethnic group, per se.

\textsuperscript{86} Casebourne and Britton, DWP Research Report No. 214 (2004) found that lone parents in work or on IS had very different perceptions of work and ill-health issues compared to lone parents on health-related benefits. The most marked difference was in perceptions of the impact that their health problem had on their daily activities and their ability to work. Those in work or on IS highlighted a range of constraints that could be attributed to being a lone parent, whereas those who were on health-related benefits, saw their health problems and/or disability as the primary constraint to work.

\textsuperscript{87} FACS is a refreshed panel survey, with both a cross-section and longitudinal element, informing policies such as reducing child poverty, promoting family employment and improving child outcomes.

\textsuperscript{88} Barnes et al., DWP Research Report No. 250 (2005).

\textsuperscript{89} Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
4.4.4 Constraints less likely to prevent entry to work

Lone parents citing other constraints as their main impediment to working, nevertheless enter employment at rates close to the average. However, these groups – those with constraints relating to a lack of skills or qualifications, to financial difficulties and debt and to childcare problems – also take longer on average, to enter work following an LPWFI. Reasons for this range from the need to wait on a change of circumstances, to the need for time to undertake training, to the choice of delaying employment until a child had reached an age when either they were settled in school or were judged old enough to look after themselves.

4.4.5 Childcare

Childcare was an underlying issue in one form or another for all lone parents. It was not, however, seen by all of them as necessarily preventing them from working and many managed to start jobs despite having childcare problems to cope with. Even those lone parents who viewed childcare as presenting a constraint were no more or less likely than others to have gone into work, though two-thirds of them took six months or more to do so. This was a reflection of the difficulty many experienced finding the right compromise or ‘package’ around working, and the fact that many would wait until the right opportunity presented itself or until their youngest child reached an age at which they could look after themselves. In general, most customers with very young children were unwilling to work.

Such judgements were highly specific to individual parents and children and did not fall into any easy pattern based solely on age. Some concerns appeared more prevalent in relation to younger children, for example distrust of leaving them with ‘strangers’ or anyone outside the immediate family. However, it was not a simple case of childcare issues diminishing as children grew older. There was a perceived problem among many parents in relation to children in their early teens (from 12 to 15). Many lone parents with children this age described a situation where primary level out-of-school provision was no longer available, there were no similar alternatives, the young people themselves ‘refused’ to be looked after by childminders and the lone parents did not feel they could trust them alone for any length of time, particularly in deprived areas perceived as presenting a potential threat on the streets. This specific combination of circumstances appeared to be presenting a particular problem for some lone parents. Childcare for older children was also found to be an important provision gap in the ND+fLP pilots.

Advisers were sometimes able to plan activities to match crucial stages related to childcare such as timing an LPWFI to coincide with a child entering full-time school.

in the next six months. A further possible trigger point was when a child was 9-11 years old where there was a small increase in exit rates for August-October claimants\(^92\).

**Recent childcare initiatives**

To address the constraints imposed by limited good quality childcare provision and increase lone parent confidence in using formal childcare, a number of initiatives have been developed since 2003. These include strategic initiatives such as the development of Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) and more practical proposals such as Childcare Assist (CA). CPMs were introduced in April 2003 to help Jobcentre Plus customers overcome childcare issues and to build up local partnerships relating to childcare provision to benefit lone parents, advisers and employers. The evaluation of CPMs\(^93\) emphasised the long-term nature of such initiatives, with the benefits of partnership working likely to take several years to become evident. The importance of this strategic role, however, has been emphasised elsewhere in the evaluation literature\(^94\) and a focus on partnership with other agencies posed as the role best suited for Jobcentre Plus in relation to childcare issues, even though ‘true partnership’ in the delivery of childcare elements was judged not to have been achieved to date. Indeed, within the ND+fLP pilots the childcare elements overall were found to be unresponsive to the specific concerns of lone parents (about gaps in provision, delayed Child Tax Credit payments and up-front costs and affordability) even though these constituted the most significant issues.\(^95\)

Childcare Assist was introduced in April 2005, allowing a week’s paid childcare before a lone parent started work. In practice advisers stressed that lone parents had little time between job offers and starts because of a tendency to make sudden work decisions\(^96\) and to prefer informal childcare. The majority of advisers felt it would be more useful to offer this paid week of childcare once the lone parent had started work. Similarly, the take-up of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) Childcare Subsidy had previously also been found to be low because it was only available to lone parents working less than 16 hours, and the majority of lone parents doing this were working within school hours and thus, not requiring childcare.

The New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots have attempted more active engagement and a persuasive approach, as evaluation research has indicated that childcare, per se, is not the only aspect of this issue, but that often a lone parent’s perception of a childcare constraint is related to their actual willingness to work. However, the childcare-related elements of the ND+fLP pilots are described as having had ‘limited success’ and are judged not to have had the persuasive


\(^{94}\) Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).

\(^{95}\) Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).

power that they were designed for and to have seen lower than anticipated take-up – particularly childcare tasters and CA. Childcare chats have been marginally more popular, though most lone parents are subsequently making their own arrangements as many lone parents prefer to do. **A key element in perceived childcare constraints for lone parents is having the confidence that they can make the necessary arrangements and adjustments if and when they have to do so. In this respect at least, LPWFIs are said to be achieving a high degree of success, with around half of lone parents saying they felt more confident about dealing with childcare after their LPWFI.**

*Work and parental care orientation*

Within customer groups there exists a great diversity of viewpoints regarding the prioritisation of parenting and work. Bell *et al.* (2005) developed a typology of lone parents based on work and parental care orientation, emphasising that policy interventions in this area should reflect diversity rather than imposing simplified solutions. Four types of lone parents were identified:

- **Type 1:** high work and high parental care orientation
- **Type 2:** high work and lower parental care orientation
- **Type 3:** lower work and high parental care orientation
- **Type 4:** lower work and lower parental care orientation.

Such a typology reinforces the importance of advisers’ role in tackling the perceived difficulty of how to combine work and childcare as well as the more practical issues such as childcare cost and availability, both of which could influence the other.

The key element of pilots aimed at strengthening work orientation has been the Work Search Premium (WSP). There has been poor take up of WSP to date (though improving with time), largely because advisers found it inflexible and are uncomfortable with its mandatory elements (fortnightly meetings) which they felt are intimidating to some lone parents and sit awkwardly within a voluntary programme. However, even where it has been taken up, it appears not to be working as a motivator to look for work but to be being used as a ‘bonus’ for those already looking whom advisers think are deserving of it.

In a further attempt to address lone parents’ general orientation towards work, pilots have allowed a number of activities that might extend the advice, information and influencing process into the community. Among these are group information sessions at Children’s Centres and other outreach venues and home visits for lone parents with no apparent constraints to work. Measures such as Extended Schools Childcare (ESC) pilots, Discovery Events and Jobpoints in Children’s Centres, have all contributed to attempts at extending contact with lone parents into the

---

97 Bell *et al.*, DWP Research Report No. 230 (2005) recognises that this is a simplified model but stresses that lone parents can move along the continuum in relation to both childcare and work preferences and that the aim is to facilitate targeted policy at different groups.
community and into the social networks in which they live their lives, although the effect of much of this type of activity will only be felt in the longer term. Jobpoints are being used and there have been some positive responses from customers to the confidence building aspects of Discovery Events provision, but early measures of levels of referrals to NDLP (and into jobs) have been low.98

Marketing of lone parent support in the ND+fLP, especially through use of the ‘chocolate box’ brochure to reinforce LPWFIs, is thought to be helping some lone parents to consider options in a more systematic way, although its motivating power is again questioned. Additional CPM resource is being widely used as a focus for links with Children’s Centres where outreach clinics are being held.

