KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE LABOUR MARKET: A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION OF THE BACK TO WORK BONUS

By Andrew Thomas, Nick Pettigrew, Daphne Cotton and Paul Tovey

The Back to Work Bonus was introduced in 1996 with the aim of encouraging clients in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support to maintain contact with the Labour Market. This qualitative research study explores whether there have been any changes in clients' attitudes and behaviour towards undertaking part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming since the introduction of the Back to Work Bonus. The research compared findings with a baseline study published in 1997.

- Overall awareness about the Back to Work Bonus scheme was limited, and the report found little evidence of it acting as an incentive to increase the number of part-time hours worked. The feeling of some respondents was that they would have moved into full-time work for reasons unconnected to the payment of the Bonus. A few people felt that they might have increased their part-time hours in response to the Bonus, had they known about it.

- Clients' overarching view was that while the Bonus was a good idea in principle, in practice it might not always act as an incentive to move people into full-time work because: some respondents (mainly men) only wanted full-time employment; some only wished to work part-time; out of work benefits were felt to offer more security.

- As was apparent in the baseline research, earnings disregards were perceived to act as a disincentive to part-time work: the amount that could be earned was felt to be 'negligible', particularly once travel and lunch expenses were taken into account.

- Decision-making processes about the take-up of work had changed little since the baseline report. Attitudes to employment plus barriers to work (perceived and actual) determined jobsearch strategies. Decision-making amongst couples varied enormously. Male partners tended to want to make decisions about their own work strategy as well as that of their partner.

- Part-time and voluntary work were not necessarily seen or used as direct stepping stones off benefit. Rather, they were considered more likely to have acted indirectly, but positively, as transitional activities. A belief that part-time and voluntary work could act as a direct stepping stone into full-time work had weakened somewhat since the previous study.
SUMMARY

Background

The Back to Work Bonus (the Bonus) was introduced in October 1996. The aims of the Bonus are to encourage individuals and their partners to keep in touch with the labour market by undertaking small amounts of work whilst claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support, and to provide an incentive to claimants to move out of unemployment and into paid work. Clients accrue a Bonus if earnings from part-time work reduce the amount of Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income support they are paid. They can claim the Bonus – a tax-free lump sum of up to £1,000 – if they move off benefit and into work.

BMRB Qualitative were commissioned to undertake a qualitative study to explore whether there have been any changes in clients’ attitudes and behaviour towards undertaking part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming benefit since the introduction of the Bonus.

The study comprised seventy-six depth interviews with lone parents in receipt of Income Support, unemployed people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance and former jobseekers. Thirty-five paired depth interviews were also carried out with jobseekers, former jobseekers, and their partners. The sample included both those who had experience of part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming benefit and those who had not undertaken such activities whilst claiming. Fieldwork took place between September and November 1998.

Moving into Work: Attitudes and Decision-Making

The process of moving into work is rarely straightforward and a number of factors come into play that contributes to a person’s decision to look for work. On the basis of the individuals interviewed for the present study, the labour-market decision-making process was modelled to explore the links between the factors involved in decisions about work.

Attitudes about work are partly shaped by a series of inter-related factors such as beliefs, personal circumstances and barriers to work (perceived or actual). The report divides these barriers into three groups:

- **personal barriers**, including age, qualifications and experience, lack of confidence, lack of childcare facilities, and family commitments;

- **labour-market related barriers** including the availability of work, job prospects and satisfaction, long travel to work distances, employer attitudes, and lack of jobsearch advice;

- **financial barriers** including a lack of understanding about the contribution of out-of-work benefits and in-work benefits, a lack of ‘better-off’ calculations, low earnings disregards, long hours for low rates of pay for jobs, and a major concern of exchanging the perceived security of benefits for the perceived insecurity of work.
It follows in this model of decision-making that jobsearch strategies are informed by these barriers and attitudes. The ensuing work-related strategy may be characterised by an immediate, short-term or long-term goal. It may range from the wish to find employment, either full or part-time; to find employment on an ad-hoc basis for extra money; to undertake training or further education; or to avoid work altogether.

Where couples were involved, the decision-making approach could be seen to lie along a continuum ranging from joint decision-making to totally independent decision-making, with various shades in between.

**Comparisons with the baseline research**

Compared to the baseline study, disaffection with the traditional labour market seemed to be in greater evidence, a feature that appeared to go hand in hand with greater use being made of undeclared earnings. However the key features taken into account when making the decision as to whether to take a job were very similar to the baseline study. There was more evidence in this study than in the baseline report to suggest that male partners wanted to make more decisions about their own work strategy as well as that of their partner.

