New Deal Plus for Lone Parents qualitative evaluation

Mehreen Hosain and Dr. Eleanor Breen

A report of research carried out by GHK Consulting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Adviser Discretion Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
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<td>BME</td>
<td>Black and Minority Ethnic</td>
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<td>BOC</td>
<td>Better Off Calculation</td>
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<td>BTEC</td>
<td>Business and Technology Education Council</td>
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<td>ChB</td>
<td>Child Benefit</td>
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<td>CIS</td>
<td>Children’s Information Service</td>
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<td>CPM</td>
<td>Childcare Partnership Manager</td>
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<td>CRB</td>
<td>Criminal Records Bureau</td>
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<td>CTB</td>
<td>Council Tax Benefit</td>
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<td>DASO</td>
<td>Diary Administrative Support Officer</td>
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<td>DLA</td>
<td>Disability Living Allowance</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>ESCP</td>
<td>Extended Schools Childcare Pilot</td>
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<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
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<td>ESSG</td>
<td>Evaluation and Strategy Steering Group</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EZ</td>
<td>Employment Zone</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Failure to Attend</td>
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<td>HB</td>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>IB-PA</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit – Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>IWC</td>
<td>In-Work Credit</td>
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<td>IWEF</td>
<td>In-Work Emergency Fund</td>
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<td>IWS</td>
<td>In-Work Support</td>
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<td>JET</td>
<td>Job Entry Target</td>
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<td>JOT</td>
<td>Job Outcome Target</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseekers Allowance</td>
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<td>L&amp;D</td>
<td>Learning &amp; Development</td>
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<td>LGV</td>
<td>Light Goods Vehicle</td>
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<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
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<td>Lone Parent Adviser</td>
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<td>LSC</td>
<td>Learning and Skills Council</td>
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<td>MI</td>
<td>Management Information</td>
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<td>MVC</td>
<td>More Voluntary Contact</td>
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<td>New Deal for Partners</td>
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<td>ND+fLP</td>
<td>New Deal Plus for Lone Parents</td>
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<td>ODR</td>
<td>Organisational Development Review</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Personal Adviser</td>
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<tr>
<td>QAF</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Framework</td>
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<td>QWFI</td>
<td>Quarterly Work Focused Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIA</td>
<td>Security Industry Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBLA</td>
<td>Work Based Learning for Adults</td>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work Focused Interview</td>
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<td>WSP</td>
<td>Work Search Premium</td>
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<td>WTC</td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
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Summary

Introduction

The New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilot was launched in April 2005. It builds on the voluntary New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programme in place since 1998. The pilot is being implemented in five Jobcentre Plus districts in England. Initially expected to run for twelve months, the pilot has now been extended through to 2008 and to two additional districts in Scotland and Wales from October 2006.

The new intervention regime reflects a move towards a more persuasive effort to draw out lone parents’ aspirations and provide the support and capabilities they need to overcome constraints and return to work. The package of support includes:

**Pre-employment measures**: mandatory Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) for those lone parents with the youngest child aged 12 years and over; Action Plans; Discovery Events; Childcare Chats and Tasters; Childcare Assist; Work Search Premium (WSP).

**Post-employment measures**: In-Work Credit (IWC); In-Work Emergencies Fund (IWEF).

**Support for delivery**: marketing package; enhanced training for advisers; extra administrative resource; More Voluntary Contact (MVC) between Work Focused Interviews (WFIs); an additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM); access to Flexible Provision (for training); In-Work Support (IWS); and Jobpoints in Children’s Centres.

This qualitative evaluation forms part of a suite of research and evaluation activities around the pilot. The approach involved observing the live running of the pilot over time, to identify and feed back promptly on the development of the pilot.
Organisation and delivery

An important facet of the pilot has been the ‘architecture of delivery’. Additional advisory and administrative resources were provided for the pilot. Given the importance of the childcare offer an additional CPM was provided. The resource allocated to the pilot was protected or ‘ring-fenced’, which has been effectively applied.

Delivery models varied, with both centralised and decentralised management of advisers and administrative staff. In both models, it was found that regular meetings across the lone parent team were critical for ensuring communication, learning, and maintaining staff morale.

The additional staff resource was pivotal to the effective delivery of the pilot; in particular the additional administrative resource has allowed advisers to focus on a better quality dialogue with lone parents. The additional CPM enabled a more strategic focus on partnerships. This has been particularly useful in developing relationships with Children’s Centres.

The enhanced training for advisers improved the quality of dialogue and engagement with lone parents. The training for administrative support staff was more ad hoc, with an emphasis on on-the-job support and mentoring. The guidance for the pilot and its elements was generally felt to be clear and helpful, with the exception of the MVC element and Flexible Provision.

Engaging with lone parents

In most instances, advisers were skilled in delivery and were observed to establish a good rapport with lone parents. The enhanced training improved advisers’ ability to explore constraints and choices with lone parents.

Advisers differentiated their approach to lone parents, depending on individual’s constraints and distance from the labour market. The pilot package was used as a menu of options, and advisers would select options most relevant to the lone parents’ circumstances.

In order to promote the pilot and engage better with lone parents a range of measures were introduced.

- The marketing material has been universally popular. Yet, the extent to which it was referred to by lone parents following interviews was not clear.
- The effect of the QWFI was varied and its utility was questioned. Most staff felt that a degree of flexibility and discretion was required in the frequency with which different types of customers should be seen.
• Advisers felt there was value in documenting actions as a record for future meetings, but the value of actually printing and signing the Action Plans was not clear to many staff. Customers were not referring to the Action Plans following interviews.

• While other activities such as IWS and MVC were felt to have been ‘standard’ informal practice preceding the pilot, they have now been formalised and structured.

Training and skills

The training offer available through Jobcentre Plus for lone parents was found to be the cause of greatest frustration for advisers and managers.

• This option was highlighted in the marketing material and raised lone parent expectations.

• The types of courses available were viewed as better suited for those who were more job-ready and had existing skills.

• While Discovery Events were viewed positively in some districts, knowledge on their impact was limited.

• The complexity and time taken in processing Flexible Provision was deterring advisers from making full use of this resource.

Financial offer

The best leverage to engage lone parents has been obtained from the financial offer, specifically the IWC element.

• The IWC was widely recognised as providing a strong incentive to enter employment, particularly when presented in the context of a Better-Off Calculation (BOC).

• The possibility that many lone parents would return to benefit when their IWC entitlement ended was not widely observed, but there were some reports of lone parents coming back onto benefit. This raised the question of whether some lone parents had taken employment with wages insufficient to cover costs once their IWC payments finished.

• The benefits of the IWEF in helping lone parents to stay in employment became clearer once greater flexibility had been provided on how it could be used.

• The conditionality associated with WSP is viewed as a deterrent for many lone parents and an administrative burden by advisers. WSP is most effective for those very actively seeking work, in helping with costs, or as a financial ‘bonus’, rather than as an incentive to encourage lone parents to seek work.
• Pilot elements were frequently usefully combined with those outside the pilot, such as the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) and Job Grants.

• One area where the need for additional support was highlighted related to the management of debt or financial responsibilities.

Childcare

• There were three elements related to childcare at the start of the pilot. However, Childcare Chats and Tasters are no longer offered as the Extended Schools pilot has ended, and Childcare Assist has had limited success. The lack of lone parent take-up can be partially attributed to issues with design. Additionally, the relevance and location of the offer could be problematic.

• Staff used IWEF and the ADF to cover upfront childcare costs, but a number of key childcare issues such as lack of specific types of childcare, out-of-hours provision and the affordability factor remain.

• The role best suited to Jobcentre Plus in childcare is clearly linked to partnership working; highlighting the importance of CPMs and additional CPMs in developing effective partnerships and signposting lone parents to relevant provision.

External partnerships

• As the pilot has increasingly targeted ‘harder to reach’ groups, alternative modes of engagement have become important. The partnership with Children’s Centres has been an important element in this work.

Outcomes

There were high expectations from the pilot. It was widely believed that the pilot did help to sustain lone parent job entry performance which otherwise would have dipped.

Findings indicate that the pilot works best for those lone parents who are more job-ready or who are undecided. In these cases, the persuasiveness of the financial elements, the training offer and the support offered by advisers has been very effective in ‘tipping the balance’ towards work.

There is a view that for lone parents more distant from the labour market, the pilot can only help progression at a pace that is appropriate for their level of confidence, skills and motivation to work.
Conclusions and recommendations

The pilot has demanded profound changes of both those delivering it, and the lone parents benefiting from it. The move away from an entirely voluntary regime towards a greater focus on rights and responsibilities has been underpinned by an accompanying paradigm shift in the behaviours required of advisers and lone parents. There was some initial resistance from advisers but this was considerably tempered through the course of the pilot, as the value of both the approach and the offer became evident. Amongst lone parents, the change towards mandatory attendance at interviews while accepted by new customers has also had some resistance from those already on benefit.

The empathetic mode of adviser engagement with lone parents has moderated the impact of the change in regime for most lone parents. It is believed by managers and staff that the pilot has been an appropriate tool for changing ‘hearts and minds’ and offering a new view of Jobcentre Plus.

Some of the main recommendations for further development include:

• As far as possible retain the administrative support function that enables advisers to focus on engaging with the lone parents.

• In the case of QWFIs and WSP, there is a need for greater flexibility, to allow targeting to those who would benefit most from the engagement and support for QWFIs, and to tailor the support better to customers needs in the case of WSP.

• In the case of Flexible Provision, internal processes need to be streamlined to allow faster access and use.

• Consideration is required of a ‘tapering off’ approach to IWC.

• Greater support around financial and debt management for lone parents is required.

• Consideration of rules, processes and the extent to which advisers can exercise greater discretion in tailoring the offer to different customers’ needs is recommended.

• The training offer has been a stumbling block in delivering a comprehensive service to lone parents. Better links and knowledge are needed to signpost lone parents to relevant provision, and compatible childcare support.

• Effective links to appropriate English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision were highlighted as an important concern.

• More effective approaches need to be developed with specialised outreach organisations to address the needs and constraints of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) lone parents.
• There is a need to continue to signpost lone parents to relevant childcare provision. Importantly, the gaps identified in provision should be addressed through continued dialogue and partnership working with service providers.

• The partnerships with Children’s Centres have been important for engaging with harder to reach groups and building Jobcentre Plus links with wider services. This partnership should be given better strategic focus and joined-up planning and monitoring.
1 Introduction

The background to the research, an overview of the evaluation’s aims and methodological approach, and details of the nature and coverage of activities conducted are presented in this chapter.

1.1 Policy context

The lone parent agenda is strongly embedded within the Government’s strategy for the evolution of welfare to work policies and programmes, with work viewed as the best route out of poverty. Most non-working lone parents live in low-income households. There are currently an estimated 1.8 million lone parents of working age in Great Britain. Of these, about 774,860 are on Income Support (IS), constituting 36 per cent of the IS caseload. At present, the lone parent employment rate stands at 56.5 per cent, which represents an 11.8 percentage point improvement over the position in 1997. However, this does not compare favourably with the employment rate for partnered women (71.4 per cent), or with lone parent employment rates in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries or North America. The Government has set a target for achieving 70 per cent lone parent employment by 2010, a target that has clear links to halving child poverty by 2010 (achieving this rate would lift 200,000 children out of poverty) and eliminating it by 2020.

The New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilot (ND+fLP) was introduced in April 2005, and built on the voluntary New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) programme in place since 1998. Evidence indicates that this dedicated labour market programme for lone parents, along with measures such as the Work Focused Interviews (WFI), has led to

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2 This is consistent with previous estimates of a child poverty effect which suggested 300,000 children would be lifted out of poverty. These were made from a lower initial level of lone parent employment and thus implied a larger increase in lone parent employment to reach 70 per cent.
significant improvements in the labour market participation rate of lone parents\textsuperscript{3}, although more recent evidence indicates that the impact may have been somewhat lower than initially estimated\textsuperscript{4}. Attaining the Government targets would however require greater impetus, a concern in which the ND+fLP is rooted.

The pilot builds on international evidence that indicates high lone parent employment rates are achieved where there is a balanced package of measures, combining affordable and reliable childcare with strong financial incentives for returning to work. To develop a comprehensive package of support for the pilot, new measures have been combined with existing initiatives partially or fully in place and available to lone parents.

Initially scheduled to run for 12 months, through to April 2006, the ND+fLP pilot has been extended through to 2008 and expanded to two additional Districts, one in Scotland and one in Wales, from October 2006.

1.2 Overview of the pilot

The new intervention regime reflects a move towards a more persuasive effort to draw out lone parents’ aspirations and provide the support and capabilities they need to overcome their individual constraints and return to work. The offer can be characterised as a continuum of tailored support. The range of support offered can broadly be classified into pre and post-employment support. This includes engaging with the lone parent, identifying constraints to employment and building confidence, planning and job search assistance, finances and facilitating skill enhancement and childcare. These initiatives are further supplemented by internally focused Jobcentre Plus initiatives which seek to enhance the ‘capacities and capabilities’ of those delivering the services; a move to enable the staff to be more responsive to varied and complex demands.

The elements of the pilot include:

- mechanisms for engaging with lone parents (marketing, Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs), action planning, More Voluntary Contact (MVC), In-Work Support (IWS), outreach and Jobpoints in Children’s Centres);
- training and skills (Flexible Provision and Discovery Events);
- financial support (Work Search Premium (WSP), In-Work Credit (IWC) and In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF));


• childcare (Childcare Chats, Childcare Tasters and Childcare Assist); and
• additional resources (additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM) and administrative resource).

The individual elements of the pilot are described in further detail in Appendix A.

The pilot has been implemented in the following Jobcentre Plus districts:
• South-East London;
• North London;
• Sandwell and Dudley;
• Leicestershire;
• Bradford.

The pilot has been extended to include two other Jobcentre Plus districts in the devolved administrations from October 2006:
• South East Wales;\textsuperscript{5}
• Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders.

1.3 Aims of the evaluation

This qualitative evaluation forms part of a suite of research and evaluation activities around the ND+fLP pilot.

Other research activities are focusing on the impact of individual elements of the pilot in addition to the overall impact. The main focus of this qualitative evaluation is to examine the effectiveness of the pilot as a whole, highlighting the extent to which it is a comprehensive and coherent portfolio offer to lone parents.

The core objective of the qualitative evaluation is to examine the pilot holistically; searching for synergies and disjuncture between the various initiatives, with a view to identifying elements that are both effective and sustainable. As such, it seeks to review issues around ‘appropriateness’, ‘demand’, ‘delivery and packaging’, and to a lesser extent ‘effectiveness’ and ‘impact’. Impact is only being examined in as much as it is important to review which combinations of initiatives have been effective and work best for different groups of lone parents.

\textsuperscript{5} The former Cardiff and Vale district.
Specifically the evaluation has attempted to:

- determine the overall effectiveness of the pilot in moving lone parents towards work;
- examine the ways in which different elements interact and determine where the synergies lie, and what works less well in particular contexts;
- provide some assessment of the effectiveness of the various elements offered; and
- explore the delivery of the pilot over time and determine how effectiveness could be improved.

1.4 Methodological approach

1.4.1 Sequencing of the evaluation

The methodology for the qualitative evaluation was to observe the live running of the pilot over time and to identify and feed back promptly on its development. Fieldwork was conducted in all five Jobcentre Plus districts where the pilot was being implemented. Appendix B provides a summary of the methodology.

A scoping stage set the context for the evaluation, and base-lined resources and delivery models. The qualitative evaluation was sequenced to provide feedback in three stages; Wave 1 of fieldwork corresponded to the period immediately following launch, Wave 2 when the pilot was embedded and some emerging outcomes expected, and Wave 3 as the final assessment. Originally Wave 3 was scheduled towards the end of the pilot allowing stakeholders to reflect on the entire course of the pilot with a view to assessing effectiveness and sustainability. With the extension of the pilot, Wave 3 was delayed by approximately six months to allow further time for impacts to emerge.

As a result of the delay between Waves 2 and 3, an interim stage was introduced. This stage specifically focused on gathering feedback from a small panel of lone parents whose progress was being tracked throughout the pilot. It was felt important to retain contact with lone parents without too great a time gap in order to minimise potential drop-out by lone parents from the panel.

Each wave of fieldwork was followed by reporting and feedback to the Parent Policy Evaluation and Strategy Steering Group (ESSG). An internal report was also produced to present the findings from the Interim Follow-Up of the lone parent panel.

1.4.2 Evaluation tools and methods

The evaluation tools included in-depth interviews (of key stakeholders both internal and external), and focus groups with advisers, adviser managers and administrative support staff. Additionally, telephone interviews (used where staff were not
available during field visits), observations of lone parent/adviser interviews, shadowing of advisers, and an on-line survey of advisers, adviser managers and administrative staff were conducted.

The participant perspective was captured through face-to-face interviews with lone parents. A small panel of lone parents was also tracked through telephone follow-up. The intent was to determine how the package was perceived by participants, through examining the prompts, motivation and ease of take-up of elements or combination of elements over time. The longitudinal follow-up also provided a sense of benefits from the lone parents’ perspective, as well as the outcomes through participation. It should be noted that the sample of lone parents was intended to gain a qualitative perspective on outcomes and was not to definitively test nor measure impact.

A more detailed technical annex (Appendix C) further expands on the methodological tools and analysis, while the interview schedules used are included in Appendices D-F.

1.5 Report structure

In the remainder of the report:

- Chapter 2 considers the ‘architecture’ of delivery, use of resources, capacity for delivery and systems for monitoring and learning.

- Chapter 3 examines how the pilot has been delivered on the ground and the extent to which new capacities and resources have contributed to enhanced delivery. It also examines how lone parents have responded to new delivery modes.

- Chapter 4 analyses the findings for the main tools used for engagement with lone parents, assessing what factors have enabled or detracted from delivery and effectiveness.

- Chapter 5 reviews the support available for training and skill enhancement, as well as the important financial support available to lone parents, both through the pilot and through complementary offers.

- Chapter 6 looks at childcare, the role of Jobcentre Plus in this area, and the partnerships that have been instrumental in this offer.

- Chapter 7 describes the impacts of the pilot as perceived by key stakeholders, and draws out the main conclusions and recommendations.
2 Organisation and support for delivery

2.1 Summary of main points

The ‘architecture’ of delivery – examines how the pilot was organised and extent to which the additional capacity provided as part of the pilot has contributed to effective delivery:

• Additional resources, both advisory and administrative, were provided for the implementation of the pilot. These resources were protected or ‘ring-fenced’. There was some delay before resources were fully in place and functional.

• One of the keys to the success of the pilot has been the additional administrative resource. Staff have taken on increasing responsibilities and released advisers from much of the paperwork associated with the pilot. This has allowed advisers to focus on better quality engagement with lone parents.

• Two basic delivery models were noted; a centralised and decentralised model. While there was no consensus on which model offered better results, the research found that the decentralised model did result in some loss of coordination across the lone parent team. The key to success lay in constant coordination within and between adviser and administrative staff teams.

• The enhanced training for advisers was viewed very positively and had encouraged better approaches to identifying lone parent constraints and needs and offering appropriate support. The need for consolidation of the newly acquired skills was, however, highlighted. Some advisers felt that the short time-frame and structure of interviews did not allow them to use their skills fully.

• Training for administrative staff has been less formal, and the need for more formalised approaches to supplement on-the-job training and mentoring was highlighted.
• Guidance for the pilot was found to be well developed in most areas, and staff felt that the ‘roll-out’ of the pilot had been well planned. However, there were some areas, such as More Voluntary Contact (MVC) and Flexible Provision, where it was felt that guidance could have been clearer.

• Districts felt that monitoring guidelines had been unclear, and that the availability of more Management Information (MI) would have allowed them to assess performance and adjust approaches better.

• Regular adviser meetings were a key tool for sharing best practice and learning. Project Managers have been central to ensuring the coordination and smooth implementation of the pilot, and have played a role in sharing information across districts.

• An additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM) resource was provided as part of the pilot. This resource has been used either to share responsibilities with the existing CPM, or as a specific liaison point with Children’s Centres. The CPM resources had particular importance in relation to Jobcentre Plus’ engagement with the childcare agenda. Specifically, the additional CPM role had been central to developing the embryonic relationship with Children’s Centres.

2.2 Infrastructure for delivering New Deal Plus for Lone Parents

2.2.1 Pilot resources

The pilot was expected to place additional demands on lone parent teams; not only in terms of number of interviews but also in terms of the quality of engagement needed to effectively interface with lone parents to promote the package. To provide for the extra workload, additional resources were provided in the advisory teams. Similarly, to address the additional paperwork related to the pilot and allow advisers to focus on customer engagement, additional administrative resources were also provided.

Staff were recruited internally from a variety of sources. Some staff came from an existing advisory background, while others came with a different experience set. There were no issues with recruitment as the job is viewed as attractive and the cadre of lone parent staff, particularly advisers, is a relatively stable one. Other resources central to the pilot included a Project Manager and an additional CPM resource.

Some managers welcomed the recruitment of staff from varied backgrounds, indicating that they came with ‘a refreshing lack of baggage’. In the case where staff had been recruited from a non-advisory benefits background they were found to contribute a new and detailed knowledge of the benefits system that proved valuable. Conversely, it was also found that their lack of advisory experience meant they sometimes struggled in their interaction with lone parents. This had some impact on the effective delivery of the pilot, as these new staff required more mentoring and support during the early stages.
Most of the additional resource had been recruited by Wave 1, although a number of staff were still undergoing training and were not fully operational. By Wave 2, all planned resources were in place and functional, although those who had been recruited from non-advisory backgrounds were found to be still adjusting to their new roles. By Wave 3, staff were found to be comfortable in their new roles.

The time taken in recruitment and training had an impact on delivery in the initial stages, and it is widely felt that although the pilot went ‘live’ in April 2005, it was not fully operational until late summer 2005, and later still in some districts. Managers and advisers welcomed the extension of the pilot to 2008, with general agreement that impacts were unlikely to emerge within the original time-frame.

The resources provided for New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) were protected or ‘ring-fenced’. The organisational model used for delivery had some minor impact on the ‘ring fencing’ of advisers and administrative staff. Where staff were decentralised and being managed by local offices, there was some evidence that this compromised ‘ring-fencing’, particularly in the case of administrative staff.

By Wave 2, the benefits of the additional resource were being seen across all districts. It is widely believed that the intense delivery demands of the pilot would not have been met without the additional resource provided. Managers recognised that there had been a visible difference in the quality of engagement this allowed with lone parents.

### 2.2.2 Delivery models and pilot management

#### Delivery models

Two basic delivery models were observed across different districts, a centralised and a decentralised model with some degree of variation. The decentralised model was found to be more consonant with broader institutional changes in Jobcentre Plus.

In some instances all advisers were managed entirely at the local office level, while in other cases, the additional advisory resource was managed centrally and allocated specific tasks (for example MVC).

The administrative resource was also deployed in different ways. In some cases staff were divided between a central team managing bookings with other administrative resource being allocated to local offices. In other cases all administrative staff were centrally managed. In these cases, booking teams were in general separate from teams that provided other support.

There was no consensus on which mode of delivery offered better results, with each model viewed as having its own advantages. Those in favour of a centralised model for adviser management claimed that decentralising management resulted in a ‘dilution of effort’, and compromised ‘ring-fencing’.
‘One management chain gives consistency, a clear view on performance and ability to influence it, and also gives the lone parent team an identity and profile.’

(Manager)

However, in one district that followed a centralised management model, it was noted that a centralised approach did stretch Adviser Managers. Because they needed to cover a number of offices, Adviser Managers at times could not quality assure to the extent that they may like to. Despite this, the district still valued the cohesion that centralised management allowed.

Advocates of the decentralised mode of management for advisers claimed that this resulted in a more efficient use of resource and better integration and coordination with local offices. It was acknowledged that ‘ring-fencing’ could be compromised particularly in smaller, more rural offices; but this was viewed as an ‘efficiency’, as resource would be allocated where it was needed most.

‘You have to use resource where it is needed. You can’t have an adviser in a small office where there may not be a large volume of lone parent traffic, only focusing on one task, they need to pitch in where they are needed most.’

(Manager)

In some instances it was found that decentralisation had indeed resulted in some loss of coordination across the lone parent team, with staff in one district claiming they rarely met or shared best practice. This not only led to reported feelings of isolation, but also affected their ability to learn from each other and improve. In another district, the decentralisation had been compensated for by close coordination by the pilot Project Manager and regular adviser meetings.

Similar issues emerged around the deployment of the administrative staff. Some managers and staff felt that it was important to have geographical proximity between advisers and administrative support, as it led to a more seamless process. Decentralised administrative staff could back-up advisers more easily and have more face-to-face contact with lone parents. However, there were indications that where administrative staff were located in local offices, they were inevitably drawn into other tasks such as reception duty.

In other districts it was stated that the centralised administrative model worked exceptionally well, and did not interfere with the quality of interaction with advisers. Some of the advantages of this model included the ability to learn from each other, experiment with different duties, and to back each other up when staff were on leave or sick.

Pilot management

The role of the Project Managers has been pivotal to the pilot. They have been responsible for communication, management and overall monitoring of the pilot, and have been the key liaison point with the project team in head office. Project
Managers have worked closely with district management, with Adviser Managers and Administrative Team Managers, and with CPMs. In some districts staffing changes resulted in changes in Project Manager, which was not viewed as ideal within the course of a pilot, as the transition could be difficult.

Project Managers have had varying amounts of time to devote to the pilot, as this has not been a full-time role in all districts. It was noted that greater time allocation allowed for a more ‘hands-on’ engagement. When time was limited, functions were mainly oversight, general communication and monitoring.

In some districts Steering Groups met regularly to ensure coordination. In other districts contact has been more informal, with managers meeting to resolve issues as and when they arose. In most districts, the regular monthly adviser meetings have been an important forum for communication and ‘trouble-shooting’ around the pilot.

**Pilot monitoring**

The high expectations for improved performance associated with the pilot, led to some surprise and concern amongst managers interviewed during Wave 1 regarding the lack of specific guidelines for monitoring. As a result, districts have subsequently built on existing monitoring systems to try and gauge progress and identify bottlenecks.