4.4.6 Better Off Calculations

Financial considerations are an important factor in guiding most lone parents’ decision-making regarding work. Better Off Calculations (BOCs) (formerly known as In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBCs)) have been seen as instrumental in inducing lone parents to apply for jobs or decide to work sooner than they had originally planned.99 Additionally, BOCs have been used by advisers to challenge perceptions held by lone parents that they would be worse off working, simultaneously tackling benefit dependency and increasing the lone parent’s financial confidence.

This fear of the financial risks of moving from benefits into work was particularly encountered with longer-term claimants. The provision of up to date information on available support, transitional help and in-work benefits helps address these fears, but it has been the ability to carry out a BOC, to quantify the margin by which a lone parent would be better off in work, that has been reported as the key method for overcoming lone parents’ concerns in this regard.

Frequency of BOCs

In the early years of the initiative just under one-third of lone parents were having a BOC during their initial LPWFI: one-third of existing claimants and just over a quarter of new/repeat claimants.100 Most calculations showed that lone parents would be better off in work than claiming benefit, although in 12 per cent of cases, the calculation showed that they would be either worse off or would see no financial difference from being in work.

A worse-off result from a BOC had a strong negative impact on many lone parents. Those who had received such a result were twice as likely to say that their meeting had left them feeling less hopeful than before about working. Advisers were sensitive to this possibility and most tried to avoid doing a calculation in instances where they thought a negative result would be produced.

Results of BOCs

It appears that BOCs do not always match up with the actual job taken by a lone parent. In the participant survey, none of those told they would be worse off but who had gone into work anyway, actually were worse off once they started a job. Of those told they would be better off, 13 per cent ended up financially worse off in a job. However, this may be in part the result of BOCs being conducted for different jobs than those which customers eventually took up. Those who had a positive calculation were on average told they would be £40 per week better off in work. Slightly more customers had a negative result from a BOC at annual review meetings (34 per cent were told that working would either make no difference or that they would be worse off) either because of greater selectivity in doing calculations at initial LPWFIs or due to the more ‘residual’ characteristics of those still on benefit at subsequent meetings.

Advisers’ use of BOCs

Practice among advisers was found to be mixed regarding how they used BOCs. Some advisers only conducted BOCs in relation to actual job vacancies, where a specific job at a particular pay rate was being considered by a lone parent. Other advisers used BOCs more ‘speculatively’ to help establish what kind of job, at what level of pay, would be required for a customer to be sufficiently better off to choose to leave IS. The customers most likely to have a BOC were those describing themselves as looking for work at their LPWFI (40 per cent of whom had a calculation). There was some evidence that BOCs were more widely used in review meetings, and especially six-month review meetings, than at initial meetings. In some districts it was policy to try to do a calculation with every lone parent attending a six-month review. Although the judgement that BOCs can be a powerful tool for persuasion was echoed in the responses of many customers, assessments of the relationships between BOCs and subsequent benefits and employment outcomes present a more complicated picture.

Impacts of BOCs

Analysis has been made of the associations between BOC outcomes and benefit exits/job outcomes for the respondents to the LPWFI participants’ survey. The study focuses only on those lone parents getting a BOC at their initial LPWFI, and is restricted to outcomes in the 12 months following that LPWFI. There was not judged to be a causal relationship between having a BOC and achieving a positive outcome because lone parents’ endowed characteristics determined strongly not only who got a BOC, but also who got a job or left benefits. Thus, although new/repeat claimants were more likely to leave benefits, more likely to enter work and likely to spend more time in work than existing claimants, this was more plausibly attributed to variation in claimants’ characteristics between

the two subgroups than to receipt of a BOC. **Compared to existing claimants, new/repeat claimants had fewer health, skills and confidence issues, were more likely to be looking for work, and had better financial expectations of the impact of working.**

It is worth noting that regardless of whether lone parents were existing or new/repeat claimants, those who received a BOC, those who moved into work and those who left benefits were all more likely to have been looking for work at the time of their LPWFI.

Analysis, therefore, focused only on those who had received a BOC and looked at associations between the outcomes of the calculations (better off, the same, worse off) and subsequent work and benefits outcomes. A positive association was found for new/repeat claimants between work outcomes and BOC results, though not for existing claimants.

**Factors over-riding BOC outcomes**

For existing claimants health, skills, confidence and caring issues, as well as number of children and the age of the youngest child, were all found to be significant to work outcomes – over-riding any relation to BOC outcomes. This supports the view that existing claimants are harder to work with, and to get work outcomes for, than new/repeat claimants, and that if they go on to enter NDLP they may gain less help from it (see Section 5.3). A longer time-frame for analysis, however, may have found an association given that BOCs were more frequently carried out at review meetings.

Benefit outcomes proved more difficult to interpret due to the many variables not available for modelling (such as changes in partner status) and benefit exits were found to be a poor proxy for work outcomes.

When both work and benefit outcomes were considered together, health status was the only factor always found independently significant to achieving work entry or benefit exit by existing claimants, while the desire to work was the single factor consistently found significant to achieving these outcomes by new/repeat claimants.

**The role of BOCs**

The main conclusions reached were that the findings were inconclusive regarding the role of BOCs as an instrument encouraging lone parents to enter work or leave benefits and that the key constraints specific to the two subgroups of lone parents needed to be targeted separately and differently.
5 LPWFIs outcomes

5.1 Increasing numbers on NDLP

An important success factor of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (LPWFIs) within the outlined overall approach, is seen to be persuading customers of the benefits of work and of the support and help that New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) could provide. Particularly among longer-term claimants, but also among repeat claimants, many were found to be concerned that leaving benefit would be difficult and disruptive and ultimately leave them worse off. This is one key area in which advisers feel able to engage in persuasive argument, backed up by information about available support. Three main aspects were evident in advisers’ techniques for securing further engagement from lone parents:

• suggesting the role that part-time work could play in breaking up routines, getting customers ‘out of the house’ and back into the world of work, with the social benefits this can bring;

• highlighting the various forms of financial help available both in the transition to work and within employment, that could address fears of leaving the ‘security’ of benefits;

• doing BOCs to alleviate fears about moving off benefits and to counter ‘myths’ that work would not pay.

Emphasising help available, within a supportive and unthreatening general approach, coupled with a forceful presentation of the benefits of being in work and concerted efforts to secure follow-up contact, appears to represent good practice in delivering LPWFIs and securing customers’ engagement. It has contributed to success in getting lone parents to join NDLP. However, there are indications that this does not carry forward to the same extent into securing net gains in benefit exits or job entries (see Section 5.2).

5.1.1 NDLP entry from LPWFIs

An intermediate measure of the success of the LPWFI initiative is the rate at which participants voluntarily participate in NDLP. There are two stages to this process:
The first is agreement to an initial NDLP interview. The second is agreement to be case loaded for regular, ongoing and active support in all aspects of the move to employment, from action planning and training support through to job search and submissions.

The initiative has been successful in achieving this objective. Both the mandatory nature of LPWFIs and the power of face-to-face contact with an adviser appear to have strongly contributed. NDLP case load starts increased nationally from around 8,000 per month to over 10,000 per month after LPWFIs were introduced. Furthermore, the net impact of LPWFIs on entry to NDLP has been large and strongly statistically significant,\(^\text{102}\) indicating that the initiative has been reaching lone parents who would not otherwise have found their way onto New Deal support.

Good practice by advisers in high performing districts has been found to include:

- making a positive initial assumption that all customers will want to ‘opt in’ to NDLP;
- presenting the LPWFIs and support under NDLP as a set of opportunities and entitlements;
- avoiding talk of ‘programmes’ such as NDLP or the availability of general ‘schemes’ such as the payment of Training Premium (TP), but talking instead of the detail of practical measures through which lone parents can be helped which meet individual needs and circumstances as they emerge from the interview/discussion;
- playing down the mandatory and voluntary aspect;
- presenting the meeting itself as the start of a process involving further contact.