**The Back to Work Bonus**

Overall, there was a marked lack of awareness of the Back to Work Bonus scheme, even amongst those who were eligible. There was also considerable confusion with other Employment Service schemes. A variety of administrative problems with the payment of the Bonus were reported by respondents, including instances of payment without a specific request from the recipient, and, on applying for the bonus after starting full-time work, being informed that they had already received it.

‘I think they should be reminding people of this scheme. You get so many bits of paper, this scheme that scheme. I don't remember seeing anything about it on the TV about it’ (Lone parent, male, 26-40, voluntary work)

Information about the Bonus came from a number of sources including a computer generated letter informing benefit recipients that they were eligible to start accruing a bonus, and a letter indicating amounts accumulated under the scheme. There was little evidence of information being proactively offered by Employment Service or Benefits Agency staff about the Bonus and little evidence of jobseekers or lone parents looking for additional information.

As there was little awareness of the Bonus, the principles of the Bonus were described to the respondents. Whilst the Bonus was perceived to be a good idea in principle, it was not felt to be effective in practice. Some respondents felt that the Bonus was an ‘enforced saving’ as it comprised of half the money ‘taken off’ them on declaring their earnings above the earnings disregard. There was considerable strength of feeling to indicate that it was more important to have this money at the time of greatest need – while claiming benefit. This mitigated against any incentivising effect of the Bonus.
‘At that time, I needed the money more than anything. I couldn’t understand why they’d done that when I needed the money there and then, and not when I started working’ (Former jobseeker, female, 26-40, part-time work)

There was no evidence of the Bonus acting as an incentive to increase hours or move from part-time work to full-time work, even amongst those who were eligible for the Bonus. This was in part because many eligible people were not aware that they were accumulating a Bonus as well as a feeling amongst some that they would have moved to full-time work with, or without, the Bonus.

Respondents did not, on the whole, feel that the Bonus could have an effect on moving people into full-time work because:

- some respondents, mainly men, only wanted a full-time job and would not contemplate a part-time job;
- some respondents only wished to work part-time;
- benefits were felt to offer more security than a full-time job; and
- respondents perceived a lack of suitable full-time jobs in the area.

In terms of moving people into part-time work, views were mixed. There was a perception that working less than 16 hours a week was not financially viable because of low wages, and that the Bonus was not a sufficient incentive to encourage the take-up of part-time work whilst claiming.

**Earnings disregards**

There was minimal awareness of the term ‘earnings disregard’, although there was more awareness of the concept. There was some confusion over the amount of the disregard.

The current level of the earnings disregard was seen as derisory and perceived to act as a disincentive to do part-time work. This was because the amount earned was felt to be ‘negligible’, especially once work expenses were taken into account. This low level of disregard would encourage people to not declare part-time work to the jobcentre.

**The Role of Part-Time Work**

**Perceptions of part-time work**

Perceptions of part-time work related to a person’s availability and desire for full-time work. Women, especially those with children, tended to see part-time work as complimentary to their family commitments. Some lone parents viewed part-time work whilst claiming in a positive light, an attitude which may be explained in part by the higher earnings disregard available for those claiming Income Support. Conversely, those respondents used to, and desirous of, full-time work saw part-time
work in negative terms. Men, on the whole, did not regard part-time work as a 'proper job'.

Part-time work was described as casual or temporary and seen as quite insecure. Wages were felt to be low and hours often anti-social. Consequently, part-time work was seen as low status. However, some respondents described their part-time work as more permanent and as a very acceptable arrangement for them.

Respondents expressed some confusion over the number of hours that could be worked and the effect of any earnings on their benefits. Jobcentres, on the whole, were felt to be indifferent towards part-time work and not particularly helpful or forthcoming with advice. Some respondents were of the opinion that jobcentre staff had insufficient knowledge to help work out strategies for combining part-time work with claiming benefits.

**Reasons for doing part-time work**

Reasons offered for undertaking part-time work varied. Generally those who did part-time work showed a willingness to work for small amounts of income, which was sometimes seen as supplementary to benefits. Some saw part-time work as an activity to keep them busy. Part-time work helped increase confidence, self-esteem and motivation, and presented the opportunity to learn new, or keep up, skills.