It was felt the Labour Market System (LMS) did not capture all elements of delivery, and the availability of critical information for effective monitoring of the pilot was raised as a key concern by managers in all districts in Wave 3. It was highlighted that the new Resource Management System had been problematic since late 2005, and it had been difficult to access data. Moreover, for most elements Management Information (MI) markers were only introduced in summer 2006, resulting in a dependence on clerical information.

Managers stated that without information on spend and referrals, it was extremely difficult to make informed management decisions, and determine how well each element was performing. Additionally, the added burden on both advisory and administrative staff of preparing clerical information was especially highlighted.

‘The pilot was all ‘fuzzy and warm’ at the beginning and there was a surprising lack of emphasis on targets; now there is greater clarity on what is expected, only now have markers been introduced and statistics demanded, but it would have been better if we had had guidance at the start.’

(Manager)
2.3 Administrative support

2.3.1 Roles undertaken and response to enhanced administrative support

The additional administrative resource was expected to enhance advisers’ ability to engage with lone parents. During Wave 1, the benefit of this resource had not yet emerged as many staff were still undergoing different forms of familiarisation and training, and were consequently not fully functional. By Wave 2, this support was being widely endorsed as one of the ‘success stories’ of the pilot, a view that was further reinforced in Wave 3.

Administrative staff covered a wide range of functions, though this varied from district to district, and even from individual to individual depending on the level of experience of the administrative staff member, capacity and where they were located.

Among the more routine duties were: booking Quarterly Work Focused Inter views (QWFIs), reminder calls prior to appointments and follow-up for ‘Failure to Attend’ (FTA) customers. Pilot elements considered to have produced a great deal of paperwork were In-Work Credit (IWC) and Work Search Premium (WSP), though by Wave 2, administrative staff had relieved advisers of much of this paperwork. Additionally, staff supported routine queries, paperwork, and payments associated with the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF), training premiums and Childcare Assist where it was used. In a number of cases administrative staff also supported advisers by channelling queries to head office, which they viewed positively as it enhanced their sense of responsibility.

Most districts experimented with more stretching duties such as undertaking MVC, training staff for carrying out Better Off Calculations (BOCs) on the phone, In-Work Support (IWS) and in some instances undertaking routine QWFIs.

By Wave 2, anecdotal evidence and observations in offices indicated that where the administrative staff were fully functional they released advisers from the bulk of burdensome paperwork, allowing them to engage with customers in a more strategic and focused manner. The use of the administrative resource has been especially creative and has evolved constantly through the pilot. It is notable that some staff have taken on increasingly complex responsibilities, over and above what had originally been envisaged. There has been sufficient flexibility for managers to experiment with roles, and through ‘trial and error’ the most fitting roles have been explored and then put in place.

It has become evident through the pilot that there are some duties suited for administrative staff, while others have not worked as well. A notable example is MVC, where in Wave 2 it was found that administrative staff were being groomed to carry out this role. However, by Wave 3 it was found that in many cases administrative staff had been removed from this role. Hampered by their lack of
historical knowledge about the lone parent, administrative staff found that they were not fully equipped to deal with more complex queries, or occasional hostile reactions to follow-up and MVC. There were, however, areas where some administrative staff felt that they could do more, including supporting Discovery Events, conducting BOCs, reminder calls, and processing around Flexible Provision. Despite the issues surrounding the use of administrative staff for MVC, some administrative staff felt that they could also contribute to this area. This was generally in areas where they had not been used extensively for this activity. Overall, administrative staff agreed that they found customer contact very satisfying and would like to engage more with customers, with the right training and support.

Administrative support staff were happy and generally comfortable in their position, claiming that their role in the lone parent teams was more rewarding than other roles. Relationships between administrative support staff and advisers were found to be cohesive and mutually supportive. There was, however, also a feeling that administrative staff were not being adequately recognised or rewarded for their increased workload and responsibilities. The feeling of being ‘undervalued’ and working at grades that were not commensurate with their duties was highlighted in several districts. Managers felt that this was a potential source of concern.

All managers and advisers highlighted how valuable the administrative support had been, and all strongly indicated that it would be critical to retain this support as a key element should the pilot be rolled out.

2.3.2 Training for administrative staff

The enhanced roles being undertaken by administrative support staff have had to be underpinned by training, although this has varied greatly. In Wave 1, it was found that there was no standardised approach for training administrative staff, which to some extent was understandable given the variation in their individual roles according to their assignments. This did, however, lead to a somewhat ad hoc approach in imparting skills to this group, with few instances where formal training was provided.

In one district, administrative staff allocated to offices undertook the enhanced training aimed at advisers as well as other lone parent adviser training modules, with the understanding that they would back-up advisers when the need arose. In another district there was a structured four week programme for administrative staff consisting of orientation, mentoring by advisers on systems and protocols, observation and shadowing and review of guidance and intranet resources. In all cases, mentoring and shadowing with both advisers and fellow administrative staff were key contributors to developing skills and confidence.

One area of need that became evident over the course of the pilot was the gap in knowledge of administrative support staff of the LMS. With the roles they were undertaking in supporting pilot elements, this was a critical need, and in a number of districts LMS training was undertaken to ensure the correct usage of MI markers.
However, a number of staff in Wave 3 indicated that they were not fully confident in this area, and would have liked further support.

Overall while there was a degree of satisfaction with the training a number of staff felt that more formal or structured training would have also been helpful in addition to the ‘on the job’ training and mentoring received. In the absence of formal training staff indicated that they felt tentative while undertaking telephone contact with customers, as they were not always able to address difficult queries. With the overall Jobcentre Plus move towards e-learning, staff further indicated that while this was useful, greater face-to-face learning and support was needed. Without monitoring and feedback they could not be sure they were undertaking tasks correctly.

2.4 Adviser training, guidance and learning

2.4.1 Enhanced training for advisers

The enhanced training modules were designed to improve adviser confidence in their dialogue with a customer group that faces a wide range of constraints. All lone parent advisers were obliged to undergo the training at the start of the pilot. As implied in its title the training focused on further enhancing the ability of lone parent advisers to effectively identify the constraints faced by lone parents and offer them the most appropriate support available in the pilot; this was expected to ensure a degree of customer ‘buy-in’. The training also focused on reversing certain embedded adviser behaviour patterns, teaching them to enter a ‘listening’ mode that would allow them to better gauge the customers’ personal aspirations and abilities and direct them to realistic job goals.

Delivered in-house by Jobcentre Plus, the training comprised of two modules of two days each, with a consolidation period between the two:

- Module 1: Skills for Gaining Customer Commitment; and
- Module 2: Skills for Helping the Customer to Identify Realistic and Achievable Job Goals.

The training was delivered by Learning and Development Officers, not all of whom had a detailed knowledge of the pilot elements. The tight time-frame within which the training was rolled out, and the resource for the training were considered inadequate to an extent, especially when trainers were expected to deliver the module and conduct observations at the same time. Some managers and trainers also commented that the roll-out of the training had been far too rushed over a peak annual leave period.

The training material had been adapted from the Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser (IB-PA) training. In some instances trainers and staff noted that the material would have benefited from greater adaptation to the lone parent context, as the ‘situations’ used were not felt to be relevant by participants. Overall, however, participants appreciated the use of ‘real life’ situations explored through role-play.
While the enhanced training was widely felt to have been comprehensive, a number of managers and staff have noted the need for a ‘refresher’ and further consolidation. Importantly, it has been pointed out that the fact that the training has not been available for new recruits has considerably disadvantaged them. The e-learning available to new staff members was not considered to have the value of the enhanced training, particularly given the focus on soft skills and behaviours.

Overall, the response to the training was positive. On reflection staff found themselves surprised at the extent to which they had benefited, with initially cynical staff acknowledging that there had been a change in their interview styles. Staff indicated that the training had helped them in exploring limitations in QWFIs, and in encouraging lone parents to articulate their needs; as one adviser noted ‘now we talk to, and not at customers’.

## 2.4.2 Guidance and learning

With few exceptions, the guidance received for the implementation of the pilot was felt overall to have been clear and very helpful. Most staff noted that the guidance for IWC and WSP was especially strong. There were areas, however, where guidance was felt to have been less than adequate. These include the MVC guidelines that had resulted in considerable definitional confusion, and Flexible Provision, where in at least one district there had been conflict between national and local guidelines. One manager commented that the guidelines for some elements were ‘woolly, leaving the adviser to make difficult judgements’. For certain elements, for example, Discovery Events, revised guidance had been issued and was an improvement. The intranet had ensured widespread access to pilot guidelines.

The initial roll-out of the pilot was felt to have been well planned in most districts. All districts have been overwhelmingly positive about the support provided by the project team in head office, in providing guidance, promoting learning and resolving issues. Project Managers found the initial meetings between districts during the launch phase extremely helpful; and while the telephone conferences used in the later stages for keep-in-touch meetings were useful, they were not an effective replacement for face-to-face interaction.

Districts noted that they had been able to share experience and learn from each other, sometimes through cross-office visits. For example, in one instance a Project Manager had undertaken an analysis across districts of Jobpoint usage and had shared this with colleagues. However, some managers continued to feel that greater sharing around actual implementation experience would further the learning process.

A mix of ‘mentoring’, ‘training or away days’ and ‘guest sessions’, helped advisers to learn from each other and address issues in delivery. Most new advisers were mentored and observations and feedback helped to adjust delivery techniques.
‘We try to put a balanced team in place in each office so they can all learn from each other. They do share all the time.’

(Manager)

Importantly, the ‘monthly meetings really help’ as one manager noted. These monthly meetings have been an invaluable learning and ‘trouble-shooting’ forum for advisers, and where meetings had been held with regularity, this made a considerable difference to coordination, understanding of the pilot and staff morale. In some instances ‘master classes’ had been held during these meetings, to share best practice and resolve difficulties in delivery. For example, with low take-up of the WSP element in early stages of the pilot, many districts made concerted efforts to promote this element through sessions at monthly meetings. This resulted in improved understanding of the value of the element and better delivery in a number of instances.

2.5 Childcare Partnership Manager roles

The roles of the CPM and additional CPM have particular importance for the pilot, not only in relation to the use and value of the additional resource provided, but also in relation to Jobcentre Plus’ overall engagement with the childcare agenda.

The CPM role was introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2003 to coordinate Jobcentre Plus programmes and strategies with local childcare development plans and strategies. The role covers all Jobcentre Plus customers, with only a portion of time being allocated to the lone parent team. CPMs saw themselves as having a dual role: an internal one in developing knowledge and awareness on childcare and promoting recruitment into the sector; and an external one in building partnerships with key stakeholders. The pilot introduced an additional CPM resource to support the existing CPM role. This new position assisted in managing the overall childcare package available through the pilot, providing outreach and building effective links with the Sure Start programme, the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot (ESCP) and other childcare partners. The role was also intended to involve working closely with advisers in addressing childcare issues and signposting appropriate provision.

The additional CPM was intended for almost exclusive focus on the lone parent team. In most cases they have spent about 80 per cent of their time on lone parent issues. In the context of linking with external partners, the role has through necessity, involved coverage of a broader group of customers; for example, the range of potential customers who may be using Children’s Centres. In some districts CPMs have line managed the additional CPM resource, while in others they have been line managed by the Project Manager for the pilot. The degree to which CPMs have worked closely with the lone parent teams has varied across districts. In some instances there has been a particularly close relationship and coordination with CPMs regularly attending adviser meetings, while in other cases there has been more limited engagement.
While the CPM role itself was fairly well established by the time the pilot was introduced, there was a sense of uncertainty as a result of Jobcentre Plus roll-out, mergers of districts and the organisational changes taking place in Jobcentre Plus. This was in some cases influencing how the new resource was going to be used, and the extent to which this was incremental.

During Wave 1, the additional CPM resource was just coming on board in all but one of the districts. By Wave 2, the additional resource, where appointed, had settled into their roles, and by Wave 3, it was evident that the additional resource had assumed even greater importance. The support of the additional CPM was considered pivotal in assisting and complementing the CPMs as their own area of coverage expanded and their duties were ‘stretched’.

Additional CPM roles have varied across districts. In some cases they have shared overall responsibilities with the CPM, dividing responsibilities geographically. In other cases they have been viewed as a ‘delivery arm’, with the CPM playing a strategic role, and the additional CPM taking the role of hands-on delivery, for example in focused activities in Children’s Centres, or at promotional events such as job fairs. All partners viewed the division of responsibility (with delineated strategic and operational roles) very positively, as it reflected commitment to the partnership, and ‘delivers the goods’ as one CPM remarked.

The relationship with Children’s Centres in particular has been viewed as a synergistic one. It has allowed Jobcentre Plus to develop links with a wide range of services, and it allows Children’s Centres to promote a service that is central to their mandate. For example, in one district, the additional CPM had been working closely with Skills Teams through the Children’s Centres targeting an estate where they provided links to skills and training. In this situation, the additional CPM provided extra employment support and links to Jobcentre Plus services.

In the two districts where additional CPMs have focused on delivery of Jobcentre Plus services in Children’s Centres, partnerships were found to be better developed. In addition to providing Jobcentre Plus services (case-loading, BOCs and referrals) these additional CPMs have handled a range of other activities. Examples include developing a desk-based tool that will provide links to websites where advisers can search for children’s services by postcode, and liaising with the Local Authority in providing more sustainable childcare that covered the gaps in out-of-hours provision.

Children’s Centre Managers noted the importance of balancing outreach and linkages with wider community services in Children’s Centres, with the one-to-one offer to lone parents and other customers. At times, the focus on interviews did not allow sufficient time for community development work and broader promotion activities.

While additional CPMs had not received the full compliment of training, they had in some cases had a compressed version and had supplemented this through familiarising themselves with the guidance. Where there is a greater role in delivery
of Jobcentre Plus services, this becomes quite important, and the need for more structured and consistent training for this role is evident.

While the inclusion of childcare elements in the pilot was considered by CPMs to be extremely important, the delivery of these elements through external partners had generated some frustration, in particular in relation to monitoring and determining outcomes. Charged with the monitoring of these elements, the degree to which CPMs had consistent, accurate and comprehensive data was variable, due to the lack of well developed joint monitoring systems.

The development of links with Children’s Centres has been a slow and sometimes difficult process. First in overcoming entrenched negative views associated with Jobcentre Plus and secondly, in addressing logistical constraints. Operational issues such as lack of broadband access and printing facilities have adversely affected the ability of staff who are attempting to offer services such as BOCs or case-loading to customers. Dedicated office space, in some instances, has also been problematic. By Wave 3, significant progress had been made in some districts towards addressing the first issue, largely through the close coordination and service delivery the additional CPMs have provided.

One particular concern that emerges as more Children’s Centres roll out is the degree to which existing CPMs and additional CPMs will be able to provide dedicated services for these centres. There was already considerable pressure on the CPMs’ and additional CPMs’ time. In one district, the additional CPM covers ten Children’s Centres that will be increasing to 18. This concern, coupled with the need to build stronger monitoring processes, is an area that will require greater attention.
3 Delivery and engaging with lone parents

3.1 Summary of main points

An examination of how the pilot has been delivered and its influence on lone parents has been central to determining the context within which different elements have been effective or not. Lines of enquiry included: the environment and pressures in which the advisers operate, the additional demands made by the pilot and how this has influenced delivery, and the extent to which advisers have been able to use the enhanced training in their interviews. In particular, the dynamic between adviser and lone parent was examined, along with the content and tone of the dialogue.

- Advisers approached lone parents with empathy and the dialogue was often informal and relaxed. In general advisers were responsive to lone parent concerns and supportive when the lone parent had significant constraints or was at a distance from the labour market.

- Advisers were able to build a typology of lone parents and combine certain pilot elements based on an analysis of constraints and the receptiveness of the lone parent. They were therefore able to sequence what they offered lone parents based on the stage they were at on the pathway to employment.

- In the initial stages of the pilot there was some tendency to selectively offer lone parents options based on the advisers’ judgement of their needs. Over time it was found that the advisers were pointing out the range of options before tailoring to individual need.

- Lone parents appreciated the sequenced approach and the fact that they could progress at a pace appropriate to their needs. While the decision to return to work was often a personal one, the support offered by the advisers was viewed as important in the decision-making pathway.
• At times interviews were rushed or the lone parent was accompanied by children. In these instances the adviser found it difficult to establish a rapport. In other cases, some advisers were found to use jargon or to limit what they offered the lone parent, having judged that the lone parent was too distant from the labour market or had English language issues.

• One area where advisers have struggled is in delivery to ethnic minority groups. Language issues and a variable understanding of cultural barriers have impeded clear communication and advisers’ ability to segment this customer group.

3.2 Preparation and opening of the interview

Prior to an interview, most advisers were able to at least make preliminary checks on the Labour Market System (LMS) to read previous notes and familiarise themselves with the details of the customer and their children. In cases where customers were dropping into the office, advisers were generally accommodating, and would check over the customer’s details during the interview.

In cases where the lone parent was meeting the adviser for the first time, the adviser would introduce themselves at the start of the interview. The majority of advisers also tried to clarify the purpose of the meeting. There were cases of advisers being off sick or on annual leave when their regular customers would be scheduled for an interview or drop-in for a specific concern. These situations could be difficult as the adviser who was seeing the lone parent was not as familiar with their background and the information on the LMS was often sketchy. One lone parent commented on this:

‘The problem is that advisers keep changing which is very disruptive to us, and it also must be difficult for the advisers to get to know us.’

(Lone parent)

3.3 Interview approaches and delivery styles

Observations of interviews demonstrated that advisers adapted their approach and delivery style for clients with different needs. Clients varied from lone parents with complex issues and barriers, to lone parents who could benefit quickly from the support that was available through the pilot.

In both Waves 1 and 2, an incremental approach was in evidence. Most advisers took a long-term focus for interviews with lone parents who were not yet interested in working, by highlighting some of the pilot’s incentives (such as the In-Work Credit (IWC)), or in some cases by offering a Better Off Calculation (BOC). The rationale was to try and help these customers to focus on their future goals and highlight how, by being employed, they could offer their children a better future. For customers whose children were older and closer to the age when the lone parent would have to leave Income Support (IS), the approach was more focused on ensuring the customer was aware of this imminent change and encouraging them to start looking for work.
In most cases advisers would try to explore constraints and sequence options available to them depending on where the lone parent was placed on a pathway to employment. For example, advisers would address fear of working first by raising awareness on the financial benefits of work. They would then address childcare concerns, followed by focusing on skills and training if necessary. Jobsearch support would be offered when the customer was more job-ready. Where there were immediate and serious issues, such as housing or fear of violence from ex-partners, the advisers would not attempt to market the pilot, but would deal with these issues first. This approach was also seen with refugees who had suffered war and trauma. When lone parents had ongoing caring responsibilities, advisers felt that there was very little they could do for the customer. Many advisers did, however, attempt to gauge whether the situation had changed between visits, or could potentially change in the future.

Advisers were almost always found to be using the pilot as a ‘menu of options’ from which they could choose the most relevant options for the customer. This worked best for advisers who had taken time to understand the lone parents’ needs and would then tailor appropriate options.

In most cases, advisers would try to work out the best financial option for the lone parent. Some advisers would do different BOCs based on numbers of hours worked. The focus on the financial benefits of returning to work had the most persuasive power. The fear of not coping financially once off benefit, was highlighted by lone parents in a number of interviews.

In Wave 3 many of the appointments focused on steps lone parents had been taking towards employment and on further steps that needed to be undertaken to continue progression. For example, in one case an adviser had recommended to a lone parent interested in security work that he should obtain certification. When his interview was observed in Wave 3 he was in the process of finishing the course and had met with his adviser to discuss financial support for paying for his badge.

### 3.4 Nature of the dialogue

It was noted that there was a significant volume of interactive and often informal and relaxed dialogue between the lone parents and the advisers during the interview. This was particularly the case where lone parents were on case-loads, or were returning for a follow-up interview.

A lone parent interviewed in Wave 3 highlighted this, stating that she enjoyed coming to the Jobcentre Plus office and had a good relationship with advisers she saw. She explained she was suffering from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and learning difficulties and was particularly pleased with the nature of the engagement, noting, ‘the advisers accommodate me; they never look down on me’.

In many instances the lone parent would be suffering from severe loss of confidence;
in these cases advisers were supportive, providing reassurance and boosting confidence regarding skills and abilities. After these interviews, a number of advisers highlighted a gap in what they could provide to customers for confidence building (Discovery Events were not felt to be sufficient for addressing serious confidence issues).

Time allocations for interviews were found to vary according to interview type and in some cases the circumstances of the district. In districts where there were backlogs, interviews were scheduled to be shorter than the general guidance. Interviews of one full hour were rarely observed. This sometimes put pressure on advisers, and they felt that they were unable to use the skills they had acquired through the enhanced training.

Interviews were, on the whole, well paced and not generally rushed. The majority of advisers were patient with the lone parents in carefully explaining the different options and providing clear answers to any lone parent questions. In a few situations, however, it was obvious advisers had made a judgement on whether the lone parent was job ready or not. In these cases, if the lone parent was thought not ready to consider employment, the adviser would sometimes speed through the interview, not ensuring that the lone parent fully understood the details of what was being offered. Where advisers were inexperienced they were found to be tentative in their delivery, sometimes trying to follow a set sequence of events, with limited exploration of the lone parents’ needs and constraints.

In some cases it was observed that advisers were using quite a lot of jargon and were not explaining terms to the customers, this included the use of words such as ‘case-load’, and ‘submission’ for example, or referrals to categories of benefits. The dialogue was especially problematic when the client did not speak English fluently, or had basic skills issues. This did not establish a sound basis for the interaction, as the lone parent would often be tentative in asking for explanations, and at times the offer and its implications would clearly not be understood.

The benefits of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes to lone parents were evident in some cases. An interview in Wave 2 was observed where the customer had strained communication with the adviser due to her limited command of English. When the same customer was observed being interviewed in Wave 3, she had been taking ESOL classes, was much more fluent in English and was able to communicate well with her adviser.

There were sometimes situations where advisers would need to discuss a potentially disappointing situation with a lone parent. It was observed that advisers generally handled the situation tactfully and continued to maintain a positive relationship with the lone parent. For example, in Wave 3 in one observed interview a lone parent was told that he was unable to get funding for the training programme of choice. The adviser exercised understanding in the way the message was conveyed, and continued to motivate the lone parent towards his goals by offering alternative choices.
In all of the waves it was observed that many lone parents attended interviews with their children, who were often quite young and sometimes caused disruption to the interview. The advisers addressed these situations well. Where Jobcentre Plus offices had toys available, this often eased the situation and the children did not disrupt the interview too severely.

3.5 Use of marketing material

The marketing material was used in a variety of ways, depending on the guidance issued by the district, and the approach used by the adviser. In general, however, there was often insufficient time for the adviser to explore the brochure in detail with the lone parent during the interview. In some interviews, it was used as a way of explaining the pilot, and advisers would show the lone parent where the information about options was contained. In one case in Wave 1, an adviser who did not seem very confident with the pilot, would go through the marketing brochure page by page, quickly explaining the different options but not tailoring the discussion to the lone parent’s circumstances. Other advisers would give the marketing material to their customers for them to look at on their own, to reinforce the options outlined during the interview. Sometimes they would quickly flip through the brochure showing the lone parent where the different options were detailed, and would add their name and contact details inside in case the lone parent had any questions.

3.6 Next steps

At the close of interviews advisers would generally try to re-visit the key points of the discussions and any options taken-up by the lone parent. Paperwork was often completed at this stage. In Wave 1, one lone parent, for example, was concerned about completing some forms, so the adviser offered support in filling in parts of them. In a number of interviews the lone parent and the adviser discussed tax credits in detail, and the BOCs were revisited.

During the majority of interviews, the next steps were clearly defined and elaborated. For lone parents who were interested in starting job search, the advisers clarified the specific actions the lone parent would need to take to move the process on. Follow-up interviews were often arranged for lone parents who were interested in specific options. This was particularly noticed during Wave 3, where it seemed as if the next steps were more concrete, for example that the lone parent would enrol in a training course or would complete the application for a specific job.

For the lone parents whose interview had taken more of an exploratory tone the next steps often took the form of agreeing the subsequent date for an interview and advising the lone parent to think about the information discussed in the interview. The majority of advisers emphasised that the lone parent could return to the Jobcentre Plus office to talk at any time about any issues, if they needed to, and most advisers gave their name and contact details.
3.7 Transitions to work

The Back-to-Work appointment was important in organising some of the post-work support offered and paperwork associated with strands such as the IWC. In some cases a BOC was carried out at this stage to finally determine whether the lone parent was better off in work and reassure them on this and other financial matters. This was also a time to discuss the payment of Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF), which had been offered in most cases as an additional incentive to further convince lone parents that transitional needs would be addressed. Observations indicated that several advisers would encourage lone parents to use ADF to purchase clothing for work and for other interview expenses. Advisers were encouraging at this stage, providing positive reinforcement for the lone parent and allaying any concerns. On the whole, the lone parents who were moving into work were excited about their new jobs and looking forward to the challenge, although some were found to be somewhat intimidated by the prospect.

There were some reported instances of lone parents feeling cut off or ‘abandoned’ once they returned to work. A few lone parents interviewed discussed facing difficult challenges in their new jobs or with their childcare arrangements and reported not receiving the support that they had hoped for from their advisers. In some cases there had been issues with Working Tax Credits (WTC), or payment of IWC or Housing Benefit (HB). In other cases, the lone parent had struggled with applications and was not happy with the degree of support received. Overall, however, advisers were found to be very supportive and spent considerable time helping lone parents with issues encountered during the transition to work.

3.8 Use of adviser time

The shadowing and observations indicated that, as expected, the use of adviser time was dependent on the ‘fullness of the diary’ and spacing of interviews, as well as the experience of the adviser. Those who were relatively new to the job remained somewhat tentative and took longer to go through procedures and in entering data on the system. Some still struggled, especially in carrying out processes such as BOCs. The adviser attitude also determined how they structured their time and the extent to which they followed up options and engaged with lone parents. On the whole, advisers presented themselves well and tried to take the time needed with the lone parents. However this became somewhat difficult when there were multiple drop-ins waiting combined with full diaries.

Tasks occupying advisers included checking information prior to interviews, determining the accuracy of information on the system, updating the system, following-up interviews, and paperwork for some pilot options. Telephone queries, and following-up training and benefit queries for lone parents also took some time.