It has been noted that in the months following the introduction of LPWFIs, the proportion of lone parents who attended at initial NDLP interview but who dropped out before being case loaded, rose from under ten per cent before the initiative to over 25 per cent among those agreeing to NDLP at an LPWFI.\(^\text{103}\) Notwithstanding some problems that have since emerged regarding the accuracy of NDLP markers, this might support the view that LPWFIs have been successful at persuading lone parents to explore their options for working, but that perhaps those customers entering NDLP from an LPWFI are less decided or committed to working at that stage than were lone parents who self-referred directly onto NDLP.

There is the further possibility that even lone parents who go on to be case loaded on NDLP following an LPWFI may be either less committed to working, or face greater difficulties that they need to overcome before they can work, than self-referrals. This is one possible reason for the negative incremental effect of LPWFIs on the effectiveness of NDLP in terms of benefit terminations.

\(^\text{102}\) Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 182 (2004).

\(^\text{103}\) Evans et al., DWP Research Report No. 163 (2003).
5.1.2 Average impact of LPWFIs on NDLP case loading

A number of impact analyses have been carried out in relation to LPWFIs, which relate to different cohorts and sub-groups of lone parents and employ a number of different methodologies making them intrinsically difficult to compare. Work has been commissioned on a reconciliation report to bring them all together which is due to be published in autumn 2007. Impact estimates are reproduced in this report to provide indicators of where net gains are being achieved by LPWFIs but no attempt is made to reconcile them with each other in terms of comparing the magnitudes of impacts, nor is any implication to be drawn about the methodologies behind them.

Analysis of administrative data has shown that the LPWFI process had a large and strongly statistically significant net impact upon the case loading of new/repeat claimant lone parents onto NDLP compared with the situation prior to the start of the initiative. Table 5.1 shows the measured impact at each month after a claim start, for three cohorts of new/repeat claimants starting a claim between August and October 2001, between November 2001 and January 2002, and between February and March 2002 respectively.

Table 5.1 Average impact of LPWFIs on entry to NDLP (percentage points)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Months after claim start</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug-Oct cohort</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov-Jan cohort</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb-March cohort</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Average monthly net impacts of around 15 percentage points have been shown up to October 2002 for each cohort examined, compared with matched cohorts of lone parents from before the start of the LPWFIs initiative in April 2001, demonstrating clearly that LPWFIs were successfully getting lone parents into NDLP who would not otherwise have joined the programme. Impact on NDLP entry from the LPWFI process appears to have been fairly even across the year. It is reasonable to assume that this impact continued to be felt after 2002, although the analysis cannot be updated due to the lack of an effective comparator population for any later cohorts of lone parents.

Within the estimates of the size of the LPWFI net impact on NDLP entry, there was some variation by the age of the youngest child. New/repeat claimants with a youngest child aged 10 had the lowest net increase in NDLP entry rate, at about 13 percentage points, while those with a youngest child aged six had the highest
increase at close to 17 percentage points. Qualitative research found that decisions to enter NDLP appear to be affected by factors relating to ‘trigger points’ in the circumstances of lone parents’ lives and those of their children. Among those cited were the age of a youngest child and the need to get a child settled into school before actively considering work options. These might be contributing to the higher measured impacts for lone parents with a youngest child aged six, with the LPWFI process acting to enhance NDLP entry at this pre-existing trigger point.

The same analysis of net impact is not available for existing claimants, due to the need for a differently constructed baseline for comparison. However, whereas there was scarcely any difference in the NDLP entry rates of existing claimants between 1999/2000 and between 2000/01, there was a very large increase in 2001/02 following the introduction of LPWFIs that was visible in the first month from entry and sustained in subsequent months. While all this increase may not represent net additional entries it is likely that much of it will.

Overall, evidence points to a picture of ‘job-readiness’ (positive work orientation and fewer perceived and/or actual work constraints) as the key to understanding whether lone parents go on to participate in NDLP.

5.1.3 Non-participation in NDLP

A study of non-participation in NDLP\textsuperscript{104} found that customers more resistant to participation lay at either end of the spectrum of job-readiness; lone parents furthest from the labour market, and those fully engaged with the process of returning to work and not feeling the need for NDLP support. Evidence from qualitative research suggests many at the latter extreme are lone parents with high level qualifications who do not believe the types of jobs they seek will be available through Jobcentre Plus. It has been predominantly the job-ready that have been found to attain positive transitions from LPWFIs (onto NDLP and into jobs). This explains to an extent why net impact on NDLP entry has exceeded net impact on benefit exits and job starts.

Evans \textit{et al.} (2003) identified factors both for and against participation which have been supported by further research. Factors correlating with an increased likelihood of participating in NDLP included several which indicated high work orientation. Of critical importance was the length of time since last working rather than the actual length of claim. There was evidence that lone parents were more easily persuaded of the benefits of work if they had worked recently or were working part-time (under 16 hours). This led to stronger motivation to work and advisers actively case loading such lone parents, ensuring further contact in weeks rather than months and maintaining enthusiasm. Other employment factors included:

- being undecided or flexible about hours to work;
- preferring to work 16 to 30 hours a week;

\textsuperscript{104} Brown \textit{et al.}, DWP Research Report No. 408 (2007).
• willingness to work for the minimum wage;
• having made a job application within the four weeks prior to an LPWFI (quantitative research found that those looking for work at initial LPWFI were most likely to attend further voluntary meetings (36 per cent) compared with 22 per cent of those who were not).

Other factors included: having only one child, especially if the child was under five years of age; an education level of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) or above; and being motivated to receive help and advice or being in receipt of child support/maintenance – possibly due to the greater potential financial gains from work and conceivably strong ideas of parental responsibility associated with it (recent proposals have been made to increase the amount of maintenance payments lone parents can keep before it affects their benefits). Lone parents were found to be particularly open to help and advice when they had a child approaching their 16th birthday when advisers stressed the urgency of taking up NDLP help. A perception of Jobcentre Plus providing high quality advice and support was a further motivation to join NDLP.

Financial factors were also significant among NDLP participants, including the belief that they would be better off working, which could be reinforced by advisers’ use of Better Off Calculations (BOCs) and of financial assistance such as Job Grants initially and Work Search Premium (WSP) and In Work Credit (IWC) later on in pilot areas. IWC is the one work incentive that has been credited with persuasive power. Although not thought to have a great impact on lone parents’ work receptivity it is felt to make a significant difference particularly to those lone parents only partially convinced about work. Having its greatest leverage in the context of a BOC, the IWC is said frequently to ‘tip the decision in favour of work’ with lone parents in this important sub-group.

Factors against participation were found to be diametrically opposed to those related to participation. Aside from the highly-qualified/recently-employed group of customers who made a conscious decision not to participate, the work orientation of non-participants was low. In particular, lone parents in this group viewed work as something for the more distant future and were less structured in their ways of thinking about work/careers, including preferring informal job-search and wanting to work less than 16 hours a week.

107 However, once lone parents started to work less than 16 hours per week their work-related attitudes appeared to move closer to those of lone parents working longer hours, indicating that this was an important stepping-stone to more beneficial forms of employment in the future. See Rafferty (2003) DWP Report No. 125.
5.2 Maximising numbers of lone parents in (sustained) work

Descriptive data demonstrate an increase in job entries from NDLP immediately after the introduction of LPWFIs in April 2001. However, only 30 per cent of surveyed customers who had started a new job in the first two years of the initiative said that the LPWFI had had an impact on them applying for it. Figure 5.1 shows the average numbers of job starts from NDLP, by entry route between November 1998 and September 2003.