> 'Part-time work builds your confidence back up, even if it's only 5 hours a week. You have to make the effort' (Lone parent, female, 18-25, part-time work)

Some individuals chose part-time work over full-time work because of the independence it offered them. There were a small number of respondents who took up part-time work in the expectation that it would act as a stepping-stone to full-time employment, although they were sometimes disappointed.

**Reasons for not doing part-time work**

Some people decided against taking up part-time work for the following reasons:
- a belief that part-time work was not a 'proper job';
- part-time work was regarded as menial and of low status;
- the de-skilling effect of perceived menial part-time work;
- low pay and costs of part-time work;
- low earnings disregard;
- fluctuation of hours and wages;
- disruption to family life;
- a need to be available for full-time work; and
- confusion over benefit rules regarding part-time work.
Part-time work as a stepping-stone off benefit and into full-time work

Some respondents felt that part-time work was more likely to lead to full-time work if it was related to their job aspirations. The potential of part-time work was viewed in terms of helping to develop skills and confidence to move into a full-time position. It could be useful in making contacts, or may lead unexpectedly to a full-time position. However, there were others who felt that part-time work could be both an irrelevance and a hindrance in gaining full-time employment.

Overall, the study found little evidence of part-time work leading directly to full-time work, as most respondents found it difficult to find part-time work which fulfilled their expectations and enabled them to move off benefit. However there was some evidence of part-time work having an indirect effect. Consequently, part-time work was seen less as a direct stepping-stone and more of a transitional activity between unemployment and full-time work.

Comparison with the baseline research

The present study tended to confirm the perception of part-time work highlighted in the baseline study. An increasing emphasis on shift working, particularly split shifts meant that the 'disruptive' view of part-time work was heightened in the present study, especially amongst lone parents.

In the baseline study there was a sense that part-time work could offer a useful route to gaining confidence, skills and possibly work. In this study, there was a view that part-time work could easily become a treadmill ultimately leading nowhere, a reflection of the fact that the part-time jobs obtained were unskilled, low paid and often temporary. Unlike the previous study, there was greater emphasis on the value of relatively small earnings. This emphasis was particularly apparent amongst the lone parents.

It was also apparent in the current study that reliance upon undeclared earnings had become more 'legitimate' in the sense that respondents, while condemning the practice in principle, were more likely to see this as a way of making ends meet. The overall belief that part-time work could be a stepping-stone had dissipated somewhat since the previous study, as the predominant view was that the 'right type' of part-time work hardly existed anymore.

The Role of Voluntary Work

Perceptions of Voluntary Work

Volunteering was described in stereotypical terms by many respondents- typically as pass-time attracting middle aged-women who liked doing good deeds.

'It's like working for Oxfam, working for the old people' (Jobseeker, female, 26-40, no activities)
Knowledge regarding the rules relating to combining voluntary work with the receipt of benefits was mixed, although for Jobseeker’s Allowance clients there was widespread recognition of the need to declare voluntary activities because of the actively seeking work rule\(^1\). People undertaking voluntary work generally understood the rules correctly.

**Reasons for doing voluntary work**

The reasons for undertaking voluntary work can be summarised as follows:

- **Direct work-related reasons.** Those taking up voluntary work with a specific job in mind were very focused individuals and were generally younger recipients.

- **Indirect work-related reasons.** Voluntary work was seen as having some benefits that might enhance a person’s prospects of getting a job, although it may not be related to a specific field of work.

- **Non work-related reasons.** Some people did voluntary work for reasons unrelated to opportunities for paid employment, for example for philanthropic reasons, as well as for enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Others did it simply for something to do.

**Reasons for not doing voluntary work**

Reasons put forward by respondents for not participating in voluntary activities included:

- **lack of awareness** – some people were generally ignorant about voluntary work.

- **barriers to jobsearch** - some people could not see the connection between voluntary work and a full-time job and felt that voluntary work may actually prevent this;

- **working for nothing** - some respondents were adamant that they would not work without pay and felt angry and insulted at the suggestion;

- **other responsibilities** - some lone parents felt that their home responsibilities prevented them from taking up voluntary work;

- **costs of volunteering** - there were instances where voluntary work involved extra expenses such as travel and food, which people on benefit felt they could not afford;

- **negative images** - the perception of the volunteer ‘do-gooder’ dissuaded some respondents from taking up voluntary work.

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\(^1\) The test of actively seeking employment is that a person is taking in any week ‘such steps as he can reasonably be expected to have to take in order to have the best prospects of securing employment’.
Voluntary work as a stepping-stone to work

The evidence from this study shows voluntary work to be more of a transitional activity between unemployment and employment, or an indirect route into paid work rather than a direct stepping-stone into employment. Many respondents could see the potential of voluntary work as a way of enhancing job prospects.