In offices where a high Failure to Attend (FTA) rate was noted, it was difficult for advisers to plan the use of the extra time. It would take a while to realise that the lone
parent was not going to turn up, and where possible, advisers would look at details on the system or carry out small administrative tasks. It was not viable to undertake telephone enquiries or extended tasks, as it was possible the customer could arrive late.

Once a number of the pilot related administrative tasks which advisers had been observed to undertake in Wave 1, had been transferred to the administrative support, advisers were able to engage better with lone parents. There were, however, still some issues around some advisers failing to enter sufficiently detailed information in the system. This caused difficulties during subsequent meetings with lone parents, especially when they were seeing another adviser who was not familiar with their circumstances. In each wave the advisers seemed progressively less ‘stressed’ and more comfortable with delivering the pilot and with their interaction with the lone parents.

3.9 Lone parents response to the offer

Observations and lone parent interviews revealed that the incremental approach did help lone parents in progressing at an appropriate pace, depending on their circumstances and constraints.

When asked what had influenced the decision to return to work, lone parents often reported that it was a personal decision ‘to get out of the house’ or ‘do something for myself’. In general, lone parents interviewed felt that work would bring stability and independence, with concomitant psycho-social benefits. For the majority of lone parents in employment, improving their financial situation and security had been an important factor in their decision to look for work. Triggers for returning to work were often a natural watershed point such as children moving into school. However, importantly, support and motivation through advisers and the availability of relevant training were key factors that helped to reinforce the resolve to work.

Most lone parents had previous employment experience, but there was great variation in the period of time that they had not been working. For example, some lone parents interviewed had been unemployed for less than a year, while others had not worked for the past two decades. This influenced their degree of job-readiness, though not necessarily the willingness to work.

An example of this is a lone parent who when interviewed in Wave 1 had not worked for 18 years, as she had been married and supported by her husband. When she was interviewed she had recently separated and was keen to look for work. When followed up during the Interim Stage she was still looking for work but was finding it difficult because she was not used to working and therefore not confident enough to work outside of her local area. In another case, a lone parent who had been unemployed for two years was found to be more job-ready. She was visiting the Jobcentre Plus office regularly, and actively looking for work. Her response to the support on offer was very positive, and she stated that it was ‘higher than my expectation, especially the help with childcare, I didn’t expect this’.
Follow-up interviews also revealed that lone parents’ desire to work sometimes waned despite enthusiasm when they initially met with their adviser and were informed about the offer. This highlighted the importance of continued contact, exploration of constraints and encouragement beyond the initial offer, particularly for lone parents who were closer to the labour market.

Lone parents who had clearly been able to develop close links with their advisers, visiting them in some cases weekly to undertake job search or to discuss their options, were more willing to engage with Jobcentre Plus and the offer.

Most of the lone parents followed-up who had subsequently found employment during the evaluation did feel that the Jobcentre Plus support had helped them in some way. Even where the lone parent had located the job through their own sources, the support provided, in filling in applications for example, was considered extremely helpful.

**Lone Parent Case Study 1**

A lone parent interviewed during Wave 1 was actively looking for work. At that time she was receiving IS, Child Benefit (ChB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and HB. She had been receiving IS for nearly six years. She felt that working would enable her to plan for the future, buy things, maybe have a holiday and provide her children with a better education. She was, however, nervous about not being better off.

She had an interview the following day for a position at a retail shop that she had seen advertised at the Jobcentre Plus office. Overall, she felt that there were not many suitable jobs for lone parents in the area but that the advisers had been very helpful in assisting her with her search. The reason for the meeting during Wave 1 was to prepare her for the interview and to renew her travel card.

She said that she felt a lot more confident about looking for work now that she had received help and support from her adviser. When she visited the Jobcentre Plus office she was always able to find some vacancies and would send off for the application forms.

When followed up during the Interim Stage she was found to have been working for a few months, doing 20 hours a week in a local shop, a job she found advertised at the Jobcentre Plus office. Her adviser had helped her with the application. She had also received Work Search Premium (WSP) and ADF, which she used to purchase clothes. The £250 job grant helped to cover costs in the gap between benefits and receiving her first salary package.

She found there were benefits in returning to work because she had extra money that she could use with her children and did not feel that she had to constantly plan and budget for expenditures.

Continued
She was using a childminder who picked her children up from school and watched them until 6 pm, which allowed her to do some chores around the house after work. The childminder was arranged through her adviser and she received support towards the costs, which she found very helpful. She did see the benefits of childcare, and felt it was important ‘to take the pressure off,’ as she did not have to rush back home.

She was looking for another job in administration, as she had taken a training course that she wanted to put to use, particularly as she did not find retail work sufficiently stimulating.

Interviews did reveal, however, that there were a number of lone parents who did not want to or could not contemplate work. The main issues that lone parents identified related to: concerns about leaving their children with strangers, the age, disability or special needs of their children, caring responsibilities, personal health concerns, lack of basic skills or English language, or a feeling they needed further skills or qualifications before looking for work and that training was a prerequisite. In a very small number of cases lone parents did not see the benefits of returning to work.

Health concerns were an important barrier for some lone parents. A number of staff felt that some lone parents on IS should actually be on Incapacity Benefit (IB), and when their youngest child turned 16, would indeed move onto IB of necessity. When speaking to lone parents, a range of health issues or related concerns were identified. One lone parent commented that she was worried about working because ‘I will be too exhausted to give adequate time to my children’. Another lone parent was attending a training course that she had to stop because of her depression.

In some such cases, less formal or non-traditional employment were being explored as more attractive and viable options. In one case a lone parent interviewed in Wave 2 was considering taking up training but felt intimidated because she had not worked in a long time and technology had changed over the years. She also had epilepsy and arthritis that limited her mobility and had affected her psychologically. When followed up in the Interim Stage she was still not feeling well and continued to be worried about going back to work. She felt that she needed to find a job where her health problems would be considered and would not get in the way. In this instance her adviser had been responsive to her concerns and at the suggestion of her adviser she was contemplating setting up a small card-making business.

Where there were significant constraints and distance from the labour market, advisers adopted an incremental approach and were found to be supportive. Lone parents confirmed that they were very appreciative of the pace of their interaction.
4 Tools for engagement

4.1 Summary of main points

A number of tools have been used to promote the package of interventions, and to help advisers in effectively engaging with lone parents. The marketing package was intended to help in broad promotion, and to raise awareness on the options available through New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP). The Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs), More Voluntary Contact (MVC) and partnerships with Children’s Centres, were expected to draw customers in and initiate dialogue that would support them in progressing towards employment. Action Plans were formalised and made mandatory to enhance the lone parents’ sense of responsibility, and provide a structured framework for interaction between adviser and lone parent. In-Work Support (IWS) was introduced to ensure that customer contact would be retained in the early difficult stages of employment. Key findings with respect to these tools show:

- The new marketing material was considered by Jobcentre Plus staff and partner organisations to be a vast improvement over standard Jobcentre Plus material, both in concept and design. While lone parents have also responded positively to it, the extent to which the material is used to review and consider choices is not clear. It is, however, considered important as a promotional tool.

- The value of the translated marketing material was uncertain, though it was felt important to have on offer. Advisers believed that those with English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) issues would prefer to have relatives and friends translate the English material. The research was unable to determine the extent to which this was true.

- The QWFIs have led to resistance both from advisers and lone parents due to their mandatory nature. There has been some effect on adviser workload and advisers expressed concern that this detracted from the quality of dialogue with lone parents.
• For lone parents with serious barriers, such as caring responsibilities, the QWFI is not viewed as an effective mechanism. Many staff also felt that bringing in parents with their youngest child aged 12 for QWFIs was too early. Overall, it was felt that a degree of discretion was needed in determining the frequency with which customers were seen.

• The action planning process has continued to be problematic. While advisers felt there was value in recording actions for future reference, the value of printing and signing action plans was not clear to them. Action Plans were also felt to be of limited value for those customers distant from the labour market.

• Other tools such as MVC and IWS were felt to have been ‘standard’ practice prior to the pilot, but have undergone a process of formalisation, with accompanying targets. There was some resistance to the more structured approach and targets. It was felt that the MVC targets resulted in advisers focusing on these at the cost of case-loading.

• In both, there was a lack of clarity of what constituted ‘contact’. The need to be discerning with MVC was also highlighted, as all lone parents were not suitable candidates for more constant follow-up.

4.2 The marketing package

The marketing package was designed to sell the benefits of an overall package of interventions, and brings together all elements in the pilot using a distinctive ‘chocolate box’ motif. In addition to large brochures and smaller leaflets, other material such as videos, audio, and posters are also available. Material has been available in translation in a range of languages including Bengali, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Arabic.

4.2.1 Design and content

The marketing package was a creative initiative for Jobcentre Plus. The material was developed professionally and designed with accessibility and appeal to a broad range of lone parents in mind. The new material was perceived to be a vast improvement on previous Jobcentre Plus material and was greeted with great enthusiasm by most staff and partner organisations.

Most staff felt that the material was comprehensive, with clear content and simple language. Some advisers did however observe that there was too much information for some lone parents to absorb. Other concerns related to the emphasis on the training offer, an area where raised expectations may not be matched by availability given the cuts in Jobcentre Plus training provision.

Eligibility for certain elements of the package was not clearly spelt out, leading to some frustration and confusion amongst customers who felt entitled. In some cases
this resulted in tense exchanges with advisers. One lone parent interviewed in Wave 2 mentioned being confused as to why she was not given more support when she was looking for work. She was also concerned that she was not offered Work Search Premium (WSP) when others she knew had been, especially as she had read about it in the marketing brochure.

Most initial issues on the availability of material were resolved by Wave 2 of fieldwork. However, minor difficulties in procurement persisted. As the guidance around certain elements of the pilot changed, the marketing material had to be revised and by Wave 3 new material had been issued.

### 4.2.2 Use of marketing material

The manner in which different types of marketing material was used varied across districts and with individual advisers. This is indicative of a lack of clarity in the guidance and a variation in adviser views on the utility of the material. In some instances it was found that the larger brochure was being reserved and issued only to those who opted for New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) or who were being case-loaded, while the smaller leaflet was issued to all other customers. Overall, by Wave 2 the material was better distributed to lone parents than at the start, and by Wave 3, distribution of the material was routine.

As the pilot progressed, the need for a larger variety of ‘follow-on’ leaflets had been identified. Staff also highlighted the need for more targeted material relating to specific issues around certain elements. As a result of demand some districts were developing material, for example for those just starting work, or the rules around IWC. Simpler leaflets for wider distribution at job fairs and other marketing opportunities were also being developed.

### 4.2.3 Effectiveness of marketing material

While the availability of professionally laid out and attractive marketing material was viewed very positively by all respondents, the views on the effectiveness of the material have been somewhat mixed. A number of staff indicated that they felt the ‘word of mouth’ factor was more effective in generating interest in participation and awareness of the pilot. Others have felt that the brochures help lone parents to ‘spread the message’. On the whole, the brochure was seen as a reference point for those who were seriously interested in the pilot.

‘...it wasn’t too boring or heavy – not too much writing. It was very easy to understand and explained all of the benefits you were entitled to.’

(Lone parent)

Advisers have pointed out that the fact that the marketing material is ‘not found in the gutters or bins’ outside Jobcentre Plus offices is a good indicator of its attractiveness to lone parents. A number of advisers feel that it gives lone parents the opportunity to review the various options at their leisure.
‘The brochure gets customers to think about their situation, get their thoughts together, write them down and then they come back and we talk through it.’

(Adviser)

4.2.4 Translated material

The views on the utility of the translated material have been mixed, although it was generally felt that the material was important to have on offer. With the revision of the marketing material, the translated brochure was only available as a download in black and white for advisers to print for the lone parent. This was a cause of concern to some staff members who felt it may convey a sense of marginalisation to ethnic minority customers.

A number of advisers felt that those unable to read English would often prefer to take home the English brochure and have their children or a family or community member explain it to them. Given the small number of interviews achieved with ethnic minority lone parents, the validity of this claim is hard to ascertain. There have been instances however, where lone parents have mentioned the need for material in a particular language for example Spanish or French. Adviser perceptions on the usefulness of the translated material reflect the different demographic features of each district. Districts with a larger proportion of ethnic minority customers with ESOL needs have naturally found the material more useful.

4.2.5 Other marketing efforts

In almost all districts there have been attempts to promote the pilot in various ways, using the marketing material available or developing bespoke material. Efforts have included mail shots, radio spots, newsletters and job fairs amongst others. For the main part these efforts, particularly radio spots and coverage in newspapers, have had limited success. There were some exceptions, for example in one district a ‘road-show’ near health centres in areas with a majority Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population was cited as particularly effective in generating interest. Supplementary marketing efforts have also been undertaken in outreach venues such as Children’s Centres (discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

Overall, the brochures and leaflets in the marketing package were used frequently, as were posters and some other materials. It was found that the emphasis on the training offer in the audio-visual material (videos and DVDs) was felt to be misleading which limited their use.

4.3 Quarterly Work Focused Interviews

QWFIs for lone parents with the youngest child aged 12 or over have been in place since 30 September 2004 in Extended Schools Childcare Pilot (ESCP) areas.
4.3.1 Introducing the 12+ QWFIs

In the pilot areas, the introduction of the QWFI for lone parents with the youngest child aged 12 years and over was viewed with some trepidation by both managers and advisers. The concerns centred on the potential increase in workload for staff, despite the additional resources provided to support the increase in Work Focused Interviews (WFI) volumes. WFI s were generally booked by centralised administrative teams. During the initial stages of the pilot, WFI backlogs were encountered and the additional interviews generated by scans were further adding to this. In Waves 2 and 3 however, these backlogs were found to have been largely cleared. The ‘group WFI s’ that had been taking place to cope with the backlog were also no longer being utilised.

While initial issues were evident and there was continued strain on resources in some instances, the WFI workload was not found to be as problematic as initially envisaged. It was felt that high Failure to Attend (FTA) rates had helped staff to cope, allowing them to deal with ‘drop-ins’ or paperwork. Once the newly recruited advisers were fully trained and in some instances experienced administrative staff were covering for QWFIs, the pressure on advisers had eased. During Wave 3 the additional resource for 12 plus QWFIs was no longer in place, and districts were still legally bound to continue the QWFIs for this group. All districts mentioned this as a concern, and indicated that resources had to be shifted from other teams to cope. The extent to which this had affected the overall resource use at the district level was not clear.

The QWFI load has led to a degree of tension between the quality of engagement and the pressures of fitting in large volumes of interviews. The fullness of diaries, with slots booked weeks in advance, has meant that advisers have less time for MVC and case-loading.

“The real problem occurs when the adviser has an interview and wants to book a follow-up; the lone parent may have to wait a month or more for the meeting and you lose momentum.”

(Adviser)

As part of the same problem administrative teams indicated that they too have difficulties in booking interviews, due to the fullness of adviser diaries. In some districts the short period of time allowed for the QWFI (30 minutes) due to resource constraints, has also continued to be raised as an issue. This is felt to leave less time for support such as job matching and job searching.

4.3.2 The impact of QWFIs

The QWFI is a key tool for easing lone parents whose children will be soon approaching 16, towards the labour market on a gentler trajectory. However, the

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views of staff on the effectiveness of this tool were found to be mixed. Advisers strongly felt QWFIs were only effective for certain customer groups. The views of managers initially diverged.

‘Ultimately, the more contact we have with the client the more we are able to offer them and maintain some continuity and ignite sparks. It also keeps them up-to-date as information changes.’

(Manager)

By Wave 3, while continuing to endorse their importance, there was wider recognition amongst managers that QWFIs were not always useful for all customers.

‘Some lone parent clients are nowhere near the labour market, and this needs to be recognised by the Department.’

(Manager)

This was particularly true in relation to those lone parents with more intractable barriers such as caring responsibilities, health issues or children with disability. It was also true for some customers who had some time to go before their youngest child turned 16 years old. As one manager noted, ‘it is too early to sow the seed when the child is only 12’. In these instances the obligation to come in to a Jobcentre Plus office every three months, in some cases, led to agitation on the customer’s part. For those customers who were distant from the labour market, the QWFI had diminishing returns. Once the basic status of the lone parent was established and they were aware of the offer, advisers felt little progress could be achieved through frequent face-to-face interviews.

One of the positive impacts of the QWFIs has been the perceived effect on reducing fraud. Advisers cited anecdotal evidence indicating that they are an effective deterrent for those customers who may, for example, be working, or living with partners.

The effectiveness of QWFIs in achieving higher conversion rates has remained unclear, with respondents ambivalent about drawing a linkage. Some respondents have noted that as there is no further mandatory element other than attendance, the efficacy of the QWFI is limited. Overall, the QWFI is felt to be most effective for those customers with older children or those who are actively seeking work and need more intensive support through that period.

Staff and management maintained that greater flexibility and discretion was needed in determining who should be on a QWFI cycle. Most staff felt that some adviser discretion was important, such as determining waivers for a period of time, a six monthly cycle, or alternative solutions such as telephone contact.
4.4 Action planning

Action Plans are a mandatory requirement for advisers during each WFI. Advisers are expected to complete one at the initial WFI and then regularly review and update this. From October 2005, it has been a requirement for lone parents to also agree on the Action Plan as part of participating in a WFI. Since April 2005, Labour Market System (LMS) changes have supported this requirement.

4.4.1 The Action Plan

The Mandatory Action Plans were introduced nationally in October 2004, when it became compulsory for advisers to complete an Action Plan at each WFI. Since then there has been an emphasis on the lone parent actively participating in the preparation of the document and viewing it as an agreement between Jobcentre Plus and themselves. The Action Plans collect a range of information around children, levels of qualifications, employment history, perceived constraints to employment etc. Agreed next steps form an important part of the document.

While action planning itself was not new to advisers, certain elements associated with it have been. The process of action planning has swung through the course of evaluation from being inconsistently applied in the beginning towards greater rigour in Wave 2, and then reverting to a somewhat relaxed attitude in Wave 3.

4.4.2 Staff attitudes and the effectiveness of Action Plans

To understand this apparent reversal in adviser behaviour it is useful to examine how advisers have viewed this process, along with the barriers they perceive in completing Action Plans. During the initial phases of the pilot, action planning was not viewed as mandatory as lone parents did not have to agree on and sign an Action Plan. It was found at that stage that the understanding of the concept was variable. The planning was not always found to be a structured process. Often the Action Plan consisted of a couple of points in the dialogue box. Advisers observed that for some customers the process of action planning was redundant, particularly when there was no intention to work or a very serious barrier to work. They also felt that action planning was of limited use for those who were on six-monthly or annual interview cycles.

On the other hand, advisers did attempt to engage with lone parents during the process, often turning the screen of the computer towards customers for them to view what was being written. The Action Plan was serving a purpose as a ‘record’ of the meeting, and a ‘memory jog’ for advisers for follow-up meetings. It was acknowledged by all to be useful for this purpose.

‘With more information about the lone parent in the system I can do job searches for them even when they are not there.’

(Adviser)

However, there were few advisers who felt that the Action Plan was a useful document for the lone parents themselves.

### Adviser comments on Action Plans

‘Makes them feel involved in decision making.’

‘Helps lone parents to start thinking about work.’

‘They know they won’t have to repeat the same information next time.’

‘Getting the customers to sign the Action Plan makes it more formal, more like Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA).’

‘Making a lone parent sign an action plan and requiring them to come in every three months borders on pestering them.’

‘It is a waste of paper.’

‘Action Plans are useful for those actively looking for work and for the adviser as a memory jog. Otherwise their use is limited. In some instances where the customer has come in for a specific purpose or is distressed, they are inappropriate.’

A number of advisers noted that customers never read the Action Plans, and they were often discarded. It was felt that the mandatory signing of the Action Plan was generally subject to some resistance by advisers as it highlighted the duality between the mandatory and voluntary natures of the NDLP regime. Advisers indicated that signing ‘confused’ lone parents and was not beneficial because at this stage they are uncertain of what they were committing themselves to.

Some advisers felt that the action planning process detracted from the flow of the dialogue with the lone parent. Typing-up information was thought to be time-consuming and they also felt the easy rapport they had established could be disturbed. Advisers observed that lone parents tended not to bring the old Action Plan back with them, and it appeared that few lone parents used the document to help them consider their actions and choices.

Through Waves 1 and 2, there were also numerous technical issues with the printing of Action Plans, which deterred advisers from printing them out. By Wave 3, discussions revealed that many advisers were no longer issuing the Action Plan to customers. Some advisers stated that they were only using it for case-load customers (although findings did vary from district to district). As the Action Plans were felt to be more useful to advisers than to customers, advisers suggested that they should only be given to those customers who asked for a copy. A lack of clarity on the
guidance itself was also evident at this stage. Many advisers and even some managers noted that they understood signatures to be necessary only when there was a training plan that needed approval or if the customer was on WSP. At the time of Wave 3, a more ‘user friendly’ version of the Action Plan was due to be launched.

4.5 More Voluntary Contact

This initiative involves the provision of named advisers to work with lone parents through the duration of their claim. The rationale is to apply a more intensive regime, but without the conditionality that accompanies other regimes such as JSA. This allows for more and sustained contact to reach a broader cross section of lone parents and encourage them to participate in NDLP and move into work.

4.5.1 Introducing More Voluntary Contact

The space and resources for the more formalised MVC approach in the pilot only became available by Wave 2 when all staff were in place and fully trained, and there was a degree of control over WFI backlogs. At this stage of the pilot, MVC had started to take place in almost all districts. By the end of the evaluation period MVC was found to be a more regular feature.

A number of staff noted that the guidance around MVC was the least clear of all the elements, and it was apparent that definitional issues were causing considerable confusion. Staff generally understood MVC to mean a less intense engagement with customers than case-loading. In many instances it was considered to involve follow-up phone calls to customers. This was occasionally to be supplemented by a telephone Better Off Calculation (BOC) to encourage them to participate in NDLP or move on to case-load. However, more recent guidance from the project team had indicated that MVC entailed face-to-face contact. The use of MI markers was also found to be an issue. Managers noted that the incidence of MVC was probably being under-reported or over-reported depending on the definition used. Up to Wave 2, the LMS was not recording MVC and it was being recorded clerically. By Wave 3, while markers had been introduced onto LMS, contacts were still being aggregated clerically which managers felt was inefficient.

As the guidance did not stipulate how MVC was to be carried out different approaches were taken. In one district MVC was undertaken by a centralised adviser team, while in others both advisers and administrative staff undertook the contact. In some districts administrative staff were initially used for MVC but were later removed from this duty, as it was not felt to be appropriate. Expectations from MVC were high, with managers hoping it would result in greater volumes of conversions to NDLP. The additional administrative resource had in fact been introduced to release advisers for activities such as MVC, which would allow a better quality of engagement with lone parents.
Staff noted that MVC was difficult when lone parents kept changing mobile phone numbers and considerable time had to be spent in tracing them. Some staff gave examples of instances where lone parents had become irate at being pursued. In one office a managerial decision was taken to contact all lone parents a month after their interview. This caused numerous issues as some lone parents had English language problems, others were not interested in work, and quite a few indicated that they had problems with illness, depression or care responsibilities. Where barriers such as these existed, some staff, particularly administrative staff, felt ill-equipped to deal with the lone parent reaction. Staff also felt that they should not ‘hassle’ lone parents as they wanted them to feel comfortable enough to come into the Jobcentre Plus office without pressure when they were ready to do so.

4.5.2 Initial impacts of More Voluntary Contact

In most districts staff felt that they had always retained contact with their clients, though it had now been given the title of MVC and was now more structured with greater pressure to record it. The targets set by districts for MVC were also noted to have caused some concern amongst those undertaking it. In some districts managers noted that the targets were driving MVC and this was interfering with time spent for case-loading. However, some staff noted that MVC was targeted at the ‘ifs’, ‘buts’ and ‘maybes’; those lone parents who had minor issues and could potentially be enticed to participate in the programme with relative ease. It was particularly useful for these customers as a more constant contact ensured that you could capture them as and when they became ready to engage. This could for example be at the end of the summer holidays, or following a college course.

In general it was found that advisers could see the value in maintaining contact with certain customers who they felt they may be able to ‘tip over’ onto NDLP. However, they also felt that the contact should be applied to selected customers, and that the establishment of targets and formalisation of the process was not very useful.

4.6 In-Work Support

IWS allows advisers to maintain contact with lone parents who require additional support during the first 60 days after they have started work. The aim is to ease the transition to work, and prevent the lone parents returning to Income Support (IS).

4.6.1 Intent of In-Work Support and response

This initiative involves the provision of continued support for lone parents who have entered employment. This support is intended to continue for 60 days after they have started work. The aim is to ease the transition into work and reduce the number of lone parents who return to benefit. The support is meant to encompass a structured approach to guiding and counselling lone parents in the potentially difficult early period of work.
IWS is another element which advisers felt had previously been standard practice, but had been more formalised through the pilot. The additional impact of this element was therefore not widely felt. Some advisers would routinely maintain telephone contact with their customers in order to find out how they were faring in their jobs, however, the frequency of this contact was not clear. What the in-work financial elements of the package had led to, however, was more constant contact post-employment to deal with paperwork and issues related to the financial support available post-employment.

Once the rules around the In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) had been relaxed, advisers were found to emphasise the availability of financial and other forms of support to customers. In general, advisers were found to provide considerable support in the transition to work. This support was invaluable while lone parents settled in to their new employment and grappled with paperwork and issues related to finances, the workplace, or childcare.

4.7 Outreach in Children’s Centres and Jobpoints

This initiative involves the installation of a remote access Jobpoint in one Children’s Centre in each pilot district. This would allow better information about the availability of jobs and the take up of other services such as NDLP. CPMs are expected to raise awareness about the Jobpoints and handle enquiries through regular contact with Regional Sure Start teams and Children’s Centre managers.

4.7.1 The partnership

During Wave 1, the additional CPM resources were becoming established, Jobpoints were yet to be installed and partnerships were not fully developed. By Wave 2, Jobpoints had been installed in all but one district.

The relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Children’s Centres, however, remained embryonic. Additional CPMs noted at this stage, that it would take time and effort to develop mutual understanding and embed the relationship. Children’s Centre staff indicated that parents had a fundamental mistrust of Jobcentre Plus. This needed to be broken down over time.