**Figure 5.1 Weekly average NDLP job starts, by entry route**

![Weekly average NDLP job starts, by entry route graph](image)


5.2.1 Lone parents entering employment

The survey of participants was able to look at job outcomes for lone parents in the period of, on average, 14 months following initial LPWFIs. Table 5.2 shows the proportions of some of the different categories of lone parents entering employment following an initial LPWFI.
Around a quarter (23 per cent) of all participants had started work following their LPWFIs. This comprised more new/repeat claimants (25 per cent) than existing claimants (20 per cent).

**Those more likely to have started work included: those with recent work experience (within six months prior to the LPWFIs); those looking for work at the time of the initial meeting (47 per cent compared to 20 per cent of those who were not looking for work at that time); and lone parents in younger age groups.** (18 per cent) of those who had never worked previously went into work following an LPWFI, and among lone parents who moved onto JSA, the proportion going into work was similar to the average at 22 per cent. Those with a youngest child aged nine to 12 years were more likely than average to have started a job (27 per cent) but generally, the age of a lone parent’s youngest child was less of a contributory factor than the number of children they had. Those with three or more children were much less likely to have started work (only 14 per cent of them had done so).

Around a fifth (22 per cent) of lone parents who entered work following an LPWFI did so very quickly – within one month. These rapid entries to employment were much more likely to be new/repeat claimants than existing claimants. Twenty-seven per cent of new/repeat claimants went into work within one month compared to 11 per cent of existing claimants. These new/repeat claimants included many for whom their claim was always expected to be short-term. Advisers felt they also were more likely to have recent work experience, which was an important factor in job-readiness. Other indications of job-readiness among those moving rapidly into work was the fact that more than a quarter (28 per cent) of all those lone parents saying they were looking for work at the time of their first meeting, successfully went into work within one month, and only 30 per cent of all customers who had started a new job since their LPWFI said that the meeting had had an impact on them applying for it.

New/repeat customers moved more quickly into work than existing claimants, with a marked group entering employment within the first month.108 Existing

---

claimants took longer to enter work. Half (53 per cent) of all lone parents who entered work after their initial LPWFI took six months or more to do so, but in the case of existing claimants the figure was 62 per cent. The proportions of lone parents starting work following their LPWFI who had done so by wave 1 of the participants’ survey (four to eight months after their initial LPWFI) were 11 per cent for existing and 18 per cent for new/repeat claimants. By wave 2 (at 12 to 17 months after their initial meeting) these were 20 per cent for existing and 25 per cent for new/repeat claimants.

Lone parents’ own expectations of when they would enter employment were met, in great part, in practice. Most of those who said at their first LPWFI that they expected to work within 12 months actually did so, as did the majority of those who expected to increase their part-time hours within the same length of time.

5.2.2 Factors affecting work entry

Among those entering work, customers who had considered themselves as facing significant constraints to working did, as might be expected, take longer on average to start a job. Bearing in mind that the constraints mentioned are not mutually exclusive, the participants’ survey showed that 60 per cent of those with health and disability constraints, 63 per cent of those with debt and financial constraints, 70 per cent of those with skills and confidence constraints and 60 per cent of those with childcare constraints, took more than six months to enter employment. None of the respondents in the qualitative research who said they did not expect to work within the next three years, had done so within a year of their LPWFI.

Overall, the rate of movement into work was most strongly related to the number of children lone parents have, the length of their claim and their work orientation. New/repeat claimants who move into work following an LPWFI do so faster than existing claimants who need greater preparation. The dynamics between the lone parent, the adviser and the employer are crucial in determining favourable job outcomes.

Moving lone parents onto NDLP has been highly successful but translating that into employment has proved increasingly difficult. Apart from external labour market factors, reasons for this suggested by research findings include:

- the possibility that increasing numbers on case loads are compromising the effectiveness of NDLP advisers by reducing the time and resources they have to devote to each individual customer;

- that the constraints facing lone parents entering NDLP from LPWFIs are not fully addressable within the existing programme framework and require better referrals to specialist provision and better partnership working with other agencies; or

• that work needs to be further incentivised to increase the margin by which lone parents will be better off in work in order to encourage them to find a way around the difficulties they face.

5.2.3 Types of work

Jobs lone parents started after an LPWFI were not markedly different from the jobs they had done previously. The specific sectors that jobs most frequently fell into were: wholesale/retail (18 per cent); health and social work (12 per cent); and hotels/restaurants (13 per cent). Jobs were mostly in elementary or unskilled occupational areas, especially jobs that were not part-time. The main occupational areas lone parents were obtaining jobs in were: cleaning and factory work (33 per cent); personal services occupations (18 per cent); sales and customer service (17 per cent); and administrative and secretarial work (14 per cent). There also appeared to be a sizeable group taking up work in jobs attached to schools and related to school hours, such as play workers, ‘dinner ladies’, teachers and classroom assistants.

Half the jobs obtained (49 per cent) were for part-time hours of between 16 and 29 per week. A further 12 per cent were part-time jobs of less than 16 hours per week, in which lone parents continued to claim Income Support (IS). The other 38 per cent of jobs were full-time.

Part-time work was concentrated in cleaning and retail work in shops and bars, and in jobs attached to schools. Lone parents showing a preference for part-time working over full-time employment included those with a youngest child aged 16, and those with a youngest child under eight years. A strong preference for part-time working was also apparent among lone parents with children aged 0-3 years.

No significant shifts in the figures for part-time and full-time working, or in the occupational areas entered, were found to occur in relation to how long after the LPWFI jobs started. This indicates that perhaps people do not typically delay starting work in order to wait for better paid jobs or jobs with more hours but rather that any waiting is in order for a job to fit effectively and viably with all their other circumstances.

The most frequently mentioned help received by lone parents was finding a suitable job which aided an appropriate work/family life balance for them. Advisers clearly play a critical role in encouraging and supporting lone parents in finding suitable employment opportunities yet the role of employers and the local labour market play an equally important part in securing successful outcomes for lone parents. Evidence indicates that local labour markets affect both the rate of movement into jobs and sustainability. As well as the composition of the labour market determining the type of work available through Jobcentre Plus, the recruitment practices of some employers were said to hinder movement into

work. For example, the Evaluation of Work Works\textsuperscript{111} revealed that some local employers felt that their national policies and procedures didn’t let them exploit flexible working locally which limited job opportunities for lone parents.

### 5.2.4 Sustainability

The second Synthesis Report (2003)\textsuperscript{112} found that jobs gained by NDLP leavers were increasingly of better quality and sustainability and giving better satisfaction overall. This view was supported by other elements of the evaluation,\textsuperscript{113} in which there appeared to be a high level of sustainability among the job outcomes of lone parents following an LPWFI. Eighty-seven per cent of those who started work after an LPWFI were still in work 12 to 17 months later and those in part-time work (either under 16 hours or between 16 and 29 hours per week) were no less likely to have stayed in work than those working full-time. Despite the nature of jobs taken, which were mostly low-paid and low-skilled, there was no evidence of rapid turnover or ‘cycling’ in and out of employment. Most lone parents who had worked during the year following their LPWFI had held only one job in that time.

In spite of these evaluation findings, however, a recent evidence review\textsuperscript{114} concluded that although lone parents did not suffer worse job retention than other Jobcentre Plus customer groups, they did compare unfavourably on this measure with partnered mothers. Indeed, it has been suggested elsewhere\textsuperscript{115} that improved job retention would make a major contribution towards achieving the 70 per cent lone parent employment target.

Almost a third (31 per cent) of lone parents who entered work used unpaid childcare, generally within the family, compared to ten per cent who used some form of paid childcare provision. Most paid childcare was being used for younger children (aged five to eight years). However, in over half the cases, no childcare arrangements were made, either because lone parents only worked during school and term hours, or because children were thought old enough to look after themselves.\textsuperscript{116} These figures suggest that while LPWFIs are successfully helping lone parents without childcare needs into work, they are less successful at helping to overcome the constraint that childcare poses in many other cases.

\textsuperscript{111} DWP Working Paper No. 35 (2005).
\textsuperscript{112} Evans et al., DWP Research Report No. 163, (2003).
\textsuperscript{114} Yeo, DWP Working Paper No. 37 (2007).
\textsuperscript{116} Coleman et al., DWP Research Report No. 172 (2003).
Sustainability measures

Some of the problems experienced by lone parents in work that had led to jobs being unsustainable, stemmed from employer attitudes and practices, but by and large it has been found that it is most frequently the re-emergence of previous constraints that has brought employment to an end: deteriorating health, childcare difficulties and the effects of existing debt.

A number of financial initiatives have been implemented to address financial problems experienced by lone parents that have a high probability of reducing positive job outcomes or leading to a return to benefits. Advisers have welcomed the pilot introduction of the In Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) and feel it has a role to play in sustaining work by helping lone parents meet the costs of emergencies in the first 60 days in employment.\textsuperscript{117}

A further incentive which advisers identified as encouraging lone parents into work as well as providing valuable support was IWC. This was generally offered to all eligible lone parents (with a claim of 12 months or more)\textsuperscript{118} and used as an added incentive after undertaking a BOC, though its transitional nature was stressed. Analysis of lone parent behaviour after the 12 months of receiving IWC had elapsed\textsuperscript{119}, suggests that while some lone parents move back onto benefits at this point, it is fewer than expected and many continued to work. IWC would appear to make a positive contribution to job retention, especially in the early months following a job start, although thereafter other factors dominate sustainability. Qualitative findings suggest that over time such factors as work contract conditions and the stability of childcare arrangements become more determinate.\textsuperscript{120} There have not, to date, been any quantitative data analyses of lone parent behaviour after 12 months in receipt of IWC. The next stage of the impact assessment is to look at job retention and findings from this are due in summer 2008.

5.3 Assessment of net impacts of LPWFI

The crux of the evaluation of lone parent LPWFIs lies in the assessment of their ultimate impact on the numbers of lone parents in employment, and within this, of the net impact LPWFIs have had that represents their additionality – their effects that are additional to the employment outcomes that would have been obtained in the absence of the initiative.

\textsuperscript{117} The IWEF is currently available in New Deal Plus areas.
\textsuperscript{118} In the Initial Evaluation of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents there was some evidence of customers delaying job search in order to qualify for IWC but advisers were discouraging this practice as there was no guarantee that suitable jobs would be available for the lone parent and such a practice increased time away from the labour market. Ray et al., DWP Research Report No. 423 (2007) found no evidence of this practice, however.
\textsuperscript{119} Hosain and Breen, DWP Research Report No. 426 (2007).
\textsuperscript{120} Ray et al., DWP Research Report No. 423 (2007).
Robust data from Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs that might allow a direct assessment of impact and additionality from LPWFIs in terms of lone parent employment have not been available for analysis to date. What have been used have been ‘proxy’ measures based upon exits from IS claims and more recently, measures of ‘benefit rates’ which show the degree to which claims for all benefits in any week (not just IS) differ for lone parents who have undergone LPWFIs compared to a matched population who have not.

5.3.1 Impacts from initial and review LPWFIs

A series of analyses have been carried out, looking variously at the impact of LPWFIs: for all lone parents and for existing claimants and new/repeat claimants separately; for initial LPWFIs and for review meetings at six months and 12 months; for the extension of the LPWFI programme in 2003; for combined impact along with NDLP and for incremental impact considered separately from the effects of NDLP. Because of the progressive extension of eligibility for LPWFIs, the impacts estimated relate only to the particular sub-groups of eligible lone parents (defined by the age of youngest child) available to analysis at different times.

Table 5.3 shows the key findings for early cohorts of eligible lone parents relating to overall average impacts of initial LPWFIs and review meetings on exits from IS. It includes those impacts that were found to be statistically significant at given time points from the start date for eligibility.

---

121 In some circumstances and for certain subgroups of lone parents, especially those with a youngest child approaching 16 years old, benefit exits have been found to be a poor proxy for job entries, largely because of high levels of off-flow onto Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB).

122 For a full account of ‘the differences in differences’ method employed, see section 2 of Knight, G. and Lissenburgh, S., Evaluation of lone parent personal adviser meetings: Final findings from administrative data analysis, DWP Research Report No. 2004.

123 For full account and discussion of later analyses, including details of propensity score matching, see Knight et al., DWP Research Report No. 368 (2006).
Table 5.3  Impacts of LPWFIs and reviews on IS exits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Impacts on IS off-flows net of base turnover</th>
<th>Significant impacts (percentage points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Existing claimants</td>
<td>New/repeat claimants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average impact of initial LPWFIs</td>
<td>+1.13</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined impact of LPWFI &amp; annual review</td>
<td>+1.4 to +1.8</td>
<td>+1 to +1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental impact of annual reviews</td>
<td>+0.5</td>
<td>+1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined impact of LPWFI &amp; 6 month review</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>+1.4 to +1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental impact of 6 month reviews</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1 Early cohort comprised existing claimants with youngest child aged 13-15.75 years and new/repeat claimants with youngest child age 5.25-15.75 years.
2 At nine months (the only time point where impact was statistically significant).
3 No statistically significant impacts for new/repeat claimants at any time points.
4 For existing claimants with youngest child aged 13-15.75 years and new claimants with youngest child aged 5.25-15.75 years.
5 At 12 to 18 months.
6 At four to 18 months.
7 From 15 months.
8 At 12 to 18 months.
10 At one to 12 months.
11 At six to 12 months.


For existing claimants a net impact on rates of off-flows from IS has been demonstrated of, on average, around one percentage point (up to +1.13 percentage points at nine months). Some of this small but significant net increase will be attributable to off-flows into jobs, with other factors including a ‘deterrent

The survey of lone parent LPWFI participants found that at 14 months more than half (58 per cent) of the exits from benefits were into work or the result of increasing work hours to more than 16 hours per week. Movement onto other benefits accounted for 23 per cent of exits at 14 months, though this was mostly onto JSA and disproportionately high due to the composition of the first eligible cohort of existing claimants who had a youngest child aged 13-15.25 years.
effect’ of the LPWFI process leading to the withdrawal of fraudulent claims. The greatest impact on exit rates from IS of existing claimants was found to be for those with a youngest child aged 14 years, where LPWFIs increased the exit rate at nine to 12 months by more than two percentage points. Set against a low baseline rate of monthly off-flow from IS, this net impact measure provides an important indication that LPWFIs are helping some lone parents back into work even after lengthy periods on benefits, including some who without an LPWFI would not have taken the initiative towards seeking employment and leaving benefit at that time. This was particularly the case with existing claimants.

For new/repeat claimants, however, the evaluation of administrative data found that the net impact of initial LPWFIs on IS off-flows was not significantly different from zero, though results for the first cohort examined (August to October 2001) fell just short of being significant\(^{125}\). Furthermore, analysis of the impact of the extension of eligibility in 2003 to new/repeat claimants with a child aged one to three years old, showed positive impacts for this sub-group at three to six months from the claim start of between +1.5 and +2 percentage points.

Subsequent analyses of the combined impact of initial LPWFIs and 12-month review meetings found positive impacts of between +1 and +2 percentage points for both existing and new/repeat claimants (between +1.4 and +1.8 percentage points for existing claimants at 12-18 months, and between +1 and +1.75 percentage points for new/repeat claimants at 4-18 months). Combining these results, the incremental impacts of 12 month reviews over and above the impacts from initial LPWFIs were estimated to be +0.5 percentage points for existing claimants from 15 months and +1.75 percentage points for new/repeat claimants at 12-18 months.