To some extent, the development of the broader partnership was constrained by delays in the roll-out of Children’s Centres. However, by Wave 3 considerable progress had been made in developing the relationship in some districts. This was particularly the case in Children’s Centres where additional Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) had invested greater time and effort in outreach, and in these districts this element of the pilot had been a great success. One manager described this partnership as ‘one of the stars of the pilot’. In other districts, the value of the partnership was recognised by managers, but with the caveat that this was resource intensive and results would only be realised over time.
Importantly, there was a consonance between the goals and objectives of both partners.

“The links developed between the [Children’s] Centre and Jobcentre Plus are extremely important in taking services out to the community and in reaching groups of lone parents that may not go to Jobcentre Plus offices. They are also important not just for widening the number of parents accessing Jobcentre Plus services, but also in raising the aspirations of parents. Many parents come to our centre to access a range of services like ante-natal and other health care, and having Jobcentre Plus services here is also very important.”

(Children’s Centre manager)

4.7.2 Jobpoints

While considered to be a useful promotional tool, the effectiveness of the Jobpoint itself was difficult to determine. At the start of the pilot, there were numerous issues with the installation process. As a result, there was a time-lag before Jobpoints were operational, and in some cases the delay was considerable. Jobcentre Plus analysis shows that usage is very varied across districts; the figures for July 2006, for example, range from over 300 hits in one district, to only 50 in another. The highest usage is reported in those Children’s Centres where there has been dedicated support from additional CPMs.

While it is not entirely clear who is actually using the Jobpoints. One district’s analysis of usage appeared to indicate that a broad group of potential customers were making use of it. Where there is an accompanying ‘warm phone’ (to connect to Jobcentre Plus and other services), the usage has often been fraught with technical issues. Often customers have complained that they have not been able to get through to the relevant service. Despite this, in at least one district it was noted that demand for Jobpoints from other Children’s Centres was high, as they were viewed as an enhancement to the overall service offer within the Centres.

The installation of Jobpoints in Children’s Centres needs to be understood in the wider context of the development of partnerships and outreach. Children’s Centres were viewed as an appropriate and non-threatening environment to capture those lone parents who may be more tentative about going to a Jobcentre Plus office. Examining the expectations from this element of the pilot, initial findings indicated that there was some scepticism surrounding the effectiveness of the Jobpoint itself. Not all districts had strategically viewed them as a tool or entry point for developing a deeper partnership. However, where Jobpoints were used in the context of a strong operational link with the Children’s Centre, they were found to be a potentially useful tool.

4.7.3 Partnership models and additional Childcare Partnership Manager roles

Different approaches were taken by the pilot districts in developing the partnership with Children’s Centres. Some districts used the Jobpoint installation and the
additional CPM resource to leverage a closer partnership. The additional CPM resource was critical in developing this partnership, with clinics/surgeries being held regularly in Children’s Centres. Other models included the use of advisers to hold ‘coffee mornings’ or surgeries where information is provided. In one district all Children’s Centres were linked with a Jobcentre Plus office corresponding to postcodes, to enable swift access to support. An adviser acted as a main point of contact for the Jobcentre Plus office, and within the office, played a coordinating role for childcare provision in conjunction with the CPM. While expected to be a regular event, in practice it was found that outreach was not always conducted as planned. For example, in one district it was found that the adviser had not visited the Children’s Centre in months. The reasons for this were unclear but advisers indicated that time constraints and the lack of formalisation of the role resulted in other responsibilities taking priority.

It was found overall that the more structured approach based on the additional CPM model was more effective than a ‘coffee morning’ approach. However, ‘coffee mornings’ did have some value as an outreach activity. Overall, where there has been a closer engagement, Children’s Centre managers viewed themselves as key ‘partners’ in the delivery of the pilot. In districts where the contact has been more ad hoc Children’s Centre managers viewed themselves more as ‘service providers’. The CPM was seen by the Children’s Centre managers as a strategic point of contact. Where additional CPMS were delivering services they were viewed as an operational contact. The relative effectiveness of different forms of engagement with Children’s Centres would be an interesting area for further exploration, as these relationships are developed further.

One of the factors contributing to the development of an effective partnership has been a reliable and constant presence at Children’s Centres. As parents have become used to the presence of the additional CPMS, they have begun to engage with them more over the course of the pilot. However, it has taken time to build up to this point. In one district by Wave 3 the additional CPM was seeing six to eight people a week during a half day surgery/clinic. This was a significant improvement over earlier stages in the pilot.

The logistics in Children’s Centres have been one area of concern. Space has not been the major issue. Constant difficulties have however been faced in establishing internet or broadband access, restricting the ability of staff to effectively provide the Jobcentre Plus service offer. The lack of printing facilities also meant that staff would have to go back to the office to print. This made it difficult to share the Action Plan or the BOC with a customer following the interview. Another area of concern which emerged in Wave 3 related to the need for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for Jobcentre Plus staff who work in Children’s Centres. Children’s Centre managers pointed out that this would need to be taken into account while developing the relationship further.
4.7.4 Outcomes and future development

The outreach through Children’s Centres has been useful in establishing contact with lone parents who have multiple constraints, and who would not consider visiting a Jobcentre Plus office. In one district it was noted that there were a number of parents with children with a disability. They may not have engaged with Jobcentre Plus, but did frequent Children’s Centres for the range of service provision and outreach activities.

The co-location of services around a Children’s Centre was found to provide considerable benefits and has allowed CPMs to develop networks with link workers from other agencies. In one district a CPM indicated that she had engaged with 60 link workers from different agencies, opening up multiple avenues for feeding a stream of clients to Jobcentre Plus. Additionally, the different services that come together under the Children’s Centre umbrella has meant that it has been possible to draw on a range of support for customers. In one case a collaborative effort resulted in an apprenticeship in a mortar education project, made possible by identifying a local project and offering the lone parent a nursery placement at the Children’s Centre. Success was achieved through flexibility exhibited by all partners and the Children’s Centre manager felt this was an excellent model for the synergies and value-added a partnership approach could bring.

Children’s Centre managers seemed to have a broad understanding of the pilot, but lacked specific knowledge of targets and the day-to-day activities of the partnership. It was found that Jobcentre Plus monitoring information was not always shared with Children’s Centres. This meant that the managers had only vague knowledge of the specifics of performance.

Effective partnerships would go beyond sharing broadly common goals and vision, and also focus on a close understanding of modalities, strategy and monitoring. There had been considerable progress towards deepening the partnership in some districts, but in others this element of the relationship was still developing. Both parties viewed the key objectives as moving lone parents/customers towards training, education or employment. Overall, this is a partnership that holds considerable potential, particularly if a clear and consistent strategic approach is introduced and operationally sustained.

4.7.5 Ethnic minority engagement

One of the notable limitations of the pilot has been in offering advisers the tools they need to reach out to ethnic minority lone parents in general and certain groups in particular. It has become increasingly evident over the course of the pilot that the ability of Jobcentre Plus to work with ethnic minority customers is constrained not only by the lack of a culturally appropriate offer, which factors in alternate modes of employment and support, but also by the ability of advisers to effectively interface with these customers. Findings in Wave 3 strongly indicated that little had been resolved over the course of the pilot, and this was an increasing cause for concern to
staff. Districts where this issue was specifically highlighted tended to have large volumes of ethnic minority customers belonging to groups that had been particularly difficult to engage with.

It is important to recognise that ethnic minority customers are not a homogenous group. Even the nature of cultural barriers varied across age or ethnicity. Some ethnic minorities faced an added disadvantage due to the stigma associated with being a lone parent. A number of observations indicated that depression and ill health could, in part, also be attributed to this factor. For these lone parents, negotiating social norms while also providing an upbringing for their children that would help them progress in society, could be a difficult balancing act.

Advisers were particularly frustrated in their engagement with some groups of ethnic minorities, as the incentives through the pilot were often not found to be motivating factors. This was especially so where family networks were strong and lone parents felt they could rely on family support if IS was withdrawn. Front line staff struggled in practical terms with engaging with ethnic minority lone parents. Indeed the nature of employment opportunities available through Jobcentre Plus may not be the most appropriate for a segment of ethnic minority customers facing specific cultural barriers.

Often, the language barrier affected the ability of advisers to segment this customer group. Advisers felt the issue was compounded by difficulties in accessing appropriate ESOL provision. With the ESOL issue dominating, advisers often found it difficult to explore and differentiate constraints to determine job-readiness. As a result, this complex and varied group of customers was often lumped into one group of ‘ethnic minority customers’ or ‘those with ESOL issues’. While there are facilities available for translation, these were not found to be widely used. It was most frequently found that advisers relied on the children, family or community members of the lone parent who accompanied them for interpretation. This was not always ideal, and it was often difficult for the advisers to determine the accuracy of the translations.

To assist them in delivering to lone parents from ethnic minority groups, advisers’ recommendations were the ability to refer to specialist organisations and greater outreach as the most important, while in-house translation facilities and more advisers from BME backgrounds were also considered useful solutions.
5 Training and financial support

5.1 Summary of main points

As the overall training offer through Jobcentre Plus provision has been reduced in recent years, the pilot has offered two elements to enable lone parents to acquire the skills and confidence they need to enter employment. A flexible source of funding was introduced to cover training provision not currently available. Additionally, a shortened version of the Discovery Week, the Discovery Event was developed to overcome issues of confidence and introduce lone parents to the options available to them.

The financial offer available through the pilot has been central to its effectiveness, and is considered by advisers to have elicited the most interest and positive responses from lone parents. The pilot has included three basic forms of financial support. One focuses on the period when lone parents are seeking work (Work Search Premium (WSP)), and two are designed for support following employment (In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) and In-Work Credit (IWC)). These offers are frequently combined with other offers and tools outside the pilot such as Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF), Better Off Calculations (BOCs) and Job Grants, to enhance their attractiveness to lone parents.

Key findings in relation to training and financial support are:

- The absence of a solid training offer was a cause of considerable concern, in particular as this was an element which was highlighted in the marketing material.

- Feedback on the new Discovery Events was mixed; in some districts they had been popular, while in others they had been either under-subscribed or had encountered delivery issues. As these were externally delivered, it was found that monitoring data was limited, as was the awareness of the effectiveness of the events.
• The effectiveness of the event in addressing entrenched confidence issues was also questioned by advisers, who noted that a much longer course was needed to address such serious issues.

• Flexible Provision has been characterised by difficulties in access. These complexities and long processing times were deterring advisers from using this resource.

• Overall the use of Flexible Provision is best suited for those who are more job-ready and have existing skills. It has been used to provide quality training across a range of areas for such customers. Courses were felt to be too short to ‘up-skill’ those who had been disengaged from the labour market for a long period.

• Specific issues were identified with regard to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision, which was felt to be difficult to access, and could not be funded through Flexible Provision. Other issues also related to providing funding for childcare and travel for provision that was not Jobcentre Plus contracted.

• The financial offer is felt to have elicited the most positive response amongst the pilot elements. When combined with the BOC these elements are considered to have a strong motivational effect.

• Arguably the most effective element in the pilot remains the IWC, which is felt to ‘tip over’ those customers who may be partially convinced about work.

• IWC has been used for a range of purposes, from debt payments to holiday savings. While some lone parents have reverted to benefits at the end of the one year period over which IWC is paid, many have realised the financial benefits of work and continued working.

• Concerns were expressed over the potential ‘shock’ of having IWC halted at the end of the year, and staff suggested tapering payments, while combining them with bonuses at six months and one year to encourage lone parents to stay in work.

• There was greater ambivalence about the WSP. The conditionality associated with this element was considered to be a deterrent to both its promotion by advisers and its uptake by lone parents.

• WSP is felt to be most effective for those very actively seeking work, in helping with costs, or as a financial ‘bonus’, rather than as an incentive to seek work. While promotion of the element has improved considerably over the course of the pilot, advisers are adamant that they need to discern who it would be most appropriate for.

• With the relaxation in the rules of the IWEF, it is now considered to be important in addressing emergencies that could result in a lone parent leaving employment.
• The financial elements outside of the pilot, the ADF and Job Grants, also play an important role in motivating lone parents and supporting them through the difficult financial transition of coming off benefit. The ADF is particularly useful due to its flexibility.

5.2 Discovery Weeks/Events

Discovery Weeks/Events are a form of support for lone parents who are not ready to join New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). The objective is to build confidence, engage with employers, explore career paths and address concerns and limitations to help lone parents move closer to the labour market, through NDLP/Employment Zone (EZ), training for work.

During the course of the pilot, the longer Discovery Week (five days) was replaced with a shorter two-day mini Discovery Event. All provision during the pilot has related to this shorter version. The content of these courses has varied, but in general they have contained a mixture of confidence building, ‘pampering’ (for example, manicures) to encourage bonding and communication between participants, employer engagement and awareness on the range of options available to lone parents. The Discovery Events were delivered by externally contracted providers, and were to be evaluated in detail internally by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It has remained difficult through the course of the pilot to obtain clear feedback from Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed particularly as advisers and even managers were found to have patchy knowledge of the Discovery Events.

At the start of the pilot, Discovery Weeks were ongoing in two districts and the new shorter version was due to be introduced in the remaining three. The response at that stage had varied; while popular in one district, they had been under-subscribed in the other. Views on the length of the events had also varied. Some felt that the five-day version involved an overly long commitment of time, while others indicated that two days would not allow for the bonding and confidence building that was a central component of this element. During Wave 2, views on Discovery Events continued to be mixed. For example, in one district a venue that was not easily accessible to participants was used. Some advisers indicated that the events were not appropriate for customers with ESOL needs. By Wave 3 the events had ended in some districts, but further events were planned in others.

What remained evident was the lack of clear understanding amongst advisers and management of the exact value of these events and the outcomes achieved. The limited feedback available would indicate that the Discovery Events have varied considerably in the quality of delivery across districts. Some districts reported potential benefits. Generally advisers in districts where the events were well delivered felt that they did have some impact on customer confidence.
The need for confidence building for lone parents was evident. Through the course of the evaluation, customers with severe confidence issues were often observed during interviews. Staff emphasised the need for special support for these customers, highlighting the nature of these issues and the positive impact a well designed and delivered course could achieve. The event as presently designed, however, would appear to address the needs of those who are somewhat closer to the labour market.

5.3 Flexible Provision

This resource is intended to allow District Managers the flexibility to purchase training courses or provision, which they believe will make a difference to lone parents, or is not currently available. This would allow advisers greater opportunity to attack specific factors.

With cuts in training budgets in recent years, the absence of a solid training offer from Jobcentre Plus was repeatedly highlighted as a major gap in the pilot. While Flexible Provision was designed to fill gaps in training and has to some extent done so, this element has also been affected by issues around processes and the decision-making pathway.

5.3.1 Access to Flexible Provision

In Wave 1, Flexible Provision was not widely understood and had therefore not been widely used. In many districts, management were still determining the modalities for the use of this funding. As a result, advisers were not aware of how they could access funds or what they could use them for. In Wave 2 this situation had changed. There was a general awareness of this provision and advisers felt that guidance was clearer, though issues with access remained. Advisers felt that access to the funding was a very bureaucratic procedure, which acted as a deterrent to its use. By Wave 3, another tier of approvals at the regional level had been added. This further complicated and lengthened the process of approval and procurement. As a result, a number of advisers indicated that they were not even attempting to use the funding.

‘I am scared to use the funding as it can take four to five weeks to process, and by that time the customer has lost hope and interest.’

(Adviser)

Several cases were cited where training courses were due to start and the funding application had yet to be cleared. This was a cause of stress and uncertainty to both customers and advisers. In other cases advisers were disheartened when their applications were turned down after a lengthy process. One manager commented, ‘if staff have to jump through too many hoops, they simply won’t use it’. One adviser in Wave 3 provided an example of a customer who had a job offer contingent on completing a gas installation course. She had completed the majority of the course,
but needed funding for registration prior to qualifying. She was in danger of losing out on the job opportunity due to the slow processing time frames. This adviser suggested that there should be a three-day turn-around for flexible funding.

### 5.3.2 Uses of Flexible Funding

Where Flexible Funding has been used, it has covered a range of courses, examples of which include: Bus driver training, forklift licensing, mortgage courses, driving instructor courses, gym instructor courses, hair extension courses, Light Goods Vehicle (LGV) driving licenses, secretarial training such as Pitman’s courses, and security training for female door supervisors.

**Lone Parent Case Study 2**

A lone parent interviewed in Wave 3 was visiting the Jobcentre Plus office to follow up on his security training. He had joined the pilot seven months ago and had recently completed training in security work. He was very anxious to find employment as he noted, ‘I more happy when I am working’. He further added, ‘I am really suffering on benefits and I need money for things like my children’s school uniforms’. However, he had failed the exams for the Security Industry Authority (SIA) certificate so was unable to have further training paid for. Having undertaken the course, he was very motivated and was considering re-taking the class and paying for the certification himself.

Findings suggest that Flexible Provision was most likely to be used by advisers to provide quality training for job-ready customers and to provide refresher training where customers had previous experience. Indications are that the Flexible Provision training offer can fill the gap for specialised training, and is most effective where a specific skill is identified and can be obtained through a short course.

### 5.3.3 Barriers to using Flexible Provision

There were a number of issues around training that emerged during the evaluation. Some advisers reported that they felt that not much training was available, while others lacked confidence in their knowledge of training options. Many advisers remarked that training was a specialised area in which they needed support. They felt they could not be expected to be informed about all relevant training options and often did not have the time to do a thorough search for their customers. It was also noted that a lot of courses were too short to up-skill people who had been removed from the labour market for a long period of time.

Managers in a number of districts noted that training options were limited and were often not very ‘aspirational’, confining clients to low paid and low skilled jobs. One specific gap related to the fact that ESOL was no longer offered through Jobcentre Plus contracted provision, with changes in the delivery for Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA), including employability, basic skills and ESOL provision. Since July
2006 there has been a change to using Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded training. ESOL could not therefore be funded through the Flexible Provision. This was highlighted as an issue, particularly in districts where LSC provision has been variable.

**Lone Parent Case Study 3**

A lone parent interviewed in Wave 2 expressed the desire to work but felt her lack of English was a serious barrier. At the time, it was difficult to complete the interview with her because of her English issues, but it was clear that she was motivated to learn the language and become more job-ready. She stated that she wanted to go back to work because it ‘would improve her situation’.

When she was followed up in the Interim Stage she talked about how she was still eager to work and was continuing her ESOL classes.

By Wave 3 she was communicating with ease and spoke about her upcoming ESOL exam and jobs she was applying for. She told us that she still did not personally consider her English to be fluent enough for gaining employment. However, her adviser had encouraged her by saying that her communication had improved considerably and was now adequate. She noted, ‘I was nervous about looking for jobs, but she [her adviser] has been encouraging me about my English and telling me that it is getting better’.

A specific issue that emerged in Wave 3 was the frustration that advisers felt at not being able to fund childcare and travel for those customers who were not on Jobcentre Plus contracted provision. This was a general issue, but a significant barrier for many lone parents. Advisers felt that the support should be offered as often customers may not be able to undertake the training as a result. There was also some lack of clarity amongst a number of advisers on how to approach support related to Jobcentre Plus contracted provision and non-contracted provision/college courses.

### 5.3.4 Effectiveness of Flexible Provision

These findings are important as lone parents frequently do not perceive themselves to be equipped for the labour market due to lack of skills and qualifications. One adviser commented that training is:

‘...good for lone parents because it gets them into the swing of things and builds confidence, rather than just going straight into work.’

(Adviser)

Lone parents mentioned a number of areas of training that would be of interest to them. These ranged from confidence building to various levels of computer training, nursing, engineering and childcare courses. Information Technology (IT) literacy was often cited as a major barrier, and in some instances advisers noted that they were
not always able to fully address this need through the range of options available to them.

Not all the options lone parents are interested in would be viable through Flexible Provision. Some require extended support through a series of qualifications. This highlights the need for effective signposting to relevant training.

**Lone Parent Case Study 4**

When interviewed in Wave 1, this lone parent expressed her concerns about the skills and qualifications that she would need to find employment, and how she might obtain them. She wanted to undertake further training to enhance her employment prospects. The Jobcentre Plus office had referred her to a training provider so she could see what kind of training provision could be made available to her.

When interviewed in Wave 2 of the study, she was doing a Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) national computer course. She was doing this course via the Council because Jobcentre Plus was not able to offer any courses at the level which she was interested in. She commented ‘they seem to offer the bare minimum only’. She felt that Jobcentre Plus could provide more support when it came to retraining, and should not just be offering basic skills courses. She further commented ‘its not just about people earning a low wage and coming off benefits, they should take a longer term view’.

The paradox of Flexible Funding has been the procedural rigidities surrounding it, combined with the length of the decision making pathway. The need for training options was clear; and while Flexible Provision was found not to address the wider range of needs, it does have the potential to cover a specific niche. Findings indicate that while progress has been made in using the funds across a variety of areas, it could be used more fully if simpler and shorter procedures were involved.

### 5.4 Work Search Premium

£20 per week extra support for up to six months payable to lone parents who have been on benefit for more than one year but who agree to actively and consistently look for work. This initiative was introduced in October 2004 and is being piloted in all the extended school areas except one. This exception is due to the area also being an EZ area and the WSP is not compatible with EZ. To qualify for WSP the lone parent must be participating in the NDLP programme.
5.4.1 Design and delivery

The delivery of the WSP has over the course of the pilot been problematic in all districts, although there has been some improvement in adviser attitudes toward this offer, and consequently promotion and uptake, over time.

During Wave 1 there was considerable adviser resistance to this element, based on three key factors. First, the administration and paperwork around the element, in particular if it had to be stopped as often happened when lone parents were not compliant with the conditions for participation. Second, a perception amongst advisers that customers should not be ‘paid to look for work’ as this was their responsibility. Third, that the ‘Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) type’ mandatory nature of this element had deterred customers and moreover that this form of interaction was counter to the flexible approach normally applied with this customer group.

By Waves 2 and 3, the uptake had progressively improved, though overall performance was still lower than had been hoped for. Through Waves 1 and 2 and to some extent in Wave 3, there was a sense that advisers were ‘cherry picking’ those customers they felt were deserving of this offer. However, by Wave 3 half the lone parents interviewed face-to-face, were aware of having discussed the WSP with their adviser.

An important improvement which had emerged by Wave 2 was that administrative staff had taken over much of the paperwork associated with this element. Through Waves 2 and 3, once the low uptake of WSP had been identified as an issue concerted efforts were made by management to change adviser perceptions and encourage promotion of this element.

A number of staff noted that £20 was often not sufficient to motivate customers, and they had to sell the offer in other ways. Two approaches used were conceptually aggregating it up to a larger amount over a period of time (for example, by informing the lone parent that they would be £80 a month better off), and encouraging lone parents to view it as a bonus, for example to save towards a holiday or consumer durables. While staff felt that the extra money available through the WSP was generally taken as a ‘top-up’ to benefits by customers, there were examples, where the money was well spent in enabling job-search activities. One lone parent interviewed described the WSP as ‘brilliant, as it helps with bus fares when attending job interviews and with buying newspapers. It also does not affect other benefits’.

5.4.2 Emerging outcomes

By Wave 3, a number of positive outcomes associated with WSP had become evident. It was felt to encourage a structured job-search with a more continuous engagement with Jobcentre Plus to support the search. Some advisers found that when the entitlement to WSP ended customers continued to look for work. Advisers attributed this to the momentum gained, indicating that lone parents were now motivated or in the right ‘mind-set’.
Lone Parent Case Study 5

In Wave 1, a lone parent interviewed had received the WSP to help with her job search. She liked seeing her adviser every two weeks to conduct work search activities. The WSP worked well because it helped pay for posting job applications and for travel to interviews. In the follow up call for Wave 2 it was clear that the lone parent was still looking for work.

While the WSP payments had ended, she was back on her adviser’s caseload, meeting her monthly. She said that she did feel more confident about returning to work as it helped lone parents to have someone to talk to. The adviser had also convinced her that she would make sure that she would be better off in work and had outlined the support which was available for her in work. She needed to find work which fitted around her son which made the job search harder, but she was happy with the level of support which was available whilst she searched for a job.

However, a number of the issues that staff had associated with WSP in the early stages of the pilot remained. For example, the fortnightly attendance for WSP was viewed as one of the factors impeding uptake and a number of advisers and managers felt that there was a need for greater flexibility on this. The conditionality associated with the WSP had also resulted in problems for advisers. Tension developed in the adviser/lone parent relationship in situations where advisers halted WSP payments due to the lone parent reneging on responsibilities. The fortnightly visits also placed considerable demands on adviser diaries.

‘We need to be careful about where we direct our business resources. WSP does not appear to be working as a motivator to look for work but more as a bonus for those who are already looking for work. The diary demands that this places on advisers in conjunction with Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs), potentially outweighs their value.’

(Manager)

Overall staff have been unable to clearly determine whether this element has been broadly effective, as it is not always possible to screen out those who would use it well. Some staff felt that the eligibility should be reduced to six months on benefit to support customers before they are at too great a distance from the labour market. A number of other staff, however, while acknowledging the issues with uptake, now felt that it was a useful tool to have available in the package. Overall, it was felt that the WSP did work best for those who were actively searching for jobs, rather than as a ‘persuasive’ factor for those who were undecided. This is indicative of this element being used primarily as a bonus or reward, rather than as an incentive.
5.5 In-Work Credit

£40 per week is payable to lone parents who get jobs of more than 16 hours per week. This allowance is paid for the first year of work.

5.5.1 Delivery and administration of In-Work Credit

The IWC element had been in place some time prior to the launch of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilot. During the initial stages of the pilot, advisers frequently complained about the excessive paperwork associated with it. As it was considered the most useful element, they continued to promote it actively, despite the addition to their workload.

By Wave 2 administrative staff had taken over much of the paperwork associated with IWC. However, by Wave 3 staff indicated that some administrative issues had emerged. This, along with the numbers of people coming off IWC, had resulted in a much larger volume of queries and administrative work around the element. Staff expressed strong concerns regarding complications in administration of payments by Liberata (the organisation responsible for processing payments). Issues related both to delays in initiating payments, and to ‘overpayments’ when lone parents had stopped working and the system would not register this for some time. Where there had been delays in initiating payments staff indicated that some lone parents had to forego their job, although they now tried to use the IWEF to compensate for this. This had been very de-motivating for lone parents, and was a source of frustration for staff. A number of lone parents had complained about the harsh tone of the ‘recovery letters’ they received through the error was no fault of their own. Some staff suggested that payments should be linked to wage slips or Working Tax Credit (WTC). Other administrative issues mentioned by staff related to stopping and starting payments, loss of claims and duplication of claims.

5.5.2 Benefits of In-Work Credit

IWC, variously described as the ‘jewel in the crown’ and ‘the cherry on the cake’ by staff members, has consistently been regarded as the most effective element through the course of the pilot. The analogies are useful in that they explain how staff perceives this element to make the most difference to lone parents, in particular those who may be partially convinced about work.

The greatest leverage was obtained when the offer was promoted within the context of a BOC, and strong synergies were observed between these elements. This gave the lone parent a structured look at how they would benefit financially. Observations indicated that lone parents would be visibly receptive and engaged in the interview process when they were told of this incentive. Advisers were also enthusiastic in their promotion, cognisant of the potential positive outcomes.
This additional financial incentive was frequently found to tip the decision in favour of work. Managers and staff were unequivocal about the effectiveness of this element. This positive view of the IWC has been sustained through all three waves of fieldwork.

The potency of this offer is reflected in the positive lone parent response. Lone parents often did recall discussing this element over and above others, even if they were not ready to return to work. Those who were considering the return to work were also able to mention some of the uses they could put the money to, for example managing their debts. A number of the lone parents interviewed who had found employment indicated that IWC had made the difference to their decision.

‘I may not have seriously considered returning to work without the additional money. I’m working part-time now, but am thinking of working full-time so I can get the extra money. I come regularly to the Jobcentre Plus office to look for work.’

(Lone parent)

5.5.3 Coming off In-Work Credit

One of the concerns related to this offer had been that many lone parents would return to benefits once the year was over. Advisers in most cases were observed during interviews to emphasise the point that the IWC was only payable for the first year of work. Advisers reported that lone parents had used IWC for a range of purposes. Some had used it to pay Council Tax and towards shortfalls in rent payments; both of which would result in some dependency on the additional funds. Others had used it to manage debts, while some had saved the extra money using it for holidays for example.

In Wave 2, initial analysis appeared to indicate that a return to benefits was not occurring to the extent that was expected. Moreover, lone parents had reported to advisers that they got used to working and their new independent financial status. Some had even progressed in work during this period. The one-year period was felt by advisers to be long enough to ‘nurture’ many lone parents in the initial stages of employment and allow them to find their feet.

By Wave 3, staff reported that while some lone parents were indeed moving back onto benefit, indicating that they had taken on work which perhaps was not sufficiently financially beneficial in relation to benefits, many continued to work.

The concern that sudden stoppage of the IWC would be a ‘shock’ to the lone parent was, however, brought up in Wave 3. In some instances lone parents had reverted to Jobcentre Plus in the hope that the payments could be extended, which was indicative of a degree of dependency. Some managers suggested, therefore, that payments should be ‘tapered off’ instead of being stopped immediately, which could be traumatic to lone parents. This would buffer the psychological and other impacts of loss of income. Others also suggested ‘retention bonuses’ at six and 12 months, to encourage lone parents to remain in employment.
A number of managers also expressed their concerns over the eligibility criteria for the IWC, suggesting that customers should become eligible after six months of being on benefit. By twelve months it was perceived that additional constraints to work would have developed. This added to the difficulties of assisting lone parents who could have been motivated towards work much earlier. Some staff suggested that it would be better to have this offer available earlier and extending only six months into employment.

Overall, the IWC remained the best considered element in the package, although recent administrative issues have led to some frustration and additional workload for advisers, and aggravating circumstances for lone parents.

5.6 In-Work Emergencies Fund

The IWEF was introduced to help lone parents meet the cost of emergencies during the first 60 days in employment and overcome issues that might otherwise make it difficult to remain in work. The purpose is to help lone parents remain in work rather than returning to a life on benefits.

5.7 Design and use of In-Work Emergencies Fund

The initial design of the IWEF element incorporated stringent eligibility criteria that severely curtailed its use. During Wave 1 observations indicated that the IWEF was rarely, if ever, mentioned by advisers to lone parents. Advisers commented that should the availability of such funding be advertised to customers, ‘emergencies’ would be created. This was expected to lead to difficulties and additional work in discerning the real emergencies from the ‘opportunistic’ ones. Advisers indicated that customers would inevitably come to them if they ran into genuine problems.

By Wave 2, feedback had resulted in a relaxation of rules, which had been welcomed by the districts. During Wave 3, this element was regarded as an important part of the ND+fLP package, although take-up remained limited. Managers observed that this was inherent to its very nature as an ‘emergency fund’. With an expansion in the definition of what constituted an ‘emergency’, advisers were now able to use the fund across a wider range of circumstances. In general, advisers informed the lone parents that some form of support may be available, should they run into any difficulties during the early stages of employment.

IWEF was being used for a range of purposes, including coverage for delays in WTC payments and IWC, childcare costs, utility bills, issues with rent and break-downs in cars and other transport issues. Staff in some districts however indicated that processing time was excessively long when amounts exceeded £50, which was contrary to the concept of emergency need. Staff did, however, indicate that the IWEF had on several occasions prevented lone parents from leaving their jobs. As one manager commented ‘emergencies do happen, and it helps lone parents stay in work’.
Overall, while it was recognised that while IWEF was unlikely to be used much (given that it was emergency support and not for general use), it was an important component of the offer.

5.8  Additional financial offers and tools: Better Off Calculation, Adviser Discretion Fund and Job Grants

5.8.1  Synergies between financial elements
The persuasiveness of the financial offer through the pilot was enhanced when combined with the additional financial elements available to lone parents; notably the BOC, the ADF, and the Job Grant. As indicated earlier, it is in the combination of different financial elements that the greatest synergies in the pilot have been observed. Advisers consistently use the BOC as the platform on which they demonstrate to the lone parent that their fear of being financially worse off is unfounded. When the key financial element in the pilot, the IWC was combined with the promise of the ADF and Job Grant, through a BOC, lone parents were visibly pleased with the potential financial difference this could make to their lives. Details of these complementary tools and offers are provided below.

5.8.2  Better-Off Calculations
The BOC has been found to be a critical tool underpinning the effective marketing of the financial offer, in particular the IWC and has been found to be one of the decisive factors in encouraging lone parents to work. Advisers used the BOC in conjunction with the pilot elements, the ADF and the Job Grant to demonstrate to lone parents how exactly they would be financially better off in work. The BOC is generally printed out for lone parents, to allow them to consider the implications at their convenience. Advisers were selective with those lone parents they offered the BOC to, however, targeting them at individuals who were more job-ready.

There were some issues observed with the BOC. Some advisers commented that they were complicated and slow to conduct, sometimes taking up to 20 minutes. For inexperienced advisers this was daunting, and they were sometimes observed to give up on the task. Managers noted that considerable mentoring had been needed around conducting BOCs. Advisers also indicated that it was difficult to accurately fill in parts of the BOC, for example, related to housing costs and Housing Benefit (HB) information.

The majority of lone parents were found to have had their financial concerns allayed as a result of the BOC.

‘I had concerns that working wouldn’t be worthwhile because I will lose my benefits but with the better off calculation I now know that I have different options.’

(Lone parent)
Overall the BOC was highly valued as a tool by advisers, though the need to simplify the procedure was often highlighted.

5.8.3 Adviser Discretion Fund and Job Grants

The ADF had been a key tool that advisers have had considerable discretion in using to address what they identify as customers’ needs. Consequently the considerable reduction in what was an easy to access and flexible source of funding was found to be a major concern in Wave 1. The ADF has been used for a range of purposes. It is not only used for covering the clothes and interview costs that it has acquired fame for (‘the clothes grant’), but also for covering essential expenditures such as upfront childcare, travel expenses and other essential costs. Importantly, the ease of access makes this an effective and popular source of funding.

Lone Parent Case Study 6

Finance was previously perceived to be an issue for this lone parent when she was interviewed in Wave 1, as she was about to start working but had concerns that she might be worse off when she went into work.

In the Wave 2 follow up she was still working in the same job, 20 to 30 hours a week. She was not financially a great deal better off, but she was enjoying working, in particular the social dimension of work. She reported that the BOC had put her mind to rest. In terms of financial support she felt that Jobcentre Plus had been very helpful; she received £100 from the ADF fund to help her buy clothes for her interview and to pay for her CRB check.

She did, however, mention that she was a bit confused that she was not given the WSP especially as she had read about it in the marketing brochure. The additional money would have made a great deal of difference in covering the costs of looking for work.

The Job Grant has also formed an important incentive for lone parents, especially to cover for immediate costs on gaining employment, coming off benefit, and in some cases for covering debts. It was frequently observed to be discussed in interviews with lone parents. What is significant is that the combination of financial incentives both pilot and non-pilot, collectively motivate and enable lone parents in the difficult transition to work.
6 Childcare

6.1 Summary of main points

There were three childcare options available through the pilot however Childcare Chats and Childcare Tasters were discontinued as of April 2006, while Childcare Assist was continued. Importantly, the Childcare Chats were considered useful enough by the Children’s Information Service (CIS) to ensure their continuation outside of the pilot in at least three districts; this has meant that advisers have been able to continue with referrals to Chats in some districts. Of the three elements, the one that remains in place as part of the pilot, Childcare Assist, has been the most difficult to deliver.

The main findings on childcare are:

- The childcare barrier is considered to be a critical one, yet the childcare elements in the pilot have met with limited success. Of the three elements, two (Childcare Chats and Tasters) have now been discontinued. Childcare Assist has been the least successful of the three elements, but is still in place.

- Key issues relate to reluctance to use formal childcare, affordability, upfront payments and the lack of appropriate childcare including some specific gaps in childcare.

- Staff indicated that the Childcare Chats were moderately successful and were stopped just when they were taking off. In a number of instances, Chats have been continued by local authorities (though no longer funded by the pilot), and in these districts advisers are still able to refer lone parents for Chats or the equivalent now on offer.

- Childcare Tasters have had limited success as they have not always been offered in locations relevant to lone parents. The design issues with Childcare Assist have persisted through the pilot, and relate to the fact that employment often commences rapidly following a job-offer, and it is not possible to use this facility.
• Affordability is a significant issue, though outside the remit of Jobcentre Plus. This is especially the case where there are three or more children and the financial costs of paying for childcare far outweigh the benefits of working.

• Advisers have used the new flexibility around sources such as In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) and funding such as Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) to cover upfront childcare costs.

6.2 The Childcare Offer: Childcare Tasters/Chats and Childcare Assist

Tasters offer up to one week childcare placement to lone parents who are considering entering employment but are apprehensive about using formal childcare. The aim is to increase the parents’ willingness to use childcare.

Childcare Chats offer lone parents the chance of a one-to-one meeting with a childcare provider to discuss childcare options and an opportunity to talk about any apprehension on using formal childcare.

Childcare Assist allows for the payment of formal childcare during the week immediately before the customer starts work.

6.2.1 Delivery of the childcare elements

During Wave 1 not all the childcare elements were in place. For example, in one district Childcare Chats and Tasters were not operational till December 2005 (during Wave 2). While there had been some referrals in most districts, the childcare elements were not perceived to have ‘taken off’. Advisers were seen to be bundling the three childcare elements and describing them to lone parents as an overall childcare offer or package. Advisers were positive about the childcare elements however, even at this stage, the issues with Childcare Assist had begun to emerge. In practice lone parents rarely wished to settle their child into childcare prior to employment. This related in part to the desire to spend as much time with the child as possible prior to starting work. Another key issue related to the speed with which employment commenced once the offer of a job had been made, leaving no time to put Childcare Assist in place.

During Wave 2, it was becoming evident that while referrals to Chats had stepped up, there was far less uptake of Tasters and even less of the Childcare Assist element. Advisers indicated that for those lone parents who were some distance from employment there may be limited interest in even a Chat. Those who were considering employment would sometimes want to attend a Chat, but few of them went on to do a Taster. Advisers noted that Tasters were not well planned as lone parents would want a placement at a provider they would be likely to use, close to their home or place of work. Tasters were, however, being offered with providers that did not fit this requirement, diminishing the relevance of the offer and uptake.
Observations during Wave 2 indicated that advisers were not always offering the childcare elements. The degree to which the offer was highlighted was determined by the adviser’s assessment of childcare as an issue, the lone parent’s attitude to formal childcare and the lone parent’s distance from the labour market. Some advisers felt that childcare was a deeply personal issue and they did not want to cross boundaries where a parent was resistant to certain options. In some cases, lone parents were unwilling to take on work beyond school hours which obviated the need for childcare once their children were in full-time education.

By Wave 3, neither Chats nor Tasters were being provided. The referrals for Childcare Assist remained very limited in number. Staff reiterated that the take-up of Assist would go up dramatically if it were available in the first week following employment, or as a number of staff suggested, in the first two weeks of employment. The need for financial support for childcare at that stage had become very clear over the course of the pilot, particularly to cover the burden of upfront childcare payments.

While reflecting on the childcare offer during Wave 3 many staff members assessed the Chats as being very useful. It was felt that the offer had been taken away just when it was ‘taking off’ (Chats more so than Tasters). However, some staff also indicated that many lone parents did not turn up for their Chats or did not benefit from them. Without clear monitoring information on outcomes it was difficult to determine how frequently this occurred.

It was difficult to determine the quality of delivery of the childcare elements given that the delivery partner is external and this was not a specific focus of the evaluation. There was a lack of clarity on partnership agreements between Jobcentre Plus and the providers, in particular the degree to which joint monitoring of the qualitative outcomes of these elements would be undertaken. While referrals themselves were generally monitored there was a sense that a true partnership in delivery remained to be developed.

### 6.2.2 Lone parent response to the childcare offer

Lone parents who were interviewed in Wave 1 were found to be aware of the childcare offer, though they were not able to separate the three different elements. The fact that support was available was viewed positively by lone parents and many of those interviewed at that stage felt more confident about the childcare options available to them. Some lone parents specifically mentioned that they were pleased that some financial support towards childcare was available as this was a source of great concern. However, over half of lone parents interviewed at that stage also reported that they were as yet unsure of the childcare options they may take up. Of these some had very young children and were not realistically considering employment. Others who were considering work needed time to absorb the information and consider their options.
A small proportion of lone parents interviewed face-to-face were interested in an opportunity to try the Childcare Chats or Childcare Tasters in particular. One lone parent commented that she had always thought she could not make it ‘on her own’ previously, notably because of childcare issues. In Wave 2 for those lone parents for whom childcare had been raised as a concern, more reported that they felt more confident about their childcare options than in Wave 1.

‘I feel more confident but it will depend on the response from the childcare contact I have been given.’

(Lone parent)

For those who did not feel more confident, many had concerns about using formal childcare. One lone parent was noted to be very responsive when the pilot support was mentioned but remained reluctant to leave her child with anyone other than family members and close friends.

There were a number of instances where the childcare offer had made a clear difference in the lone parent’s decision to work. In one case, a lone parent interviewed in Wave 1 had never used childcare before and was concerned about leaving her child with strangers. By Wave 3, however, she was in a full-time training course and her children were picked up by a childminder after school while she completed her course. The example below also highlights how the childcare offer had been able to make a positive difference where the lone parent was open to using it.

**Lone Parent Case Study 7**

This lone parent was first interviewed in Wave 1 when she was contemplating work. She had not really worked before and was interested in going back to work because she ‘wanted to do something different’. She was concerned about leaving her youngest child who was two years old in childcare. However, after speaking with her adviser and hearing about the Childcare Chats, Tasters and Assist she felt more comfortable. She noted that she was ‘very happy with the support she received’ [from her adviser]. The adviser went personally to the crèche with her and organised a trial period or Taster. The adviser then phoned her to see how she and her child were getting on during the Taster, which she felt very positively about, stating that it was ‘nice to think they are bothered about you’. If she had any concerns about childcare she felt she could phone her adviser.

In the Interim Stage the lone parent had secured a job in a care home and felt that employment had increased her confidence. She loved her work but was still concerned about leaving her child at the crèche because the child suffered from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
When followed-up in Wave 3 she was working at the care home and was about to increase her hours from 20 to 30 hours a week. She had received the ADF which she had used to pay some debts and for petrol expenses. Her daughter was still in a crèche and noted that she had 70 per cent of the costs paid which she found very useful. She now felt her daughter benefited from being in a crèche environment rather than having her grandmother looking after her.

6.2.3 Effectiveness of the childcare offer

The childcare offer in the package was developed and premised on the understanding that childcare is a key barrier to employment, and that reluctance to use formal childcare is deterring lone parents from working. It was therefore expected that the childcare elements would generate considerable interest amongst lone parents. Both the above premises have been found to be true to varying degrees. However, a more nuanced understanding of the specific constraints within childcare would have resulted in an offer that was more responsive to lone parent concerns.

The response to the childcare offer in the pilot has raised a number of questions about the role of Jobcentre Plus in childcare. Although all stakeholders recognise the central importance of childcare, none of the pilot elements have apparently been responsive to the specific concerns that constitute the most significant issues. Areas not addressed adequately include specific gaps in provision, financial concerns related to upfront costs, delayed childcare payments and affordability.

Gaps in provision included (but were not limited to):

- children with disability;
- older children;
- children with behavioural disorders;
- children excluded from school;
- short-term childcare for seasonal workers;
- out-of-hours or weekend childcare for shift-workers;
- holiday childcare; and
- childcare in rural areas.

A review in one district found that almost all childcare was focused around ‘nine to five’ provision, which with changing working paradigms and special needs meant that many lone parents could not be catered for. One lone parent noted that:
'I have always used a childminder before and did not have problems with this in the past when I was working more regular hours. However, as a nurse, I am now often required to work evenings or nights, or asked to stay in late if someone calls in sick. Finding someone to look after my children would be an issue, as I can’t always expect a childminder to care for them after their set hours.'

(Lone parent)

Financial concerns related to overall affordability and upfront costs. The one month upfront deposit required by most providers was often a stumbling block for lone parents, particularly where Working Tax Credit (WTC) payments were delayed (as was often the case). Advisers have attempted to cover this requirement where lone parents have been unable to cope, using the various options available in the financial offer (for example IWEF and ADF).

**Lone Parent Case Study 8**

This lone parent was interviewed at her first Work Focused Interview (WFI) during Wave 2. She had five children aged 5-17 including a 15 year old with learning difficulties. She was receiving Child Benefit (ChB), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and free school meals, and had been on Income support (IS) for 14 years. She had never worked before but felt that at this point in her life she was ready. Furthermore, she had never used childcare in the past and was concerned about leaving her children with strangers. However, she was aware that her adviser had mentioned the childcare options in the pilot. She was hoping to get her mother registered as a childminder to avoid having to use childcare. Through the meeting with her adviser she had signed up for a training course, and was excited about this and hoping that it would lead to a job.

During the Interim Stage she was employed part-time at an after school programme, had gone off IS and was only claiming CTB and free school meals. She had found the job through a Jobpoint and had applied for it on the phone with the assistance of her adviser. She received £100 of ADF that she had used to buy clothes for her job and an additional £250 as a job grant. At that moment she did not see any benefits from being in work aside from increased self confidence. It had only been a month so she was still trying to get used to the change in routine. The financial benefits of work were not evident to her at that stage. She was unaware that the Jobcentre Plus office could assist her with any in-work emergencies that may arise.
When followed up in Wave 3 she was still in work but unsure how long she would be able to maintain her job. She told us, ‘I have to be honest I have not really noticed any benefits of going to work. I’m not any better off than I was before’. When she had applied for the job she did not have any real concerns, but now she was increasingly worried about her childcare arrangements. Previously her eldest son was collecting the younger children from school. However, now that he was in employment she had lost that option and did not want to send her children to an after school club. She was thinking about returning to the Jobcentre Plus office to discuss this issue with her adviser and mentioned that ‘the adviser has always been very helpful and supportive, but I felt that the financial benefits of working would have been a lot better than they are’.

Another issue related to delayed payments for childcare. Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) and Children’s Centre managers noted that long delays in payments often occurred as providers were no longer paid directly. This could be due to delayed payments or delays in parents claiming for tax credits. This had placed a strain on some providers.

While there may not be a direct role for Jobcentre Plus in organising childcare, it is very important for staff to have some support on offer if only to be able to signpost customers to the right provision. It is equally important to be able to provide support, both financial and logistical, when childcare arrangements do break down. Failure to do so may result in customers having to give up employment.

### 6.3 The childcare barrier

Lone parents overwhelmingly cited childcare as one of the main reason for not wanting to return to work. At the same time advisers, managers, CPMs and Children’s Centre managers have all highlighted the importance of having ‘a childcare offer’.

‘The childcare offer under the pilot is more comprehensive and structured; we can offer much more support now than simply providing a list of registered childminders.’

(CPM)

A number of staff noted that those with children younger than two or three years were often very reluctant to go to work, and there was little that could be done to persuade them otherwise. As children grew older other concerns became apparent, including the availability of appropriate childcare and affordability.

One continuing issue has related to the reluctance to use formal childcare. The Childcare Chats and Tasters were designed to address this concern. It was found, however, that there was often a strong stigma associated with the use of formal
childcare, and lone parents preferred to rely on family or friends. As one adviser commented:

‘There has not been much success with childcare. The area is very close-knit and people would rather use family. It is quite an insular close minded place. People don’t tend to do things out of the norm…one man went for a chat, but he just did it to keep me happy. The usual thing people say is “I’m not putting my child with people I don’t know”.’

(Adviser)

A number of staff noted that it would be useful to pay relatives such as grandparents or friends as childminders in order to build a pool of informal childcare that lone parents would be more comfortable using. Some staff felt that this could potentially be an important ‘motivator’. This was an approach that was felt to be important for ethnic minority lone parents.

Even where there was no resistance to formal childcare, it was often observed that lone parents had considered childcare options and did not need advice from Jobcentre Plus. Financial support around childcare was, however, frequently an issue which lone parents did want help with. Upfront payments for childcare were one specific barrier. The affordability of childcare was frequently raised as a concern, by Jobcentre Plus staff, partners and lone parents, although this was not an area which could be directly addressed by Jobcentre Plus.

‘With childcare costing in the range of £130 a week, and the costs of childcare only being covered up to a limit of £300 weekly, those with two or more children under a certain age just cannot afford to go to work’.

(CPM)
7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The pilot, with its extension, is currently approximately mid-course through its implementation and the conclusions and recommendations need to be viewed in this context. It is significant that the design and content of the pilot has constantly evolved in response to issues that have emerged in delivery, resulting in improvements in both design and process. As there was an initial delay before resources and pilot elements were fully in place, this has led to variation in the degree to which the different elements are established. To some extent this has also influenced the extent to which impacts have emerged. Overall, however, the pilot was well embedded by Wave 3, with most advisers and administrative staff comfortable with the elements and their delivery.

7.2 Overview

In working towards the Government target of 70 per cent employment rate for lone parents by 2010, the pilot has demanded profound changes of both those delivering it, and the lone parents benefiting from it. The policy transformation, away from an entirely voluntary regime towards a greater focus on rights and responsibilities, has been underpinned by an accompanying paradigm shift in the behaviours required of advisers and lone parents. There was initial resistance to these changes amongst the advisers delivering the pilot. However, this had been considerably tempered through the course of the pilot, as the value of both the approach and the offer became evident. Amongst lone parents, the change towards mandatory attendance at interviews while accepted by new customers has also had some resistance from those already on benefit. The empathetic mode of adviser engagement with lone parents has moderated the impact of the change in regime for most lone parents. It is believed by managers and staff that the pilot has been an appropriate tool for changing ‘hearts and minds’ and offering a new view of Jobcentre Plus.
7.3 Overall outcomes

7.3.1 Expectations and effectiveness

There were high expectations from the pilot, with managers hoping for significant improvements in both job outcomes for lone parents and conversion to New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). During Wave 1, initial positive performance was associated to some extent with the pilot overall. However, it was also recognised that certain elements such as In-Work Credit (IWC) had been in place for some time and consequently impact was difficult to attribute to the overall package. By Wave 2, the effectiveness of individual pilot elements had become much clearer to advisers and managers, but it was felt to be too early at that stage to assess outcomes. By Wave 3 managers were clearer on outcomes and felt that there had not been any significant improvements in performance.

Managers indicated that these results needed to be contextualised within overall labour market shifts as well as the institutional changes within Jobcentre Plus. All managers felt that the pilot had helped people into work, and had importantly helped to sustain performance that would have otherwise dipped. It was widely felt that the fall in performance with other customer groups district-wide provided further evidence to support this.

In almost all districts, managers stated that targets for lone parents had been met or exceeded, and the pilot was felt to have played a key role in helping advisers achieve this. The majority of advisers felt that the pilot had been effective to some degree and had made a difference to their performance and their ability to meet their job entry and conversion targets.

7.3.2 Management Information

The ability of managers to clearly assess the performance of the pilot, and in particular the individual elements, has been affected by limited availability of Management Information (MI). It was felt that the Labour Market System (LMS) had not supported the pilot well. Further, the need to supplement information with clerical records had resulted in added pressure on workloads, as well as variability in the nature and quality of information gathered across districts. The lack of clear guidance for monitoring and the limited MI available until recently, was widely felt by managers to be one of the weaknesses of the pilot. Only just prior to Wave 3, had MI markers been extended to include a greater number of the elements in the pilot (beyond IWC and Work Search Premium (WSP)).

Furthermore, the robustness of information was affected by lack of clarity on the MI markers themselves. It was felt that incorrect entry of markers by advisers, or indeed lack of entry had distorted information. Elements that were delivered by external partners such as Childcare Chats or Discovery Events were also found to have had little consistent monitoring. This signals a need for improvements in monitoring systems in partnership working, with targets jointly set and monitored.
7.3.3 External factors

Managers felt that the overall impact of the pilot also had to be gauged against the broader landscape; both the backdrop of a sometimes difficult labour market and the wider institutional changes in Jobcentre Plus structure, systems and processes. The pilot has taken place at a time when offices were being rolled out into the new Jobcentre Plus structure, with accompanying changes in systems, measures of performance and importantly, staffing changes under the Organisational Development Review (ODR) which Jobcentre Plus offices are undergoing.