The same analysis for six-month review meetings (introduced for new/repeat claimants entering the LPWFI system from April 2002) found a similar incremental impact of +1.5 percentage points at 6-12 months.

Net impacts on exits from IS were, therefore, greater from initial LPWFIs than from annual review meetings for existing claimants, whereas the reverse was true for new/repeat claimants for whom the only significant net impacts were found to result from review meetings.

5.3.2 Combined impacts of LPWFI and NDLP

Table 5.4 shows the results of further impact analyses which looked at the combined impact of LPWFI and NDLP, and at each of these elements separately. The analyses

\(^{125}\) There are a number of factors to be taken into account when interpreting these findings which do not show LPWFIs do not have an impact: the overall impact on off-flow rates was not expected to be large; the evaluation design was constrained by the way in which policy was rolled out; and, a measured impact of very little more than that achieved would be in line with expectations and represent considerable additionality.
do not take separate account of review meetings but because of the length of the observed outcome period, it is possible that the estimates for time points over 14 months may include some review meetings. This is to say that up to this point the impact estimated is entirely for first treatment (initial LPWFI) and from 14 months impacts might include a combined initial LPWFI and review meeting effect for a sub-group of lone parents.

### Table 5.4 Impacts of LPWFI and NDLP on benefit rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Net impacts on benefit rates</th>
<th>Existing claimants at time point:</th>
<th>New/repeat claimants at time point:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined impact of LPWFI &amp; NDLP (1)</td>
<td>Variable and not always positive</td>
<td>Variable and not always positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incremental impact of LPWFI (2)</td>
<td>Negative and large</td>
<td>Negative and large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
1. LPWFI/NDLP compared to no intervention.
2. LPWFI/NDLP compared to NDLP only (i.e. self-referral).


For existing claimants the combined impact of LPWFI and NDLP was found to be variable in the short to medium term, and not always positive but by 18 months to be significantly positive at plus ten percentage points. For new/repeat claimants the net impact of combined LPWFI and NDLP was less marked but grew from negligible immediate impacts to +4 percentage points at 18 months. The programme, therefore, has no impact to start with but does later on. A probable explanation for this would be that participation in NDLP for many lone parents involves a series of meetings and discussions over time. As impacts were measured from the claim start for new/repeat claimants and from initial treatment date for existing claimants, any time spent within the advice/NDLP process will increase the time taken to achieve an impact.

It is worth noting that the pattern of further voluntary meetings after an LPWFI among lone parents in the participants’ survey confirmed that a long timescale was often involved, both between initial LPWFI and the next voluntary contact, and thereafter. More than half of those having only one further voluntary meeting waited more than six months to have it. Where further meetings had been discussed but not booked at the LPWFI follow-up contact did not occur for 12 to 18 months in a third of cases (31 per cent). Lone parents entering work/exiting
benefits quickly following an LPWFI would appear from these impact analyses to include a high proportion of ‘dead-weight’ in the form of individuals who would have achieved these outcomes anyway in the absence of the programme.

5.3.3 Incremental LPWFI impact effects

An attempt was made to break down this combined effect to separate out the LPWFI element and the NDLP element of impacts. Figures for the incremental impact of NDLP, for all lone parents, were positive and large but not considered to be robust due to the high chance of later participation in NDLP undermining the validity of the estimation. The incremental impact of LPWFIs – that is the additional impact for lone parents of having both an LPWFI and participating in NDLP as opposed to just NDLP (self-referrals) – was strikingly different for existing claimants and new/repeat claimants. The impact of LPWFI was positive for new/repeat claimants, reaching plus nine percentage points at 12 months and then reducing to plus five percentage points at 18 months, which equates to 14 per cent additional exits among participants. However, the impact of LPWFI was negative and large at all time points for existing claimants.

Caution is needed in interpreting these results but overall they suggest that the employment effects of LPWFI are dominated by those of NDLP, indicating that most of the combined impact is due to the impact of NDLP. They show that combined LPWFI and NDLP have a positive impact for both existing and new/repeat claimants. However, the incremental impact of an LPWFI is only positive for new/repeat claimants, whereas the evidence is strong that having had an LPWFI in fact reduces the effectiveness of the impact of NDLP for existing claimants. The most likely explanation for this is suggested to be that LPWFIs for existing claimants introduce into the NDLP system customers who gain much less from participation than self-referrals.

Issues such as low skills and training requirements, language difficulties and literacy and numeracy needs were found to be more prevalent among existing than among new/repeat claimants. Not only did the presence of such support needs imply greater required adviser input, but was reported as frequently being accorded low priority in the face of pressures to meet job outcome targets. Any difficulties addressing such constraints or reduced effort to address them, would clearly have the effect of limiting additionality overall. This is likely to be one element underlying the marked difference that has been shown to exist between the large and significant impacts of LPWFIs on NDLP entry and the much more modest net impacts on off-flows from IS (and by implication, into employment).

5.3.4 LPWFI additionality

Virtually all labour market programmes experience ‘deadweight’ (the proportion of programme participants who would have entered work without treatment) but there is evidence that the level of deadweight was higher for the lone parents joining NDLP as a result of an LPWFI. Survey findings indicated that nearly half
(47 per cent) of those who were looking for work at the time of their LPWFI went on to start work in the following 12 months, compared to only 20 per cent who were not looking for work at that time. This appeared to be true particularly for new/repeat claimants.

One effect of LPWFIs for new/repeat claimants was that even those lone parents expecting a rapid return to work after claiming IS and coming into contact with an adviser, saw some benefits from joining NDLP (in terms of help with paperwork for claiming tax credits and financial planning through a BOC) even though, in most respects, they were what would be called ‘job ready’. Much of this involvement in NDLP, therefore, has not registered as net impact in terms of benefit exits as many of these lone parents are likely to have entered employment at some stage unassisted. Because advisers were also found (for other reasons such as available case load time) to be concentrating their efforts on the most job-ready, the additionality of the programme will have been further limited. Indeed, within the context of the Jobcentre Plus target structure at that time, with its strong focus on job entries, advisers were actively encouraged to focus on the job ready to meet targets.

Labour market constraints, largely beyond the influence of the LPWFI process, are another possible explanation for why positive perceptions and responses to LPWFIs do not appear to have translated into larger net impacts upon off-flows. A perceived lack of availability of suitable jobs (especially as regards working hours) figured prominently among reasons given by lone parents for difficulties they were experiencing in finding work.

**Mandatory meetings and reviews, therefore, might well succeed in persuading many lone parents about work and get them to join NDLP, but struggle to turn this success into additional positive (employment) outcomes.**

Later impact analyses showed greatest impacts at 18 months. This supports the suspicion that the low impacts found for the 2001/02 cohort were, in part, the result of too short a time-frame within which to observe outcomes. Measures could only be taken at monthly points up to 12 months following the date of eligibility for an LPWFI and later exits could not be shown. This time-frame picked up the most rapid exits from IS but these may have comprised mostly deadweight outcomes and excluded those lone parents who required a longer preparatory process and those who, having reached the decision to work, had to delay taking a job until either a suitable vacancy occurred or their personal circumstances made it viable.

Moving lone parents into work (off IS) sooner than they would otherwise have done on their own initiative may be an important positive effect of LPWFIs – but this was not measurable in the impact data analysis as it would require tracking cohorts until everyone exited and the available time-frame did not allow this.
6 Key themes and implications

The Lone Parent Work Focused Interview (LPWFI) initiative has been in place for over six years. In this time there have been some major changes to the context in which it is delivered, the structure of its delivery and the make-up of the lone parent customer group, and sub-groups, to which it has been addressed. Policy has responded to successive evaluation research findings by adapting LPWFI/New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) provision, adding new elements of support and incentive and piloting a number of innovations to explore possible improvements.