The ‘ring-fenced’ resource allocated to the pilot was intended to buffer pilot districts against the potential impact of Jobcentre Plus institutional changes in order to focus attention on the intrinsic efficacy of the package and its constituent elements. While to a great extent the pilot resource has indeed been protected, some districts have struggled with headcount issues for some time. This combined with the pressures of roll-out and the impact on staff morale of the ODR, have had some impact on implementation and outcomes.

Staff also perceived a tension between the changing approach of Jobcentre Plus with resulting reductions in direct contact and face-to-face interaction, and the need to engage closely with a hard to help customer group such as lone parents. Managers and advisers felt that impact had to be further understood in the overall labour market context, with some possible effects from the European Union (EU) expansion, and broader shifts in the nature of work available. This affected lone parents overall, with greater demands for shift work outside of ‘normal’ hours, and more competition for seasonal jobs. Furthermore, sectoral restructuring over time had also affected particular groups of lone parents. For example, many ethnic minority lone parents had previously traditionally worked with textiles and clothing manufacture. When opportunities in these sectors reduced, most had not been able to find alternate employment that was culturally appropriate. While these shifts have taken place over a period of time, older groups of ethnic minority women have not been able to adapt to new labour markets since then.\(^8\)

Impact was also felt to have been affected by other extrinsic factors such as the costs of housing and childcare, and negative customer perceptions surrounding Working Tax Credit (WTC) and housing benefits. Finally, it has been noted by a number of staff that working with the harder to reach groups is time and resource intensive. Impacts may initially only be evident as distance travelled towards engagement in the labour market, with a much longer time horizon needed before progress into employment is observed.

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7.4 What has worked

7.4.1 Lone parent constraints and pilot design

The key factors that may constrain a lone parent on the pathway to employment have been studied at length, and were initially considered to have revolved around childcare, financial concerns and skills, and capabilities to engage with the labour market. Over the course of the pilot, advisers and managers have elaborated on some specific constraints to lone parent engagement with the labour market, including (but not limited to):

Childcare issues

- specific gaps in childcare, in particular, provision outside of typical working hours and during school holidays. In addition, there is a need for provision for older children, children with special needs and children with disability;
- fear of, and resistance to, formal childcare (not wanting to leave children with strangers);
- affordability of childcare, including upfront and retention payments; and
- shortage of childcare associated with training opportunities.

Financial concerns

- fear of leaving the ‘benefit comfort zone’;
- managing debt and financial responsibilities;
- clear financial benefit of work; and
- negative perceptions of issues around Tax Credits and Housing Benefit (HB) (for example, delayed payments or recovery of overpayments).

Skills

- loss of confidence after lengthy disengagement from the labour market or from never having engaged with the labour market;
- lack of, or out of date, skills; and
- English language ability.

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Health
• disability in relation to both the lone parent and the child;
• other caring responsibilities; and
• health issues.

Other
• cultural barriers\textsuperscript{10} to work amongst certain ethnic minority groups.

The evaluation has demonstrated that the pilot has included elements to address a number of these constraints, for example, the financial factors, confidence and skills (to some extent). Yet, there are some issues that the pilot has either not been designed to address (for example, cultural barriers), or has not worked well at addressing (for example, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) issues, longer term skills or training needs). Broader policy issues such as the affordability of childcare are clearly also outside the remit of the pilot.

What has also become evident is that while the elements in the pilot acknowledge, and are responsive to, the broad issues (childcare, finance, skills), they have sometimes failed to address the specific factors which are proving to be a barrier. This is illustrated well in the childcare offer. Moreover, the constraints faced by each lone parent may be a complex composite of factors, some more practical and easier to address (transport, skills), and others less concrete and harder to approach (motivation, culture, attitudes to parenting).\textsuperscript{11}

It is important that while there are certain constraining factors that Jobcentre Plus may be able to effectively address, there are others that require close partnership working and a much longer-term engagement to overcome. An example of this is addressing the needs of ethnic minority lone parents, where both internal and external resources need to be drawn on to overcome limitations related to language, culture and skills.

7.4.2 Who does the pilot work for?
Findings indicate that the pilot works best within a certain ‘band-width’, for those lone parents who are more job-ready or those who are somewhat undecided. In these cases, the persuasiveness of the financial elements, the training offer and the

\textsuperscript{10} See Tackey, N. \textit{et al.:} Barriers to employment for Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in Britain, Department for Work and Pensions, 2006, for examples of constraints faced by women from some ethnic minority groups. This may include traditional resistance to women’s participation in the labour market, for example. In other instances there may be resistance amongst certain groups for women to work in an environment where contact with men is required.

support offered by advisers has been very effective in ‘tipping the balance’ towards
work. This group includes those who are relatively younger and who have been on
IS for a relatively short period of time. This has led some managers to suggest that the
offer should be available at an earlier stage, before out of date skills and confidence
issues become entrenched.

There is a widespread feeling amongst managers and advisers that outside of this
‘band-width’, the pilot works less well. For those whose problems may extend
beyond the normal spectrum of constraints, or those who simply have a personal
preference not to work, it may be less effective. For lone parents who are further
from the labour market, the pilot can only help progress them at a pace which is
appropriate for their level of confidence, skills, motivation to work and willingness to
tavel to work.

The group includes (but may not be limited to):

• those who have been on Income Support (IS) for a very long time and are at
  considerable distance from the labour market;

• those who may never have worked;

• those with three or more young children, for whom the costs of childcare far
  outweigh the financial benefits of work;

• lone parents with ESOL needs;

• some ethnic minorities with strong cultural barriers to work outside the home
  (Muslim women from certain groups for example);

• older women from certain ethnic minority groups who may, for cultural reasons
  never have been employed in a formal work environment;

• lone parents with health or disability problems;

• those with serious debt issues or financial burden;

• those who have children with special needs or disability; and

• those who have ‘caring’ responsibilities (this is considered to be a growing group).

There is also an intermediary group, those who do not want to work immediately,
particularly while children are young, but may consider it in the future. For this
group, the knowledge of support is important. One could include in this group those
who may currently have caring responsibilities or health issues, and for whom the
situation may change in the future.

It was also felt that as the pilot had reached many of those who were relatively easier
to help, the constraints related to these harder to help groups were gaining in
prominence. Advisers were concerned that their performance would be increasingly
affected as they felt they did not have the tools to address these issues. These
concerns were already evident in districts where there were larger volumes of ethnic
minority customers for example.
Some of these constraints may not be possible to address, while others will need close work across departments and partner organisations to develop an effective response. Importantly, managers and staff have reached clarity on those whom they will be able to help through the pilot, and those groups for whom alternate channels need to be sought to improve the reach of the pilot.

7.5 Conclusions and recommendations by offer

For those groups for whom the pilot has been found to be effective, it is felt that the offer under New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) is comprehensive. Almost all advisers and managers, with very few exceptions, view the pilot positively. Advisers stated that, with the exception of the training offer which was not felt to be adequate, the package was balanced. They further pointed out that with customer groups whose problems were within a standard range or spectrum, there were few issues that they now felt unable to address. This was considered to be a step change over what they could previously offer, and had given them new confidence and impetus in executing their duties. The majority of lone parents interviewed responded positively to the offer through the pilot, often expressing pleasant surprise at what was available through Jobcentre Plus.

7.5.1 Structure and delivery

It was some time before all staff resources and elements of the pilot were operational. Managers feel that the process would have been eased if staffing-up and training had been undertaken prior to the pilot going live. One of the keys to the success of the pilot lies in the additional resource provided, in particular the administrative resource. While confident in their roles, some administrative staff felt the need for more structured training.

Advisers generally group lone parents, based on their analysis of ‘distance from the labour market’ that incorporates the needs and receptiveness of the lone parent as well as wider constraining factors. Lone parents tend to be categorised as: those who are determined to work; those who are undecided, and those who will not work. Advisers have tailored options to lone parents according to their understanding of the key constraints faced. The most positive impact has been with the ‘undecided’ group of lone parents, with the pilot providing the tools to leverage this state of indecision further along the continuum towards work.

With few exceptions, it was found that most advisers were able to establish a rapport with lone parents, though at times it was difficult to develop a dialogue. The enhanced training was viewed very positively in improving advisers’ ability to engage with customers and to allow them to identify their own constraints and goals. However, some advisers found that short time-frames and the structure of interviews sometimes did not allow them to use their skills. Managers suggested that refreshers to the training and continued quality assurance were important.
The one area which advisers were noted to struggle with has been ethnic minority engagement. It is important to recognise that ethnic minorities are not a homogenous group. They could be differentiated at many levels, by age, gender, English language ability, faith, skills, work experience, confidence and cultural background, amongst others. For some, there is a distinct need for specialist outreach and support, and the Jobcentre Plus offer and environment cannot address their constraints and needs. For others, once the English language issues are addressed, there are a number of ways in which Jobcentre Plus can provide support and motivation towards employment.

Based on this analysis, it is recommended to:

- Continue to provide enhanced training to newly recruited advisers. Introduce refresher training and structured quality assurance processes to ensure skills are being used.
- Ensure a more structured and formal approach to the training of administrative support staff. Modules differentiated to focus on different duties could allow the course to be tailored to different roles.
- Based on the review of approaches that have been most effective with specific groups of ethnic minority customers who have been hard to reach, develop a joint offer for these ethnic minority lone parents with specialist outreach organisations, including the development of what could be considered to be more culturally appropriate forms of employment for some groups.
- Improve the access to and ease of use of translation and interpretation services.

### 7.5.2 Tools for engagement

A range of mechanisms has helped to promote the pilot, build awareness of the various measures and support on offer, and to engage lone parents. The marketing package has been universally popular, though the extent to which lone parents use it has remained unclear.

The Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) have, however, led to resistance. Moreover, while it was expected that the QWFIs would have a persuasive effect on lone parents, this effect has varied both with the situation of the lone parent and over a period of time. For those lone parents who have serious barriers unlikely to be addressed through the pilot offer, and those with younger children, they have been less effective. It was widely felt that a degree of discretion was needed in determining how frequently certain customers should be seen.

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The action planning process has continued to be problematic and staff have generally felt that the process has limited utility for lone parents. This has resulted in variable use of the process.

With tools such as In-Work Support (IWS) and More Voluntary Contact (MVC) the need for discretion in application had also become evident. It was also felt that the accompanying targets and markers for monitoring have resulted in both cases in lack of clarity over what constitutes ‘contact’.

Based on this analysis, the following is suggested:

• Examine ways in which the QWFI could be applied with some discretion, for example for customers with caring responsibilities.

• Issue better guidance around what constitutes ‘contact’ in MVC and IWS, and consider the degree to which these elements should be target-driven.

• Review the action planning process perhaps with a view to differentiating the process for different customers, addressing the Information Technology (IT) issues around printing, and improving the utility for lone parents.

7.5.3 Training and skills

Lack of skills is a key barrier to labour market access for lone parents. The reduction in training options available through Jobcentre Plus has been the cause of greatest frustration for advisers and managers. Many lone parents were found to lack confidence in their ability to engage with the labour market, and articulated the need for training to upgrade their skills. Training is a particularly important complementary element to a ‘work-first’ approach for lone parents who are at a distance from the labour market, where skills are out of date or no longer relevant to the current labour market context.

Flexible Provision has been characterised as lacking flexibility, which has deterred advisers from making full use of this resource. Advisers also felt ill equipped to signpost lone parents to appropriate provision. In addition the lack of childcare and travel support for non-Jobcentre Plus contracted provision was a constraining factor.

A specific issue related to the links with ESOL provision, which were felt to be far from satisfactory. Staff suggested that longer-term engagement was needed to ensure that ESOL needs were addressed to a level that allowed lone parents to access employment.

Another area of need related to confidence building and life-skills. Staff questioned the degree to which a two day Discovery Event could contribute to progress in resolving such complex issues. A number of staff highlighted the need for more extended support in this area.
The skills barrier is an important one and efforts are needed to ensure that the pilot is able to respond to this barrier effectively, both through internally contracted provision and better links to external provision. This also needs to be supported through coverage for childcare and travel, a source of concern to lone parents.

Based on the analysis, the following is recommended:

- Simplify the processing mechanism for Flexible Provision to ensure that it is indeed both flexible and accessible within a reasonable time-frame to allow staff to meet lone parent needs.

- Improve adviser knowledge of, and links to, training provision beyond Jobcentre Plus contracted provision. In particular, ensure that information on a broader spectrum of training is available to lone parents. The coordination of training information could be through various mechanisms that need to be reviewed and considered, such as training coordinator leads.

- Improve linkages to appropriate ESOL provision and ensure that sufficient support is available to the lone parent to allow them to progress to a level of ESOL adequate for labour market engagement.

- Assess the outcomes from Discovery Events and review how those lone parents with serious confidence and life skills issues could be best assisted.

- Ensure advisers have up-to-date knowledge on funding sources related to training outside of Jobcentre Plus provision, in particular to address lone parent needs associated with childcare and travel expenses.

### 7.5.4 Financial offer

The best leverage to engage lone parents has been obtained from the financial offer, specifically the IWC element. The IWC is widely recognised as providing a strong incentive, particularly when presented in the context of a Better Off Calculation (BOC) that highlights the financial benefits of work. There were, however, issues associated with conducting BOCs, which made it difficult for some advisers to use them with regularity.

The concern that many lone parents would return to benefit when their IWC entitlement ended has not been as widely observed as expected. Some managers have suggested that there should be an element of ‘tapering off’ to prevent the trauma of suddenly being £40 a week worse off. Additionally, there could be retention bonuses at six and 12 months to encourage lone parents to stay in employment for a sufficient period to allow them to get habituated to the world of work.

Uptake of In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) has improved with the relaxation in its rules and it has proved important in addressing critical financial needs which could result in a lone parent leaving work. There remains however an ambivalence around the WSP. It has not been possible to reach clear conclusions on the degree to which
it motivates lone parents to search for work, or enables that search. Staff felt that discretion was needed in applying the conditionality associated with WSP as this was a deterrent to uptake.

One area where support was not consistent, and which advisers highlighted as a growing concern, was the management of debt or financial responsibilities. Many lone parents had some degree of debt and were also not skilled at managing budgets once they started working. Fear of not coping with their debts was a factor that was constraining lone parents in looking for work.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

- The modalities around IWC payments should be reviewed in order to allow an adjustment process for lone parents who are at the end of their year on IWC. This could involve tapering payments towards the end of the year, combined with retention bonuses at appropriate junctures.

- A degree of flexibility and adviser discretion around WSP should be allowed. This would be with a view to allowing advisers to tailor the support to the individual and to determine the frequency with which customers need to visit the Jobcentre (or could use other modes of contact).

- The BOC process should be simplified or streamlined. Regular training and support to advisers in conducting BOCs should be ensured.

- A more structured approach to helping lone parents with financial and debt management should be introduced. This could be through referrals to a specialist debt counselling agency.

### 7.5.5 Childcare

The lone parent response to the childcare offer has been the most perplexing given that this was considered to be a key barrier initially. Findings through the course of the pilot may indicate that this is not as important a barrier as previously considered. However, findings also indicate that this points to the limitations of the childcare offer, rather than diminishing the importance of the barrier. It is important to place this finding in context, as the overall importance of childcare cannot be negated.

Earlier analysis has indicated that the lack of uptake of the childcare offer can be partially attributed to issues with design, as in Childcare Assist; or the relevance of the offer, as in the case of Tasters. Many lone parents did prefer to determine their own childcare arrangements rather than seeking advice through Jobcentre Plus.

A number of key childcare issues such as specific types of childcare or affordability however remain, and are not addressed by any specific pilot element. This highlights the need to better define the role best suited to Jobcentre Plus in childcare. The role is clearly linked to partnership working. The importance of Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) and additional CPMs as liaison points in developing effective partnerships and signposting relevant provision becomes critical.
Based on this analysis, it is recommended to:

- Continue to promote referrals to Childcare Chats where they have been continued by local authorities. Where these have not been continued examine alternatives such as using additional CPMs or advisers for Chats.

- Consider changing the rules associated with Childcare Assist. If these cannot be changed, consider a reallocation of funds to other areas where they may be used to cover the critical need for upfront childcare costs.

- Work with local authorities, and public, private, and voluntary sector providers to develop specific childcare offers around identified gaps. This could relate for example to out of hours care, culturally sensitive care, or care for specialised needs.

7.5.6 Partnership working and outreach

As the pilot has had to increasingly be delivered to harder to reach and help groups, alternate modes of engagement have become important. A number of districts have worked with outreach for ethnic minority customers, as well as outreach in community venues. Managers were found to be progressively focusing on such forms of engagement with the growing understanding that Jobcentre Plus may not be the most appropriate venue to reach these customer groups. The partnership with Children’s Centres has been an important element of the pilot in this context. The partnership required considerable investment to develop trust and mutual understanding, and has progressed and deepened in many cases. This has particularly been found to be the case where additional CPMs have focused on developing the relationship. As Children’s Centres grow in number, however, it will be difficult to provide the same level of service across all outreach venues. This may therefore call for a combined effort with both additional CPMs and advisers providing outreach.

It was pointed out by the partners that a combination of the one-on-one Jobcentre Plus offer through case-loading and interviews along with community based promotional activities, was the most effective mode of engagement. With these partnerships growing in importance, the one gap related to developing mechanisms for joint planning, setting targets and monitoring of the effectiveness of activities.

Based on this analysis, the following is recommended:

- Ensure continued development of the links with Children’s Centres, but with improved strategic focus and better developed efforts at joint planning, monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.

- Continue to fund the additional CPM position, with a focus on the remit to develop partnerships with Children’s Centres. Consider supporting the efforts of additional CPMs with adviser inputs to effectively manage the engagement with the growing numbers of Children’s Centres.

- Improve the IT and logistics available to Jobcentre Plus staff in Children’s Centres, in order to allow them to effectively offer Jobcentre Plus services at these venues.
7.6 Overall conclusions

The ND+fLP pilot offer responded to the core constraints which lone parents were known to face, encompassing initiatives to address issues around childcare, finances, and skills. At the same time it has promoted a new approach, which focuses on helping lone parents take the initiative in assessing their own needs and constraints, and enabling them in developing relevant and practical solutions. While the mandatory elements have been limited, the pilot has involved a more ‘persuasive’ regime than hitherto used with this client group. The initial resistance to this approach has, with skilful delivery and the success of key elements such as the IWC, been tempered over time. Some pilot elements have been shown to be more effective than others. In some cases, where Jobcentre Plus does not have a comparative advantage, the value of partnership working has been highlighted.

The pilot has been found to be most immediately responsive to lone parents who are relatively more job-ready. For this group, the offer through the pilot, particularly the financial elements, have demonstrated synergies, and have proven to be a potent incentive in the decision to work. For those at a greater distance from the labour market, there are elements within the pilot, such as outreach through the growing partnerships with Children’s Centres, which, in the longer-term, offer promise. For those with more intransigent barriers, however, the pilot alone is not a sufficient solution to the constraints they face.

The pilot has been viewed holistically by management as a ‘packaged’ offer. Operational staff, whilst appreciative of the availability of the whole package of support, select elements that are most relevant to each particular lone parent’s needs and constraints. Most importantly, lone parents, once they are aware of the entire range of support, have been demonstrably impressed. Those who are ready to progress have a comprehensive package of support available to them, whilst others are pleased that the support is available as and when they become ready to work.
Appendix A
The New Deal Plus for Lone Parents Pilot package
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of initiative</th>
<th>Type of initiative</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-employment support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs)</td>
<td>Pre-employment support: Structured assessment of needs and options to progress to work for lone parents with youngest child over 12 years. QWFIs for lone parents with youngest child over 14 years have been mandatory since October 2005.</td>
<td>Existing initiative. Started 30 September 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Action Plans</td>
<td>Pre-employment support: Structured and measurable plan to help lone parents with specific and realistic actions. The Action Plan was mandatory for advisers to sign at the start of the pilot, and since October 2005 has been mandatory for lone parents to sign.</td>
<td>Existing initiative. Started October 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Discovery Weeks/Events</td>
<td>Pre-employment support: Confidence building events to help lone parents engage with employers and explore training and other opportunities.</td>
<td>Initiative partially in place at start of pilot. New version was shortened to two days from the previous five day event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Childcare Tasters/Childcare Chats</td>
<td>Pre-employment support: Offers a one-to-one discussion and/or one week of free childcare placement to lone parents considering employment.</td>
<td>Existing initiative, implemented through Children’s Information Service (CIS)/Local Authority. In place since April 2004, and extended in October 2004 to include all the extended school pilot areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Extended Schools pilot</td>
<td>Pre- and post-employment support: Affordable childcare by extending the opening hours of schools.</td>
<td>Existing initiative. Introduced in April 2004, and extended in October 2004 to include all the extended school pilot areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial support (Pre-employment)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Work Search Premium (WSP)</td>
<td>Pre-employment support: Offers £20/week for up to six months to lone parents who have been on benefit for more than one year and have agreed to actively and consistently search for work.</td>
<td>Existing initiative. Introduced in October 2004 and operational in all the Extended School pilot areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of initiative</td>
<td>Type of initiative</td>
<td>Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial support (post-employment)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. In-Work Credit (IWC)</td>
<td>Post-employment support: £40 a week payable to lone parents who get jobs of over 16 hours a week, payable for a period of one year.</td>
<td>Existing initiative. Introduced in April 2004 and extended to all Extended Schools pilot areas in October 2004.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacities to deliver and support lone parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Enhanced training for lone parent advisers</td>
<td>Provision of specific training for lone parent advisers to enhance their confidence in dealing with complex lone parent issues. The training consists of two+two days. It is important to note that this is different from the basic training for lone parent advisers, which is a longer training course.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Extra administrative support for lone parent advisers</td>
<td>Employment of additional administrative officers to support lone parent advisers. This is intended to release advisers from more mundane administrative tasks, allowing them to focus on the needs of the client.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. More Voluntary Contact (MVC) with lone parents between Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)</td>
<td>Provision of a named adviser to work with a lone parent through the duration of their claim. While there is no conditionality, this involves more intensive support to allow lone parents to realise their goals.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM)</td>
<td>The additional CPM will help the existing CPM in providing greater outreach and building effective links with Sure Start, Extended School Childcare (ESC) provision and other childcare partners. The additional CPM is expected to work closely with lone parent advisers to identify appropriate childcare.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Access to Flexible Provision</td>
<td>This will allow District Managers to purchase training courses or provision with greater flexibility (including provision not currently available). It is intended to help lone parent advisers in accessing bespoke or better tailored options for lone parents.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of initiative</th>
<th>Type of initiative</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. In-Work Support (IWS)</td>
<td>Lone parent advisers will maintain contact with lone parents who require additional support during the first 60 days of employment.</td>
<td>New Initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other initiatives to engage lone parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Jobpoints in Children’s Centres</td>
<td>A remote access Jobpoint to be installed in selected Children’s Centres. The objective is to provide better information about job availability and options such as NDLP.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Marketing package</td>
<td>A ‘marketing package’ is intended to sell the overall package of interventions in the pilot.</td>
<td>New initiative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Summary of the qualitative evaluation methodology
Appendices – Summary of the qualitative evaluation methodology

Inception meeting

Further development of topic guides and interview stencils

Scoping visits

First scoping report

First case study field visits

First interim report

Steering meeting

Second case study field visits

Second interim report

Steering meeting

Telephone follow-up of Lone Parent Panel

Interim findings for Lone Parent Panel

On-line survey

Third case study field visits

Second interim report

Steering meeting

Headline findings

Final summary report
Appendix C
Detailed methodology

Qualitative approach and method

**Approach and Sample**

The methodology for the qualitative evaluation was developed on the basis of the research specification and initial discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The basic approach was to observe the live running of the pilot over time, to identify and feed back promptly on the development of the pilot, specifically the offer, and changes to delivery, practice and organisational management. The longitudinal dimension was also intended to identify changes over time in attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making, all of which are factors which will contribute to the long-term effectiveness of the interventions and the institutional transformation underpinning them.

The research was conducted in all five Jobcentre Plus districts where the pilot was being implemented:

- North London;
- South-East London;
- Sandwell and Dudley;
- Leicestershire;
- Bradford.

A scoping exercise preceded fieldwork, and was carried out in May 2005. The visits covered all five districts, and were conducted in conjunction with the DWP base-lining exercise to minimise the burden on districts. The purpose was to set a baseline for examining the use of resources and the structure of delivery through the course
of the pilot, as well as to assess which pilot elements were in place. The scoping visits also helped in introducing the evaluation approach, and agreeing logistics and details for the evaluation with managers in the pilot districts. Case-study offices were agreed during the scoping visits, based on a combination of factors, including size, location (rural and urban) and the volume of customer traffic.

Fieldwork was planned for three key stages, close to the start of the pilot, mid-course, and towards the end. The sequencing was intended to examine: the process of roll out and initial issues associated with implementation, in Wave 1 (June 2005); emerging impacts in Wave 2 (November 2005); and finally reflections on the course of the pilot and its effectiveness in Wave 3 (originally scheduled for March 2006, but conducted August 2006). With the extension of the pilot through to 2008, the timing of Wave 3 was deferred to allow greater time for outcomes to become evident. Consequently, an Interim stage was added for lone parent interviews, in order to retain contact with lone parents given the extended gap between Waves 2 and 3 of fieldwork.

In all Waves of the fieldwork, detailed written guidance was prepared for researchers. Additionally, team briefing events were held to discuss approach and methodology in further detail, and address any questions or concerns. The main methodological tools included depth interviews with staff and partner organisations, focus group discussions, face-to-face interviews and telephone follow-up with beneficiaries, observations of customer/adviser interviews, shadowing of advisers, and an on-line survey of advisers, Adviser Managers and administrative support staff.

The findings of the evaluation are based on the cumulative findings through all the methodological tools employed. This has allowed for a triangulation of results, and for different perspectives to emerge.

**Analysis**

The value of qualitative data is that it provides in-depth exploration of developments and enables an understanding of context, process, details, and emerging patterns. Given the importance of the process dimension in effectively delivering the pilot, qualitative methods and analysis provided the most effective tools for capturing delivery, and the incremental changes in behaviours and institutional culture.