Despite the difficulties that this changing picture presents to evaluation there are a number of ‘headline’ issues that appear to stand out from the evidence, to date, which may provide pointers for future policy and suggest the best ways in which a successful initiative might be maintained and developed.

6.1 Have LPWFIs been successful in meeting their objectives?

LPWFIs have been successful at engaging lone parents in a process of appraisal of their situation and exploration of their options for employment. The model for delivery through personal advisers has had very positive feedback from many customers. It has clearly contributed to an enhanced standing for Jobcentre Plus in their eyes as well as positively influencing attitudes towards the use of Jobcentre Plus as a future source of advice and information about returning to, or starting, work. The success of this model appears to have been built upon an informal,

126 Some caution is required in interpreting the available evidence concerning the effectiveness of LPWFIs. Many of the analyses are not easily generalised to the whole lone parent population which displays a wide range of diverse characteristics. Others are limited by the unavoidably short time scales available for observation and comparison and by year on year changes to eligibility and the operating context of the programme.
empathetic approach by advisers to manage the delicate balance between the mandatory nature of LPWFIs and the voluntary nature of NDLP.

The enforced access to up to date information provided by mandatory LPWFIs about available transitional and in-work support, alongside the opportunity presented for informed discussion of difficulties and options, has been crucial in engaging an important minority of lone parents and turning a latent desire to work into the first practical steps towards employment.

LPWFIs have successfully brought information to lone parents that would not otherwise have reached them, informed and supported the job search process, and positively introduced lone parents to Jobcentre Plus services, as well as encouraging entry to the NDLP programme across the age range of youngest children.

The one area in which LPWFIs have not clearly demonstrated success has been in persuading lone parents who were not already decided about working that they should consider it and take practical steps towards it. Significant attitudinal barriers remain which may represent the limit to how much further the initiative can be developed without sharply diminishing returns. It is not clear from evaluation evidence what proportion of the two-fifths of lone parents who say that they want to work, but only at some point in the future, actually have serious intentions to do so and might be persuaded further or accelerated in this direction.

Recently proposed changes to lone parent benefit conditionality\(^\text{127}\) when a youngest child reaches 12 years of age rather than 16 years, may provide one route through this problem for the sub-group of lone parents with older children, though for other lone parents, attitudinal barriers look likely to remain which LPWFIs alone will not be able to impact upon.

**6.2 At what point are LPWFIs most effective?**

LPWFi intervention has been shown to be effective for many new/repeat claimants at the point of making a claim, and there are real advantages to this timing, including maintaining work momentum with some lone parents, preventing others becoming accustomed to living on benefits and establishing the connection in people’s minds between the rights of claiming benefit and the entailed responsibilities of considering work options. Although the very real short-term difficulties facing many new claimants need to be acknowledged and the fact that this will, in many cases, delay responses and entry to NDLP, the relatively short period of six months between an initial LPWF and a first review LPWF has mitigated these effects and proved effective.

With existing claimants there has been more of an element of chance in the good timing of LPWFIs. Nevertheless, a number of ‘trigger points’ and times have been

\(^{127}\) DWP, Working for Children Cm7067 (2007).
identified when lone parents are more receptive to information and persuasion about work and around which the programme can work. The most important of these have been found to be soon after the entry of a youngest child to full-time school, and the period leading up to the end of Income Support (IS) eligibility as a youngest child approaches the age of 16.

6.3 Who benefits most from LPWFIs and who benefits least?

There are indications from evaluation of mainstream LPWFI and from recent pilots that lone parents with older children are among those who benefit more than others from LPWFI intervention. Also, new/repeat claimants move onto NDLP and into jobs in greater numbers and greater proportion than do existing claimants. However, greater additionality and less deadweight seem to exist among the outcomes of existing claimants who will still have annual review meetings, than among those of new/repeat claimants.

Overall, it is the already job-ready and work-decided lone parents who benefit most from LPWFIs. Conversely, those who benefit least from LPWFIs are lone parents who do not wish to work or believe they cannot practically or viably do so, and those furthest from the labour market in other ways. The latter group includes those requiring the most intensive support input (including skills development) to bring them to within realistic reach of employment.

As a ‘work first’ initiative it is perhaps not surprising to find that LPWFIs (and NDLP) work most effectively for lone parents who are closest to being job-ready or are even already looking for work at the time of their LPWFI treatment. However, the target-driven delivery model of Jobcentre Plus appears to have accentuated this tendency still further in the past. There has been little incentive within the system to focus efforts on the persuasion of those lone parents on the margins of making a decision about working, nor on those who want to work but are at a greater distance from the labour market, even though it is from these lone parents that greatest additionality might be achieved.

Now that the stock of existing claimants have all participated in an initial LPWFI (as of March 2006) the thrust of future policy will be with new/repeat claimants. LPWFIs have so far worked well with this customer group and have been shown to have a positive incremental impact over and above the impact deriving from NDLP. Working with lone parents early in their claim will go some way towards reducing the replication of processes that have led to the difficulties faced in relation to many long-term existing claimants. But this will also only be achieved by successfully pulling more than just the willing and the job-ready into the support programme.
6.4 Have LPWFIs increased participation in NDLP?

LPWFIs have been extremely successful in this regard. The introduction of LPWFIs has greatly increased the numbers of lone parents choosing to enter NDLP and these New Deal entries have been shown to represent statistically strongly significant net impacts for both existing and new/repeat claimants of IS. Although most NDLP entries are from initial LPWFIs, review meetings also play an important role, especially for new/repeat claimants whose circumstances often change relatively rapidly and who are seen again six months after their claim start, at a point when they become eligible for additional support and financial help and incentives.

6.5 Have LPWFIs increased exits from benefits?

The picture in relation to LPWFI impacts on benefit exits and, by implication, on job entries, is less dramatic and less clear cut, not least because the separate, and potentially different, effects of NDLP are also involved in the great majority of cases. Analysis of the net impacts of initial LPWFIs and review meetings on benefit exits show that a small but significant proportion of lone parents leaving IS would not have done so without participation in the LPWFI process.

Nevertheless, the very large effect of LPWFIs on NDLP entry is not matched by a similarly large impact on benefit exits, and conversion rates from NDLP case load into jobs are approximately half the conversion rates from LPWFI onto the NDLP programme.

LPWFI and NDLP clearly achieve additionality in their impacts on benefit exits/job entries (though estimates for NDLP impact vary according to the data sources and analysis used). Nevertheless, the programme does still carry considerable ‘deadweight’ in the form of those lone parents who would have moved into employment of their own accord without the intervention.

6.6 Are review LPWFIs effective?

Review LPWFIs make a significant contribution to the impact of the programme, both in terms of conversions to NDLP and in terms of conversions to jobs. The impact analysis that shows a small net impact on benefit exits from LPWFIs also indicates that whereas most net impact for existing claimants results from initial LPWFIs, for new/repeat claimants the main net gains derive from review meetings.

Similar levels of net impact were found for the 12-month reviews undertaken by the earliest new/repeat claimant participants as were found for the six month reviews that later participants experienced.

Advisers’ views that reviews sooner than 12 months for existing customers without selective targeting would be unproductive are perhaps supported by these findings, as are the feelings of the majority that no more than six months is the appropriate interval between initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) and review meeting for new/repeat claimants.
6.7 Are more frequent LPWFIs an effective enhancement to the programme?

Targeted intensification of the LPWFI regime on specific sub-groups such as lone parents with older children, is supported by the evaluation evidence. However, from the delivery point of view, introducing more frequent LPWFIs on a wider basis, in order to reach a small and shrinking subgroup who might voluntarily enter NDLP and employment, runs the risk of overburdening the system with unproductive effort and perhaps thereby undermining the acknowledged positive effects of adviser practice. It is possible that such a detrimental effect may be being felt already in relation to the Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) that are being piloted for lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 and over.

The piloted attempts at programming more frequent (quarterly) LPWFIs for those with older children approaching the age of 16 (and thus, facing the imminent end of their IS eligibility) have, to date, not been perceived to be particularly productive, despite previous fairly widespread expectation to the contrary among advisers.

Beyond frequency and timing, the third main parameter of LPWFIs which is available to policy for possible change is content. Evidence indicates good levels of work focus within current delivery and no reason for major changes given healthy conversion rates to NDLP. Advisers have consistently called for greater levels of discretion over who they spend time with, rather than discretion over content, although in practice a considerable degree of ‘tailoring’ of LPWFIs around individuals’ salient points of interest or key difficulties is already the norm.

6.8 Is the LPWFI process effective?

The impact of LPWFIs on work entries and benefit exits has been shown to be dominated by the impact of NDLP. The strong finding that for existing claimants LPWFI actually has a large negative impact on the effectiveness of NDLP, because of the more ‘difficult’ customers entering the programme by this route, thus suggests that the blockage which policy needs to address lies with NDLP rather than with LPWFIs which are already performing perhaps as well as they can within the constraints with which they are faced. LPWFIs appear to be introducing many lone parents to NDLP who cannot be effectively helped to overcome their identified constraints nor moved successfully into employment by current provision.

Evaluation findings suggest a reason for this. Although lone parents present with a range of problems and obstacles to working, the key limiting factor to achieving outcomes does not appear to be directly related to any specific constraint but to the ‘baseline’ work orientation that they bring with them to a meeting. Repeatedly, research findings show that it is lone parents’ predisposition to work or not to work that has the greatest influence on actions and outcomes. The only plausible interpretations of the big discrepancy between LPWFIs’ large impacts on entry to NDLP and their much more modest impacts on subsequent benefit exits/job
entries are that a large proportion of lone parents enter NDLP but find they still cannot overcome their difficulties and find a viable way to work, or that they enter NDLP to explore options but fail to be convinced that they can or do actually want to, work. LPWFIs may thus be raising the hopes and expectations of some lone parents higher than can be currently met by NDLP. Many lone parents appear to be convinced that they wish to see an adviser again rather than that they wish to work.

To date, much of the focus in LPWFIs and in NDLP has been on the constraints that lone parents face in considering starting or returning to work. Many have been successfully identified and addressed in various ways through additional support premiums, incentives, transitional benefits, information on childcare and other elements that have been added piecemeal to the programme over the past five years. However, in spite of the accumulated armoury of services and provision offered, LPWFIs still appear to be unable to make significant headway against the firm decision of many to choose not to work.

Given the apparent intransigence of this obstacle, LPWFIs are having to bring an increasingly sophisticated arsenal of support and incentive to bear on a diminishing pool of potential for job outcomes. Not only is this likely to result in diminishing returns for any extra effort and resource but as already mentioned, could undermine the effective functioning of the programme as a whole if care is not also taken to facilitate and incentivise appropriate delivery practices by advisers. At the current rate of conversions to NDLP and job entries, it also looks increasingly as though such an approach on its own will struggle to deliver the necessary increases to meet the 70 per cent lone parent employment target.

6.9 Options for future development?

To meet targets it will be necessary to make headway against the two limiting conditions that currently constrain the field of action for LPWFI/NDLP, namely the baseline unwillingness of many lone parents to work and the demand-side constraints which effectively prevent many lone parents from being able to find work that is viable and can fit around their family responsibilities.

If the critical importance of attitudinal barriers is accepted, then future policy will need to seek ways in which it can extend influence back into the community context within which these attitudes are created. Some measures to start to move in these directions have been piloted within New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP). Efforts at community outreach, notably via Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs), have attempted to have an influence upon the ‘cultural’ attitudes affecting lone parents’ orientation to work by establishing a presence and a voice in the communities in which they live. Measures to increase involvement with lone parents’ peer groups and to have marketing input to help counteract negative influences at work there, have likewise sought to maintain the positive momentum that LPWFIs often create, but which is frequently undermined if lone parents return to an environment where worklessness is the norm.
Some success has been reported from experiments with group sessions and from Discovery Events in pilot areas but the main benefits from such activities are likely to be felt only in the much longer term. Indeed, evaluation of outreach activity in the short term has, to date, seen little indication of, for example, additional referrals to LPWFI/NDLP resulting from it.

At the other end of the process, plans to work more intensively with employers to encourage greater flexibility in recruitment and working hours to meet family commitments are being pursued, alongside proposals for more in-work support from Jobcentre Plus once a lone parent is in a job. Lone parents have on average less sustained periods in work than other parents in employment. It has been suggested that improving lone parents’ job retention to the average rate would not only help towards the achievement of the 70 per cent lone parent employment target but could even achieve that target without the help of further additional job entries from elsewhere.

Qualitative evidence suggests that In Work Credit (IWC) may be working effectively not only to motivate lone parents into starting work but also to keep them in sustained employment beyond the 12 months over which the credit is paid. It may well be that measures of this kind could be more productive and more cost effective in meeting the aims of LPWFI/NDLP than further refinement of the interview programme itself which may be operating close to the limit of its possible effectiveness.

Experience of the full range and entire package of current LPWFI/NDLP provision in ND+fLP pilot areas has indicated similar conclusions. Recommendations point repeatedly to the need for future development to go well beyond the confines of the Jobcentre Plus programme as it stands and to embrace greater partnership with other agencies, with employers and with the community context within which perceptions and attitudes to work are formed. Wider engagement of this kind may be needed to secure sufficient additional outcomes from LPWFIs and NDLP to meet targets in the future.
Since 2002, the main elements of policy directed towards lone parents, and contributing towards the key strategic goals of 70 per cent lone parent employment and the elimination of child poverty, have been: ensuring accessible childcare provision; helping lone parents to move closer to the labour market; easing the transition from benefits to paid work; and making work pay. Changes contributing to these aims in 2002/07 include:

- further expansion of childcare services announced in the Government’s Spending Review 2002;
- a lone parent communications strategy in six metropolitan areas, to supplement existing national and local advertising campaigns (2003);
- introduction of Discovery Weeks pilots in two metropolitan areas to boost soft skills and lone parents’ knowledge of the help available to them (2003);
- Child Maintenance Bonus of up to £1,000 on leaving Income Support (IS), based on maintenance received while claiming (replaced by Child Maintenance Premium in 2003);
- Working Families’ Tax Credit (WFTC) replaced with Working Tax Credit payable to families with children who work 16 or more hours a week and are on low to moderate incomes (2003);
- Child Tax Credit replaced child additions to IS or Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) – able to pay up to 70 per cent of registered childcare costs (introduced 2003 and since increased to 80 per cent);

• Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) were established in every Jobcentre Plus district to improve access to information about local childcare provision (2003);
• lone parents included within eligible customer groups for Employment Zones (EZs) from October 2003;
• Back to Work Bonus of up to £1,000 based on previously clawed-back earnings while working less than 16 hours a week (phased out from 2004);
• Discovery Weeks pilots in a further four metropolitan areas (2004);
• national mentoring service tailored specifically for lone parents (2004);
• a new flexible fund for debt advisory services (2004);
• pilots introduce a number of new policies in Extended Schools Childcare (ESC) areas: In Work Credit (IWC); Work Search Premium (WSP); Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) (2004);
• New Deal Plus for lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots provide access to 17 initiatives initially in five English Jobcentre Plus districts (2004) and extended to Wales and Scotland with slightly different constituent initiatives;
• from October 2004 advisers have been required to draw up an action plan for each lone parent attending an LPWFI;
• the national minimum wage rate increased (October 2005 and 2006);
• the extension of ND+fLP pilots (2006);
• the introduction of the Standard Organisational Model for delivery (February 2006).
References