The thematic headings in the topic guides formed the basis for recording information and organising analysis across the three Waves of fieldwork. With the longitudinal dimension of the research, the analysis looked for changes and patterns that were emerging through the course of the pilot, for each element of the pilot and for the package as a whole. Additionally, team debriefings were held following fieldwork, which allowed all researchers to come together to assess and discuss the overall findings, and specific details which had informed the findings.
Depth interviews and focus groups

Sample
A total of 194 interviews were undertaken across the three Waves, as detailed in Table C.1. In most instances, the interviews with advisers and administrative support staff in Wave 2 were carried out with those staff members who had been interviewed in Wave 1. This allowed examination of any shifts in perspective over the course of the pilot. In Wave 3, the core methodology was to conduct focus groups to allow an interactive discussion.

Topic guides for the depth interviews were developed for all categories of staff and external partners, and are included in Appendix B. The topic guides were developed around key hypotheses and research questions. In each Wave of fieldwork, fresh topic guides were developed to capture the progression through the pilot and issues specific to particular stages of implementation.

There were some considerations for the methodology:

During Wave 1, interviews with Children’s Centres were not carried out, as it was felt the partnership was at too early a stage of development.

As training was only carried out at the start of the pilot, with no follow-up training events planned, interviews with district training staff were only carried out in Wave 1.

Table C.1 Interviews conducted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>District Management</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilot Leads</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Adviser Managers</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>Lone parent advisers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>66</td>
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<td>Administrative support/Team Leaders</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM)/additional CPM</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Trainer/Learning &amp; Development (L&amp;D) Officer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Centre Heads/Childcare Providers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>82</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five focus group discussions with advisers, Adviser Managers and administrative staff were conducted in Wave 3, and attended by 26 advisers, managers, and Additional CPMs, and 22 administrative staff across the five districts. Almost all
participants in the focus groups had been interviewed in previous Waves of fieldwork. The guidance issued to researchers for the focus groups is included in Appendix C. The discussions were structured around the findings of the on-line survey, which allowed the exploration of key issues and themes that had emerged. The structure of the focus groups consisted of a joint discussion on key themes, followed by smaller group discussions around specific themes for advisers and administrative staff. This allowed both advisers and administrative support staff to discuss issues of specific interest in greater depth.

Shadowing

Shadowing was introduced in Wave 2 to capture the range of tasks that advisers are involved in and in order to gain a better sense of how agreed actions with lone parents are followed up. As advisers had indicated in Wave 1 that some pilot elements involved additional administration, there was the added objective of determining which elements involved the greatest inputs of time and effort. A total of ten shadowing exercises were carried out in Wave 2 across all five districts. In each district, two advisers from different offices were shadowed for half a day. The shadowing exercise involved the observation and recording of the following actions:

- follow-up undertaken by advisers and any telephone contacts made;
- information recorded by advisers on the system;
- time spent on each activity (including entering data on the system or accessing information from the system); and
- interaction with administrative staff and the nature of tasks delegated to them.

Advisers were also interviewed between shadowing and observations of interviews, which provided the opportunity to explore the rationale behind choices made and the competing demands on their time. Researchers were asked to record timings of activities and the nature of the activities undertaken as they occurred, while also exploring the intent of the adviser in undertaking the activity. The purpose of the exercise was to inform the analysis and not to conduct a detailed time-motion study.

Observations

Objectives

Observations were introduced with the purpose of capturing the dynamic between frontline staff and lone parents. The way in which the pilot has been delivered is considered to be critical to its effectiveness. Determining the right options for customers is contingent on creating an appropriate environment and rapport. It is key to encourage customers to articulate their barriers, needs and goals to determine the right combinations of pilot elements which will help the customer in overcoming their limitations to progress towards their personal goals. The enhanced
training undertaken by advisers at the outset of the pilot was aimed specifically at helping them to bring about these behaviour changes.

Observations were considered a useful way of capturing the quality of the interaction and dialogue that takes place between staff and customers. In particular, observations were considered to be an important mechanism for contextualising and gaining a holistic view of the interaction.

**Method, sampling and analysis**

The selected method was to undertake structured or systematic observations of a range of lone parent interviews, using a non-participant technique. A total of 77 observations of interviews across the five districts were undertaken; with 39 observations in Wave 1 of fieldwork and 38 in Wave 2. While structured observations were not undertaken in Wave 3, approximately ten unstructured observations were undertaken, in conjunction with lone parent interviews.

The sample of interviews observed was dependent on the bookings for the day. Researchers examined adviser diaries at the start of the day, and efforts were made to capture a broad spectrum of interview types. The observations included first Work Focused Interviews (WFIs), Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs), exploratory discussions with advisers, New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) interviews/follow-ups and the occasional visit to follow up on a specific issue.

The sampling for the interviews was opportunistic. Two researchers would visit an office to undertake interviews with staff, observations and lone parent interviews. Wherever possible, one researcher would observe the interview between the adviser and lone parent, while another would subsequently interview the lone parent to determine their response. This was particularly useful and allowed an examination of the interaction both from the perspective of the interviewer and the interviewee.

Researchers prepared for the observation by discussing the forthcoming interview with the adviser, while also observing the preparation for the interview. During the interview, researchers sat unobtrusively behind observers, but close enough to note what was being entered in the Labour Market System (LMS), and during the action planning process. As non-participant observers, no comments were made during the interview. Following the interview, the researcher again interviewed the adviser, to discuss the content and outcomes from the interview. Researchers would later discuss the interview from both the adviser and lone parent perspectives, and record this in their notes.

While interviews were not taped, an observation schedule was developed (see Appendix D) to record the observation and capture the salient features of the interaction.

The observation schedule included both structured and open-ended elements around the following themes:
• preparation for the interview; degree to which the adviser consults notes and familiarises themselves with the lone parents’ background and circumstances;

• the introductory process; capturing how the adviser presents themselves to the lone parent, makes them comfortable with the interview process, and explains mandatory requirements;

• exploration of history and goals; the extent to which the adviser is able to explore the lone parent’s background and history, and help them in identifying the key barriers they face;

• options and support offered; based on the analysis of barriers, the response of the adviser in offering appropriate and well sequenced support to the lone parent while making them aware of all the options available to them;

• action planning and closing; an assessment of the action planning process, the level of engagement of the lone parent in the process, a review of the discussion and the identification of clear steps for follow-up at closing;

• discussion around the advisers feelings about the interview and reasons for the approach taken and options offered;

• an assessment by the observer of the pace, tone and non-verbal cues observed; the appropriateness of the offer and the responsiveness of the lone parent to the offer.

The information recorded in the observation schedules was entered into an excel data-base and coded and analysed around the thematic areas described above.

There were some methodological concerns that the observations would influence the advisers’ behaviour, prompting them into presenting text-book behaviours, which would deviate from their normal mode of interaction. Moreover, there were fears that the observations could be intrusive and invade privacy; both for the adviser and the customer.

These concerns were mitigated to some extent by gaining the permission of both staff member and customer prior to the observation. It was also stated that the information gathered about the lone parent’s circumstance would be kept anonymous and, in the case of staff, the fact that it was unrelated to any assessment of performance. In all cases, customers were open to having their interview observed.

It was found that Jobcentre Plus staff were fairly familiar with observational techniques, conducted both internally and by external evaluators. Staff were therefore both comfortable with the process, and in general natural in their behaviour. While there was some minor evidence during Wave 1 that some behaviour may be influenced, this was rare and not found to be significant.
Beneficiary interviews

Approach and method

Sample

The lone parent or beneficiary interviews were an important part of the evaluation methodology, and were conducted in all three Waves of fieldwork. Overall a total of 96 face-to-face interviews were conducted with lone parents at Jobcentres (39 in Wave 1, 35 in Wave 2 and 22 in Wave 3). In addition, a panel of lone parents who agreed to be tracked for the evaluation was created. This panel consisted of the 39 lone parents in Wave 1, and the 35 interviewed in Wave 2. In total, 63 follow-up telephone interviews to lone parents were achieved during Wave 2, the Interim Follow-Up and Wave 3, as part of the panel follow-up.

The Interim Follow-Up was carried out mid-way between Waves 2 and 3, and was introduced due to the extension of the pilot and subsequent extension in the timing of Wave 3. As attrition of the lone parent panel had already been experienced in Wave 2 (only 17 of the 39 lone parents interviewed in Wave 1 were reached), this was felt to be an important measure to retain contact with the lone parent without too great a gap, and to prevent further attrition. The face-to-face lone parent interviews held in Wave 3 were booster interviews, also introduced to compensate for the depletion in the lone parent panel.

The Table C.2 presents the sample achieved through the course of the evaluation.

Table C.2 Beneficiary sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Lone parents (face-to-face interviews)</th>
<th>Telephone follow-up of panel (achieved sample)</th>
<th>Total lone parent interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim follow-up</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>96</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>159</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recruitment of sample and method

Lone parents were recruited to the study after their interview with the adviser. As such, the sample was opportunistic rather than scientific and, therefore, only indicative conclusions may be drawn from the beneficiary interviews. As a much larger scale survey of lone parents was planned as part of the overall suite of evaluations, the purpose in this qualitative evaluation was to capture process, perceptions and responses, rather than measure impact and outcomes. The
sampling was based on the assumption that the booking of lone parent and adviser appointments is relatively random and so the recruitment of lone parents should not then have any inherent biases.

A quiet space or room was provided for the interviews, which, with the permission of the lone parent were tape-recorded and transcribed. Analysis of the interviews combined the entry of data in an excel data-base and analysis of this data around common themes.

Interview schedules were developed using a semi-structured format (see Appendix E). Two topic guides were developed, one for lone parents who were already in employment and one for those who are not yet in employment. The first focused on asking questions around how they got their job, how they are finding it, what type of post-employment support they received, and about their childcare arrangements. The topic guide for those lone parents who were not employed focused on their feelings about going back to work, whether the pilot is moving them along on the pathway to work, their concerns about childcare, and their impressions of the marketing material.

**Phone interviews**

As part of the approach, a panel of lone parents who could be tracked throughout the evaluation was set up. During the Jobcentre Plus office visits in Wave 1, as part of the interviews, lone parents were asked if they would be willing to be contacted over a period of the next few months through a phone interview. Those who agreed to the follow-up were then called during Wave 2 to discuss their status and progression since Wave 1. The panel was built on in Wave 2 with a new group of lone parents who, combined with those remaining from Wave 1, were followed up during the Interim Follow-Up and then finally during Wave 3.

As is common in most longitudinal exercises, the issue of panel attrition was experienced, with many lone parents dropping out of the panel from one Wave to the next. This was not always due to an unwillingness to be interviewed. Frequently it was found that mobile phone numbers had been changed or calls were not answered. In some cases lone parents were moving back in with their partners or no longer wanted to participate in the panel. At least five attempts were made at contacting each lone parent on the panel; and timing of the phone call during the day was also varied in an attempt to capture the lone parent and maximise results. The Table C.3 shows the numbers of lone parents in each wave on the panel and those it was possible to speak with.
Table C.3  Lone parent panel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Total lone parents on panel (contacted)</th>
<th>Achieved sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim follow-up</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As with the Jobcentre Plus office visits, two types of interview schedules for phone interviews with the panel were developed (see Appendix E). Questions focused around whether or not they were in employment and if their situation had changed since their last interview. If they were in employment they were asked about their jobs, any issues that they may have faced, how they found the in-work support, which elements they had taken up and whether they were satisfied with the elements that had been offered to them with respect to training, job-search support, in-work support, and financial incentives. If they were not in employment questions focused on whether they felt job ready, how the job search process was coming along, if they were satisfied with the elements that had been offered to them with respect to training, job-search support, in-work support, and financial incentives and about any steps they may be taking to look for work.

Types of interviews
The largest number (26) of the lone parents interviewed, were at the Jobcentre Plus office for their first WFI. The next highest group interviewed (24) were meeting with their advisers for another reason, such as for a back-to-work interview, change of circumstances, a drop in visit to get advice on a job application or to discuss a training programme they had completed. Following that, 23 lone parents were at the Jobcentre for their QWFI. It is interesting to note that by Wave 3 most lone parents interviewed were not visiting the Jobcentre for WFIs but rather for other reasons or as a follow up visit.

Table C.4  Types of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for visit to Jobcentre</th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
<th>Wave 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory visit</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First WFI</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-up visit</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QWFI</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lone parent background

In terms of the ethnicity of lone parents interviewed, the overall majority were white (61 per cent), although this group included Europeans and Latin Americans who did not specify ethnicity exactly. The next largest group was black at 22 per cent, followed by Asian and Mixed ethnicity lone parents, both at six per cent.

Table C.5 Lone parent background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number of lone parents interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wave 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On-line survey

During Wave 3, an on-line survey was carried out with the primary objective of reaching a broader constituency of advisers and administrative support staff. The feedback received would be used to inform the topic guides for the subsequent focus groups.

As the pilot was almost a year and a half into implementation, the survey sought the views of both advisers and administrative staff on its overall effectiveness and impact, as well as the usefulness of the individual elements it was comprised of. Importantly, staff were asked to reflect on the extent to which their workload had
been affected, the additional roles they were now undertaking, and their ability to use their new training to engage better with customers. These views were later used to inform the discussions in focus groups.

Two separate questionnaires were developed for advisers and administrative support staff, with targeted questions around the specific roles. Once finalised, these were then uploaded online and hosted on a GHK website. The questionnaires were pre-tested twice. The first time paper copies were distributed to an adviser and a member of the administrative support staff to evaluate the length of time taken to complete the questionnaire as well as the clarity of the questions. The second pre-test was done through an on-line trial run in each district prior to the launch of the survey.

Once the questionnaire was launched links were emailed to the Project Managers of each pilot district along with an explanatory note instructing them to send out the link to all the advisers and administrative staff on the lone parent team in the district. Staff was given two weeks to complete the questionnaire. In addition to the original email distributing the link, staff were sent two reminders by Project Managers, and encouraged verbally to complete the survey during regular meetings.

The links were sent out by Project Managers to 214 individuals in both roles and there were 112 respondents in total, with 78 advisers and 34 administrative staff responding.
Appendix D
Interview topic guides

New Deal for Lone Parent Plus Pilot Project Manager/District Manager

Delivery and practical issues
Are all strands now in place and fully functional?

Are all AO and Personal Adviser (PA) resources currently in place and fully trained?

Have there been any changes to the structure of delivery and roles and responsibilities of staff, including additional staff resources?

Are the new staff who are not from an Lone Parent Adviser (LPA) background fully functional? Has any further training or mentoring been provided?

Have the additional resources released PA time? Has this enhanced the quality of engagement? Has More Voluntary Contact (MVC) and case-loading increased?

What is the status of the Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs)? Are there any backlogs? If so, how is this impacting on the delivery of the other elements?

How have QWFIs impacted on review meetings? How have they fitted in with existing processes and impacted on staff?

How is the action planning process proceeding?

Have there been any recent marketing efforts for the pilot? What has been the response?

Have any new relationships been put in place for implementing any strand of the pilot? How are these working?

Do all partners have a common understanding of the pilot?
Has the Flexible Provision been used? In what way? Do you feel that there are sufficient funds and flexibility to meet the needs of lone parents?

What other forms of training provision are available to lone parents? Are there gaps which are not covered by Flexible Provision?

Has there been any knowledge sharing between districts? If so, has this helped adopting best practice or improving delivery?

What is the best method for communicating best practice? Can you give examples?

Has there been support from headquarters? How has this helped?

Has any further guidance or changes in procedures been introduced? Has this helped? Has it resulted in any changes in delivery arrangements?

Have any specific measures been taken to promote elements for which there has been low take-up?

Are headcount issues impacting on the implementation of the pilot in any way?

How is the management of the pilot working? Are Steering Groups meeting? If so, what issues are being resolved through these forums?

Have any further training events been undertaken? Has there been any follow-up to ensure the enhanced training is being utilized?

Is there any element which you are currently focusing on more than others in your district? Why?

Have district staff been able to work effectively with the local offices in delivery of the pilot?

What are your current monitoring arrangements? Have you received any guidance on M&E?

Has feedback from monitoring resulted in any adjustments to delivery modalities?

**The package**

Do you feel that the pilot is now being delivered as a ‘package’? How is it being viewed at the district, local offices and by lone parents?

Do you feel the concept of a ‘package’ is a useful one, rather than promoting individual strands?

At this stage, how important do you feel the different elements are in the package? Which ones?

Has there been any flexibility in how you have been able to structure delivery of the various strands?
Which elements do you think are working well together?

Which elements have PAs and lone parents perceived as most important? Have PAs promoted any elements with greater enthusiasm than others? Has this related to preference or availability of resources and administrative complexity?

Are offices struggling with the delivery of certain elements, and why?

Have any specific measures been put in place to enable local offices/PAs market the ‘package’? Have you made any local adaptations?

(For North London only: How is the pilot meshing with the Employment Zones (EZs))

**Outcomes and effectiveness**

What is your existing performance on indicators related to lone parents? Has this changed since the last quarter?

What has the reaction of the key stakeholders been?

What has been the take-up of various elements in the Package?

Are you able to relate outcomes to any particular elements or to the package as a whole?

Do you feel that the right elements are included in the package to respond to demand in your district? If not, which parts of the service offer need enhancement?

From feedback from PAs and Adviser Managers which elements are particularly effective and why?

What has been the impact of the QWFIs?

Have Action Plans proved to be a useful tool? How have staff and lone parents reacted to the process?

Has the ‘package’ appealed to a broader range of lone parents as demonstrated by take-up. Are there any groups with specific needs which are not catered to by the ‘package’?

Has the ‘package’ had any visible impact on participant’s attitudes and motivation to work, which is over and above to their response to individual elements previously in place?
Lone Parent Adviser Manager

**Delivery and practical issues**

Are all staff currently in place and operational?

Are the new staff from non-LPA backgrounds fully operational or are they in need of continued guidance?

Have any changes been made to roles and responsibilities of the additional staff?

Has any further guidance been provided on the pilot? Has it helped?

If further guidance has been provided, how did you cascade down the information to your staff?

How are the management arrangements working?

Have any further workshops or events been undertaken? What issues were they structured around? Were these resolved?

Has there been any exchange with other offices on the implementation? If so, has this been helpful?

What support/guidance is provided at the district level? Have you had to approach the district for support in certain areas?

Are other initiatives or pilots impacting on the implementation of this pilot?

Are the additional resources fully in place and operational now? Since when have they been in place? Are the resources proving to be adequate?

Have you had to make any local adaptations for the pilot?

Have you had sufficient marketing materials in different languages? What has been the demand/use for the translated versions?

Have any additional marketing efforts been undertaken? What has been the response?

Have you had any referrals from Children’s Centres?

How are the QWFIs proceeding? Are there any backlogs? If so, how are they impacting on other elements?

How have QWFIs impacted on review meetings? How have they fitted in with existing processes and impacted on staff?

Have action plans proved to be a useful tool? How have staff and lone parents reacted to them?
What arrangements are in place for MVC? How has this proceeded?

How are you monitoring progress and outcomes? Have you received any guidance?

**Training**

Have any further training events been undertaken?

Has there been any follow up to the training, e.g. QUAFFING/observations?

Do you feel the PAs are able to utilise the training in their work? How?

Are staff recruited from a different background being supported or mentored in any way?

Has the training provided to Administrative Support been adequate to allow them to carry out their new functions?

**The package**

Do you now view the offer as a ‘package’ or as separate elements? How does it come together as a package?

How is the ‘package’ being supported by complementary offers such as Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF), training premium etc.?

Has the package been linked to any other service offers to enhance its value to customers?

Have the staff been able to view the offer as a ‘package’?

Have the PAs been able to deliver the offer as a ‘package’? if not, what constraints have you seen?

How important do you feel the different elements are in the package and which ones?

(For North London only: How does the ‘package’ mesh with the EZ?)

**Outcomes and effectiveness**

What are your existing performance figures on lone parents? Has this changed since the last quarter?

Do you think targets are influencing the way in which the pilot is being delivered?

What has been the take up of various elements?

What has been the impact of the QWFls?

Do you think the action planning process is achieving any additional impact? How?
Is the pilot achieving the results you had hoped it would? If not, why?

How have the different stakeholders/partners reacted to the pilot?

Do you feel the package contains the right elements to respond to the demand in your catchment? If not, what is missing?

Do PAs perceive some elements or combination of elements to be more effective than others?

Are lone parents responding positively to the offer (incremental to their response to individual elements)? Is the package appealing to a broader range of lone parents?

Has the package had any impact on participant’s attitudes and motivation to work which differs from the previous response to various strands?

Do you feel that the package offers a sequenced ‘pathway’ towards employment over time?

Lone parent Personal Advisers

Delivery and practical issues

What are your roles and responsibilities? How long have you been a lone parent PA?

Was the training and guidance provided to you for the pilot adequate?

Has any new guidance been issued? Have there been any changes in processes? If so, have they helped?

Have you had to make any changes in implementation or introduce any specific administrative measures?

Do you feel the pilot adds to your existing work-load? In what way/which specific elements?

What effect have the QWFIs had on your workload? Does this impact on the delivery of other elements? What effect have they had on review meetings?

How is the action planning process going? Are you doing anything differently? How have lone parents responded to it?

Are you able to undertake MVC? What have been the outcomes?

Please explain the administrative elements associated with each strand of the pilot (emphasise Work Search Premium (WSP), In-Work Credit (IWC))?

How does this influence the way in which you are able to deliver the pilot?

What other administrative functions take your time?
Do you feel the additional support you have been given is adequate for the pilot?
What kind of support is being provided? Does it release time? How are you spending that time?
What has the take-up been for In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF)? Do you feel you are able to use it more flexibly now than at the start of the pilot? What has it been used for? Has it helped with issues related to tax credits?
Do you feel you have sufficient resources (other than staff) and knowledge to implement the pilot?
Have you been provided with adequate marketing material (quantities, languages)?
Have you undertaken any other form of marketing?
Have you participated in or been introduced to Discovery Weeks? How do you feel about them?
How do you refer customers to childcare provision? Is it easy and accessible?
What kinds of training are available for customers? Is Flexible Provision being used? What is your understanding of Flexible Provision? What are the gaps?
What is the availability of Flexible Provision for your offices? Are you aware of the funds available? Are you aware of which providers you can purchase training courses from?

Training
Has there been any follow-up to the training? If not, would it be useful?
Are you able to continue to use the enhanced training? If not, why? Is it helping you in responding to your customers? In what way?

The package
Is there any value in presenting a ‘package’ to lone parents or do you feel it is important to present individual strands?
Are you linking the package to any other service offers to enhance its value?
How important do you feel the different elements are in the package and which ones?
Are there any elements which work particularly well together?
Are there any elements which you have found are not particularly relevant?
What kind of a customer profile do you have, and how does this influence what is delivered?
Have you bundled different elements of the ‘package’ towards different groups of customers? Why do you feel they will work especially well for these different groups?

How have lone parents responded to the offer? Do they view it as a ‘package’? Has there been any noticeable difference in their response to this package in comparison to the elements offered individually before?

(For North London: How does the package work with EZ?)

**Outcomes and effectiveness**

How has the pilot impacted on your performance? Have there been any changes over the past months?

What do you feel are the benefits of the pilot?

Is the pilot allowing you to tailor interventions better to your customers needs?

Has action planning proved to be effective? What effect has it had on the lone parent response?

Have QWFls had any impact?

Are there any elements you feel should be included in the package to address the barriers lone parents face?

Are you able to effectively use the pilot elements with other offers such as ADF? If not, why?

Have you tried to access other provision to overcome those barriers not addressed, and how effective has this been?

Has Flexible Provision been used in any way to overcome specific barriers/gaps?

In what ways have the additional staff resources helped?

Do you feel the marketing effort and materials have been adequate for engaging customers and conveying the ‘message’?

Has there been a difference in the response of lone parents to the package? Has it appealed to a broader range of customers?

Has the ‘package’ had any impact on customer’s attitudes and motivation to work, which seems to be different from their response to the individual elements?

Have you been able to have more ‘voluntary contact’ with lone parents between WFls? How has this helped?

Do you feel that the package is offering a ‘pathway’ towards employment over time? Do you feel you can progressively offer them the support from the different elements of the package to urge them towards employment?
Administration manager

**Delivery and practical issues**
What are your duties as part of the lone parent team?

How was the pilot introduced to you? Were your duties clear to you? Do you feel you got sufficient guidance?

Have you received any additional guidance since?

How many administration staff do you manage? What are their central tasks?

Which tasks related to the pilot are perceived as over and above normal administrative duties?

Were the additional resources provided through the pilot adequate?

Was any training provided to the administrative staff? Was it adequate?

Have you experienced any issues with the delivery of the pilot?

Are any backlogs in any area? Is the workload manageable?

If based in the district, how do you provide support to PA’s in offices (if relevant)? Are there any coordination issues? Does the nature of the support to different staff members vary?

Do you see the pilot as a package, or do you feel that it is a lot of separate interventions?

**Outcomes and effectiveness**
Do you feel the resources in the unit are adequate for delivering the pilot?

Are the marketing materials proving to be adequate in guiding lone parents?

In your view how have lone parents responded to the pilot?

Are there any aspects which could be improved?

Has the pilot impacted on performance? How are you measuring performance?

Are you tracking the lone parents on the pilot? If so, are there any interesting findings?
Administrator

**Delivery and practical issues**

What is your previous experience in Jobcentre Plus? When were you integrated into the lone parent team?

Who is your line manager?

What are your duties as part of the lone parent team?

How was the pilot introduced to you? Were your duties clear to you? Do you feel you got sufficient guidance?

Do you feel you have the confidence to carry out your new duties, or are there certain areas you feel you need mentoring and support in?

Do you feel the work in the lone parent unit is more complex than your previous duties?

Do you occasionally get drawn into other activities not related to lone parents?

Do you deal with any enquiries from lone parents? What sort of enquiries? Do you feel confident to do so?

Which parts of the pilot package do you provide administrative support on?

Do you provide support for Failure to Attent (FTA) or DMA action? What tasks does this involve?

What tasks do you have to undertake? (e.g., sending out letters, completing forms and getting them authorised, sending them to finance, booking appointments for lone parent advisers)

Do you support the advisers by booking some interviews?

Do you do any administration for the WSP? How are you finding it?

Do you do any administration for the IWC? How are you finding it?

Do you do any work on the MVC?

Do you support the QWFIs? How? How are you finding it?

Has the volume of administration increased since the pilot began?

Who do you provide support to? Does the nature of the support to different staff members vary? If based in the district, how do you provide support to PA’s in offices (if relevant)? Are there any co-ordination issues?

How do you feel that your role has supported the PAs? Have you experienced any issues liaising with the advisers on the pilot package elements?
Training
Were you provided any training? Was it adequate?
Overall, has the introduction and training provided given you confidence in your ability to deliver support to PAs and lone parents?
Have you received any additional guidance since?

The package
Do you see the pilot as a package, or do you feel that it is a lot of separate interventions?
Do you understand fully what the different elements of the package are?

Outcomes and effectiveness
Do you feel the resources in the unit are adequate for delivering the pilot?
Are the marketing materials proving to be adequate in guiding lone parents?
In your view how have lone parents responded to the pilot?
Are there any aspects which could be improved?

Childcare Partnership Manager/Additional Childcare Partnership Manager

Delivery and practical issues
How are the management and coordination arrangements for the pilot working (e.g. regular meetings)?
Have you interacted with other Childcare Partnership Managers (CPMs) with regard to the pilot and shared experiences?
How many childcare providers are there and how do you interact with them? What is your relationship like? Do you view it as a ‘partnership’?
Has the pilot resulted in any changes or incremental work in delivery?
What is the status of the various services related to childcare within the pilot?
Has any additional work been done in setting up new partnerships and lining up resources to enhance delivery of the pilot?
Do you feel the resourcing and time-frame are adequate?
The package

Do you view the pilot as a ‘package’ or as individual strands?

Do you feel that it is being delivered as a ‘package’, and if not, why?

What are the main concerns of lone parents with regard to childcare?

Do you feel the childcare offer in the pilot is adequately addressing these concerns?

Are there any other childcare interventions which mesh with those included in the pilot? How are these used in conjunction with the pilot?

Do you feel the financial incentives are well worked out to ‘persuade’ lone parents towards the path to employment?

Is there sufficient capacity amongst the schools participating in the extended schools programme for the offer? What are the issues?

Is there sufficient and appropriate childcare provision available and if not, what are the issues?

Do you feel that there is sufficient coordination between the different childcare providers and the Jobcentre Plus?

Have lone parents been responsive to the offer?

What are you focusing on in the delivery of the pilot? Are there any areas where you feel more support is needed?

Have you had any feedback from monitoring?

Do you follow up the outcomes of Childcare Chats and Tasters? How?

Outcomes and effectiveness

Are the childcare resources of sufficient quality to instil confidence in lone parents and to cater to their differing needs?

What do you feel the benefits of this pilot are?

What has been the initial lone parent response to the childcare provision?

Has there been any change in take up or interest?

Which elements of the childcare offer have elicited the most positive response and why?

How have the schools and childcare providers responded? What are the gaps and concerns? Do they have any specific comments or suggestions?

Do you feel that any changes are needed in the design of the childcare offer?
Children’s Centres (with Jobpoints)

**Delivery and practical issues**

What services are provided here and for whom?

Who are the key partners in the delivery of these services? What are the coordination mechanisms in place between the various stakeholders involved? Do you feel these are adequate?

Which services are provided in collaboration with Jobcentre Plus? How are you contracted for these services?

What are the coordination and management arrangements with Jobcentre Plus?

How was the pilot introduced to you (if relevant)?

How do you perceive the pilot? What is different about the service offer? (if relevant)

Are there any new services you are providing in collaboration with Jobcentre Plus or with other agencies?

Do you feel there are competing demands on your services?

What additional resources have been provided to you for implementing the pilot, and are these sufficient?

Has any training been provided to your staff for implementing the pilot?

Are you being constrained by resource availability currently?

Are there any monitoring mechanisms being put in place?

**The package**

What are the main concerns of lone parents with regard to childcare?

What have been the constraints in childcare delivery previously?

Do you feel the childcare offer within the pilot meets the needs and demands of lone parents in your area? If not, what needs to be enhanced?

Are the financial incentives for childcare in the package adequate?

How is the Jobpoint working out?

If ‘clinics’ are held in the Children’s Centre, what has the response been?

If ‘group WFI sessions’ have been conducted in the centre, how effective have these been? Have lone parents been responsive? What has been the specific role of the Centre in delivering these (has it just provided a venue)?
Outcomes and effectiveness

Do you see yourself as a ‘partner’ in the pilot, or as a service provider?

Has the resourcing been sufficient and timely?

Are your staff sufficiently trained to deal with the service offer (e.g. Childcare Chats)?

Are there any complementary services which you feel should be offered?

Has there been a greater level of interest from lone parents? Is the new service offer engendering greater confidence in and demand for the childcare facilities available?

Have the ‘work’ focused elements delivered here had a positive impact? Do you feel the offer is indeed an enhanced one?
Appendix E
Focus group guidelines

Joint discussion with Advisers and Administrative Staff

Discussion prompts (with suggested areas of discussion):

1. How effective were the roll-out and training (briefly discuss)? How clear was the purpose of the pilot and the details of the elements during roll out? Has the training been useful over the past year? Have they been able to apply it? If not, what have been the barriers? If useful, example of what ways it has been used and areas of customer interaction it has been useful in would help. Are there any current gaps in knowledge or skills?

2. What has been the impact of the marketing materials? What value do they feel the marketing material has added? Has it had any snowballing impacts? Have lone parents shared it with others? Do they use it themselves? Are there any gaps in the content of the material? Or the design? How useful has the translated material been in outreach to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups? Any gaps? What do they feel are the most important forms of marketing for the pilot/ lone parent offers?

3. What are the most important barriers that lone parents face in returning to work? Explore in particularly how important they think the childcare barrier is? How well do they feel equipped to make childcare referrals and support lone parents in this area? To what extent and how has the Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM) role helped them?

4. What do you think overall of the pilot (remind them that the pilot consists of the package of elements listed on the flip chart)? Explore the extent to which they feel it has been able to address the barriers and help lone parents. What do they think the broad outcomes have been?
How has the pilot affected the following specifically:

• Job outcomes.
• Failure to Attend (FTA) rates.
• Client confidence.
• Quality of engagement with clients.
• Ability to reach more/broader group of clients.

5. Who does the pilot help the most, and who does it help the least? How would you help those who the pilot has not been able to reach?

6. What have been the outcomes for each pilot element?

For each element explore the successes and the barriers, i.e. how well has it worked? What worked well? What worked less well? Examples of successes should be highlighted. What would they change about it? Have they innovated in any way in implementation? Any learning that they feel they should share?

• Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs) for lone parents with youngest child aged 12+.
• Action Plans.
• Work Search Premium (WSP).
• In-Work Credit (IWC).
• In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF).
• More Voluntary Contact (MVC).
• In Work Support (IWS).
• Access to Flexible Provision.
• Childcare Assist.
• Childcare Chats.
• Childcare Tasters.
• Access to Flexible Provision.

In addition, the following support was also provided and should be explored:

• extra Administrative Support;
• additional Lone Parent Adviser (LPA) resource;
• Jobpoints in Children’s Centres (please explore how much they know about the Children’s Centre work and what they feel about it).

Is there anything you feel should be added to the pilot or dropped from the pilot, and why?

End with any further comments they may have or wish to add.
Questions for Lone Parent Adviser working group

How has the pilot affected your work-load?

The following could be discussed:

- What elements add the most to your workload and why?
- Are there any processes that could be streamlined?
- Does your workload affect the quality of your engagement with lone parents? How?

To what extent has the Administrative Support been able to help you in delivery and releasing time for client engagement?

The following could be discussed:

- In which pilot elements do the Administrative Staff provide support?
- How well have you been able to work with them?
- Have there been any specific problems?
- Do you feel Administrative Staff could provide more support? To which pilot elements?
- How has the pilot affected the way in which you are able to interact with lone parent customers?

The following could be discussed amongst others:

- Do you feel you are able to help them better? How?
- Are you able to spend more time and have more contact with them? Is this through MVC?
- Do you feel you are able to help them with the right kind of support for different stages on the pathway to work?
- What would help you in doing your job better?
- Would you change the pilot in any way? How?
Questions for Administrative Staff working group

How has the pilot affected your workload?

You could discuss the following:

What are the additional roles and responsibilities you have undertaken for the pilot?

Do you feel you have the right skills to be able to contribute effectively to these responsibilities? Are there areas where you feel further training and support is needed?

How effective is your relationship with the LPAs?

You could discuss the following:

Do you feel you have enough time and dialogue with the LPAs to understand how best to support them?

Do you feel you have conflicting demands from different LPAs which make your job difficult?

Is there any way in which you feel your working relationship could be better?

How comfortable are you in interacting with lone parent customers?

You could discuss the following:

Do you feel you are able to effectively carry out MVC (if this is one of your roles)?

Do you feel you are able to respond to lone parent’s questions and concerns?

How do they react to you when you contact them?

Do you feel you should have more contact with customers?

How would you change your role in the lone parent team?

You could discuss the following:

Do you feel your level of responsibilities is correct for your job title? Do you feel you should have more or less responsibilities?

What do you think would make you more effective in your role?
Appendix F
Observation template
# Observation Template

**Interviewer Name:**

**Jobcentre District:**

**Jobcentre Office:**

**Date of Interview:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of interview</th>
<th>Start time</th>
<th>End time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Name of NDLP adviser**

**Name of Lone Parent**

**Lone parent Circumstances**

- talk through with PA
- relevant details:

**Child accompanying lone parent**

**Reason for visit to Jobcentre today:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploratory discussion</th>
<th>Tick all that apply/as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First WFI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow up visit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quarterly WFI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NDLP – on the programme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Preparation for Interview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparatory activities</th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Check LMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider deferral/waiver</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read previous notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarise with customer and children details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Does PA introduce themselves to lone parent at the start of the interview?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If 1st visit</th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction made</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No introduction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Does PA explain/discuss the purpose of the interview/meeting. If yes, note customers response below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of meeting explained</th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No explanation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note Customer Response:

Does PA explain mandatory WFI requirements (if applicable)? If yes, note customers response below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mandatory WFI explained</th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No explanation of mandatory WFI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

Note Customer Response:

EXPLORE HISTORY

Does PA explore/review any of the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Customers goals</th>
<th>Tick if appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment history</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Qualifications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transferable skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### BARRIERS

Does PA discuss any relevant potential barriers or issues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick if appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caring responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Need for specialist provision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Incapacity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### OPTIONS

Which of the following does the PA discuss/explore with the client?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilot Options</th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Note Customer response:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare taster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare Chats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Childcare Assist</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Extended schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work search premium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In work credit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In work emergencies fund</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Other forms of support/options offered?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Note Customer response:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NDLP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other New Deals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare subsidy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training premium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better off in work calculation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BOC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Options for other New Deals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – describe</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**ACTION PLAN**

Is a new Action Plan made/existing plan discussed/or no Action Plan made?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick if appropriate ✓</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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</table>

Is the Action Plan specific

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time bound – steps specific and time phased</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Realistic – potential barriers reviewed?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurable</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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</table>

Is the Action Plan copied and signed by both PA and lone parent, with a copy given to the lone parent? (Note to Reviewer: Action Plans currently only mandatory for PAs to sign. PA may or may not give copy to customer. From October 2005 they will also be mandatory for lone parents to sign).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick if appropriate ✓</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes – copied for lone parent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No just Adviser signs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No just lone parent signs</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>
Does lone parent actively engage in preparing the Action Plan?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note customer response:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When does the PA introduce the marketing materials? How are they used and what is the client’s response?

RE- EVALUATION

Does the PA re-evaluate with lone parent earlier discussions, progress and any options taken up?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic/Options</th>
<th>Tick if appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job search activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisit BOC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine tax credits</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Job grant</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adviser discretion grant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Are next step clearly identified and elaborated by PA?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Next steps explained</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No explanation of next steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note Customer Response:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next appointment set up? Date?
After lone parent has left...

PA feedback on the interview and the rationale for the approach taken and guidance/next steps agreed with the lone parent.

How did the PA feel about the interview? Ask following interview

What immediate actions or notes does the PA make for follow up themselves or by administrative staff?

Additional comments by reviewer:

NOTES TO REVIEWER

Reflections Once Interview Is Complete.

Note if there is any interactive dialogue

Is the interview correctly paced or rushed

Is the lone parent comfortable enough to ask questions?

Is the PA responsive to concerns?
Appendix G
Lone parent interview schedules
LONE PARENT TOPIC GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information to be collected from LMS record:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L P Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LP Contact Details</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for visit today</td>
<td>Follow up visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Childcare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NDLP – on the programme

- Duration on the programme
- Start date
- No of PA meetings
- Take up of options
- Specify/provide details
- Follow up appointment
- Specify/provide details

GHK are conducting a survey on behalf of Jobcentre Plus to find out about what you think about the package of options which are available in this Jobcentre to provide the support which Lone Parents might need in finding work. The survey will take around 15 minutes and I would be grateful if you would take part.

The study is going to continue into next year, so we would also like to ask if you would give us permission for a follow up call to ask similar questions in February 2006. If so can I take your contact details?

All of your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence. Any claim to benefits you may receive will not be affected in any way, either now or in the future.
BACKGROUND

Which of the following sources of income are you currently receiving?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tick as appropriate</th>
<th>Private Insurance’s</th>
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How long have you been receiving income support?

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Have you worked before?

What sort of work have you done previously?

How do you feel about going (back) to work?

What are the positive benefits of returning to work?

If you have concerns about returning back to work, what worries you most?
PLANS AND ASPIRATIONS
If you are thinking about working, when did you decide to go back to work? What made you decide?

What sort of work are you looking for (occupation, hours pay etc)? How are you looking for work?

Are you looking for any kind of training, and how?

Are there suitable job opportunities for lone parents in this area? Are there any issues in finding work?

CHILDCARE
Do you have any concerns about childcare?

If you have used childcare in the past, what types of childcare have you used?
MEETING WITH PA

You have just had meeting with an adviser, what did you discuss?


Have you had a meeting like this before? Was today’s meeting to follow up on anything specific? Did you discuss anything new today?


Did you discuss any action you should take?


Did your adviser make a record of these steps as an ‘Action Plan’?


Did you get a copy of your plan?


Do you recall signing the plan?


Did you agree to do something as a result? Why?


Were some things offered to you that you would like to think about? Why?
Were there some things offered that you are definitely not interested in? Why?

Are there some things which you did not understand or could have been explained better?

Is there anything which you feel you need as a lone parent, which you were not offered?

How do you feel about the financial support offered by Jobcentre Plus?

In the last year have you had any special childcare support or any extra meetings about childcare? Who did you meet, who provided the support?

Were you happy with the answers you received if you had any questions during the meeting?

Do you feel that there were a number of options you were offered from which you can choose the ones you need most yourself?
Do you feel more confident after this meeting about being able to find work that you would be happy with? Why?

Do you feel more confident about the childcare options available to you? Why?

How did you feel the meeting went overall?

Do you think you will be coming back to Jobcentre Plus? If so why? Do you know when that will be?

MARKETING MATERIAL
Have you seen these booklets before?
(Note to interviewer – if they don’t have material – show them the booklets)

If yes, where did you get the booklets from?

If you got the booklets in a meeting with an adviser, did the adviser explain the purpose of the booklets to you?
Have you had a chance to read through the booklets?

If you picked up the booklets elsewhere, did it give you an idea of which options you wanted to follow up?

Do the booklets make it clear which options are available and how to get them?

Was there anything missing from the information as provided, or anything you would like to know more about?

**FINAL**

Has what you have been offered met your expectations?

Do you think there was anything missing in the support offered? If so outline what they feel is missing.

What would you change? Is there anything which you feel should be done differently?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions which you would like to make?
**BACKGROUND: RECORD THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:**

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**Any Care responsibilities other than own children**

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| What educational skills/qualifications including vocational training do you have? |                        |

'Thank you very much for taking part in this interview today. We would like to know about what jobcentre services you use over the next six months and so would like your permission to discuss your situation with your personal adviser (the person you saw today in the Jobcentre) in the future. We will only discuss your details with your personal adviser and this information will only be used for evaluation purposes and will have no impact on benefits or involvement in programmes. This will help us learn more about how to improve services for lone parents and whether certain programmes of support are helpful or not. If you decide you do not want us to discuss your details with your personal adviser, please let us know at any time.'

Signed.................................................................. Date........................
**QUESTIONNAIRES - LONE PARENTS ALREADY IN EMPLOYMENT**

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GHK are conducting a survey on behalf of Jobcentre Plus to find out about what you think about the package of options which are available in this Jobcentre to provide the support which lone parents might need in finding work. The survey will take around 15 minutes and I would be grateful if you would take part.

The study is going to continue into next year, so we would also like to ask if you would give us permission for a follow up call to ask similar questions in February 2006. If so can I take your contact details?

All of your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence. Any claim to benefits you may receive will not be affected in any way, either now or in the future.

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<td>Reason for visit today:</td>
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RESOURCES

Which of the following sources of income are you currently receiving? (Please amend accordingly)

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EMPLOYMENT & PRE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

What kind of a job are you currently doing?

When did you decide to go back to work? What made you decide?

How long have you been in work?

How many hours a week, are you working?

What has been your experience of work so far?

How did you get the job?
What do you feel helped you most in finding the job?

Have you received any financial support from the Jobcentre when looking for work? What kind? What difference did the additional money make?

POST-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT
Have you had any financial support whilst in work? Was it helpful? Did you receive the support when you needed it? Any additional comments?

Have you had any emergencies since starting work? Did the Jobcentre Plus help in any way? Any additional comments?

CHILDCARE
What types of childcare are you currently using? Has anyone helped you arrange the childcare?

Did you get any help with childcare just before starting work? Was it helpful?

Did you ever have any meetings with people who arrange childcare? When did you have them? Who arranged it?
What have been the benefits of childcare?

Do you have any current concerns regarding childcare?

MEETING WITH ADVISER
Why have you come in to talk to the adviser today?

What did you talk about with your adviser today?

Is there anything which you feel you need as a lone parent, which you were not offered by the Adviser?

Are there things which you did not understand or could have been explained better?

Do you think you will be coming back to the Jobcentre? If so why? Do you know when that will be?
FINAL
Has what you discussed today met your needs/expectations?

Do you think there was anything missing in the support offered?

What would you change? Is there anything which you feel should be done differently?

Would you recommend this programme to other lone parents?

Do you have any other comments/suggestions which you would like to make?
BACKGROUND:

Record the following information:

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Thank you very much for taking part in this interview today. We would like to know about what jobcentre services you use over the next 6 months and so would like your permission to discuss your situation with your personal adviser (the person you saw today in the Jobcentre) in the future. We will only discuss your details with your personal adviser and this information will only be used for evaluation purposes and will have no impact on benefits or involvement in programmes. This will help us learn more about how to improve services for lone parents and whether certain programmes of support are helpful or not. If you decide you do not want us to discuss your details with your personal adviser, please let us know at any time.

Signed……………………………………………………………….. Date…………………
LONE PARENT TOPIC GUIDE - PHONE INTERVIEW

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GHK are conducting a survey on behalf of Jobcentre Plus to find out about what you think about the package of options available for providing the support which lone parents might need in finding work.
You may remember that GHK staff interviewed you in the summer at the Jobcentre Plus in __________and discussed with you your experiences of support for lone parents.
GHK also received your permission to make this follow up call to you to ask similar questions around this time (October) and lastly in February 2006.
This survey will take around 15 minutes and I would be grateful if you would take part.
All of your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence. Any claim to benefits you may receive will not be affected in any way, either now or in the future.

Background

Which of the following sources of income are you currently receiving?

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Since we interviewed you has your situation changed? Are you working?

_(If lone parent is working, use the questionnaire for lone parent in employment)_

How do you feel about going (back) to work?

What benefits will work bring?

If you have concerns about returning back to work, what worries you most?

If you are thinking about working, when did you decide to go back to work? What made you decide?

What sort of work are you looking for (occupation, hours pay etc)? How are you looking for work?

Are you looking for any training? If so have you been offered any training support from Jobcentre Plus?

Do you have any concerns about childcare?
Appendices – Lone parent interview schedules

If you have used childcare in the past/use childcare, what types of childcare have you used or currently using?

Last Meeting/phone call with adviser

SECTION 1

Since the meeting with the adviser (in___________ clarify exact date) have you had any further meetings or calls from Jobcentre Plus?

If yes, follow questions in Section 1 and 2

If lone parent hasn’t been to Jobcentre Plus since we spoke with them last – go to Section 2

Who did you have the meeting with/do you remember who called you? (Advisor, administrative support staff)

If so, what did you discuss?

Have you had a meeting/call like it before? Was the meeting/call to follow up on anything specific?

SECTION 2

Did you discuss any action you should take?
Did your Adviser make a record of these steps as an ‘Action Plan’?

If you met your adviser (rather than a call) did you get a printed copy of your Action Plan from the adviser?

Do you recall signing a plan?

Did you agree to do something as a result of the meeting/call? Have you managed to do what you agreed?

Were some things offered to you that you would like to think about? Why?

Were there some things offered that you are definitely not interested in? Why?

Are there some parts of the meeting/call with your adviser which you did not understand or could have been explained better?

Is there anything which you feel you need as a lone parent, which you were not offered?
How do you feel about the financial support offered by Jobcentre Plus?

In the last year have you had any special childcare support or any extra meetings about childcare? Who did you meet, who provided the support?

Were you happy with the answers you received if you had any questions during the meeting?

Do you feel that there were a number of options you were offered from which you can choose the ones you need most yourself?

Do you feel more confident after the meeting/call about being able to find work that you would be happy with? Why?

If relevant - Do you feel more confident about the childcare options available to you? Why?

Do you think you will be coming back to Jobcentre Plus? If so why? Do you know when that will be?
MARKETING MATERIAL

Check from notes if the lone parent has seen the marketing booklets before and where they got them from.

If not seen marketing material at last meeting: Have you received in post/picked up any marketing material for New Deal for Lone Parents since the meeting with the adviser?

Have you had a chance to read through the booklets?

If so, have the booklets given you an idea of which options you wanted to follow up?

Do the booklets make it clear which options are available and how to get them?

Was there anything missing from the information as provided, or anything you would like to know more about?

Additional comments on the marketing material:

FINAL

Has what you have been offered by your adviser at Jobcentre Plus met your expectations?
Do you think there was anything missing in the support offered? If so, outline what is missing.

What would you change? Is there anything which you feel should be done differently?

Do you have any other comments or suggestions which you would like to make?

'Thank you very much for taking part in this interview today. We would like to know about what Jobcentre Plus services you use over the next 12 months and so would like your permission to discuss your situation with your personal adviser in the future. We would also like to contact you again in February next year.

We will only discuss your details with your personal adviser and this information will only be used for evaluation purposes and will have no impact on benefits or involvement in programmes. This will help us learn more about how to improve services for lone parents and whether certain programmes of support are helpful or not. If you decide you do not want us to discuss your details with your personal adviser, please let us know at any time.'
LONE PARENT IN EMPLOYMENT: PHONE INTERVIEW

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You may remember that GHK staff interviewed you in the summer at the Jobcentre Plus in __________and discussed with you your experiences of support for lone parents. GHK also received your permission to make this follow up call to you to ask similar questions around this time (October) and lastly in February 2006.

This survey will take around 15 minutes and I would be grateful if you would take part. All of your answers will remain anonymous and will be treated in strict confidence. Any claim to benefits you may receive will not be affected in any way, either now or in the future.

BACKGROUND

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Since we interviewed you, has your situation changed? Are you still working?
*(Ask only for those who were working when we interviewed them previously)* if not, go to the standard questionnaire.

When did you decide to go back to work? What made you decide?

When were you offered the job? When did you actually start work?

How did you get the job?

What do you feel helped you most in finding the job?

How many hours a week do you work?

Did you get any training for work prior to starting work? Do you remember who with?

What did you see as the benefits of going back to work?
Did you have any concerns about returning back to work? If so what worried you most?

How have you found work so far?

Have you received any financial support when looking for work? What kind? What difference did the additional money make?

Did you receive any support from the Adviser Discretionary Fund when you returned to work? Explain that this is for interview clothes, travel etc.

POST-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT
Have you had any financial support whilst in work? Was it helpful? Did you receive the support when you needed it?

How are you using the financial support? Any additional comments?

Have you had any issues since starting work? Did the Jobcentre Plus help in any way? Any additional comments?
CHILDCARE
What types of childcare are you currently using? Has anyone helped you arrange the childcare?

Do you see any benefits regarding childcare?

Do you have any current concerns regarding childcare?

Did you get any help with childcare just before starting work? If so, was it advice or financial support? Was it helpful?

Have ever have any meetings with people who arrange childcare? When did you have them? Do you remember who arranged it?

MEETING WITH ADVISER
SECTION 1
Have you met with an adviser since we spoke to you in _____________? Or had any phone calls from Jobcentre Plus? If yes – Section 1 and 2, If not- go to section 2

Who did you have the meeting with / do you remember who called you? (Adviser, administrative support staff)
If so, what did you discuss?

Have you had a meeting like it before? Was the meeting to follow up on anything specific?

SECTION 2

Is there anything which you feel you need as a lone parent, which you were not offered by the Adviser?

Are there things which you did not understand from your last contact with the Jobcentre Plus (call or meeting) which could have been explained better?

Do you know when you will be going back to meet with your adviser at Jobcentre Plus? If so why?

FINAL

Would you recommend help received when you went to the Jobcentre’ to other lone parents?

Do you have any other comments suggestions which you would like to make?
Thank you very much for taking part in this interview today. We would like to know about what Jobcentre Plus services you use over the next 12 months and so would like your permission to discuss your situation with your personal adviser in the future.

We will also be calling you back, with your permission to talk about your experience of Jobcentre Plus services. We will only discuss your details with your personal adviser and this information will only be used for evaluation purposes and will have no impact on benefits or involvement in programmes. This will help us learn more about how to improve services for lone parents and whether certain programmes of support are helpful or not. If you decide you do not want us to discuss your details with your personal adviser, please let us know at any time.