Voluntary work had provided a direct stepping-stone for a handful of respondents in the study. Younger people within the study, with a definite work-related focus, tended to see voluntary work as a direct stepping-stone into their chosen career and were using voluntary work in a very focused way. However, for the most part, voluntary activity worked in a variety of indirect - yet positive - ways in helping people back to work. Many shied away from the idea of voluntary work and felt aggrieved at the suggestion of working for nothing.

Comparison with the baseline research

Little change has taken place in the perception of, and reasons for undertaking, voluntary activities since the baseline study was undertaken. However there was some evidence to suggest that volunteering was not as likely to be seen as useful a work-related activity as it had been in the previous study.

The concerns expressed about doing voluntary activities and the perceived barriers to participation were broadly similar to those identified in the baseline research, although an additional barrier, expressed particularly by the men in the study, was that by volunteering they would limit their jobsearch and miss potential work opportunities.

In the present study, the stepping stone effect was less evident in that respondents did not feel that volunteering had necessarily directly led to work, but rather that the voluntary activity was a transitional period that bridged the gap between periods of unemployment, short term contracts and more permanent work.
Relevant Publications


DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

RESEARCH REPORT No 96

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OF THE BACK TO WORK
BONUS

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A report of research carried out by BMRB Qualitative (part of
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Background (Chapter 1)

The Back to Work Bonus (the Bonus) was introduced in October 1996, with the aim of encouraging Jobseeker’s Allowance and Income Support recipients and their partners to use part-time work as a stepping stone into work. Clients accrue a Bonus if earnings from part-time work reduce the amount of Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income support they are paid. They can claim the Bonus – a tax-free lump sum of up to £1,000 – if they move off benefit and into work.

The Department of Social Security, the Department for Education and Employment, Benefits Agency and Employment Service commissioned BMRB Qualitative to conduct a qualitative research study. This was to examine the impact of the Back to Work Bonus, and the role of part-time work and voluntary activity in helping unemployed people and lone parents on Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support maintain contact with the labour market.

The research was based on a ‘before and after’ model and was designed to assess whether there were any changes in the roles of part-time and voluntary work that can be attributed to the Back to Work Bonus. ‘Baseline’ research was carried out before the introduction of the Bonus and examined clients’ attitudes towards part-time and voluntary work whilst claiming; the incentives and costs respondents perceived in returning to work, and the extent to which part-time work and voluntary work were seen as a ‘stepping-stone’ into full time work.

The study comprised seventy-six depth interviews with lone parents in receipt of Income Support, unemployed people claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance (known as ‘jobseekers’) and former jobseekers. Thirty-five paired depth interviews were also carried out with jobseekers and their partners and former jobseekers and their partners. The sample included both those who had experience of part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming benefit and those who had not undertaken such activities whilst claiming.

The research was conducted in three cities: Ashford, Stafford and Liverpool. Fieldwork took place between September and November 1998.

Moving into Work: Attitudes and Decision Making (Chapter 2)

The process of moving into work is rarely straightforward and a number of factors come into play that contribute to a person’s decision to look for work. On the basis of the individuals interviewed for the present study, the labour market decision-making process was modelled to explore the links between the factors involved in decisions about work.
All unemployed people and lone parents receiving Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support have a defined work-related outcome which may be seen in terms of an immediate, short-term or long-term goal. These goals may be to find employment, either full or part-time; to find employment on an ad-hoc basis for extra money; to undertake further education; to undertake training; or to avoid work altogether.

Attitudes to work varied across the sample but can be captured within a five point typology:

- **active work seekers**, who were to be found across all age groups. They felt that work was the ‘right thing to do’ to gain and sustain a lifestyle to which they aspired;

- **conditional work seekers**, who held similar views to active work seekers but due to a set of beliefs about work, ill-health or family commitments, their ability to work was conditional on support being available;

- **resigned attitude towards work**: people who were often in their later years and had been made redundant, and had resigned themselves to unemployment or casual work for the rest of their working life;

- **unmotivated**: a group of individuals who did not really want to work as they had adjusted themselves to a low income lifestyle. They tended to be young people with no commitments and who often lived with parents;

- **disaffected**: a group of older individuals in their 30s and 40s whose past experience of work had been fractured by a range of poor experiences which had contributed to their disaffection. Many were providing an income for themselves through benefits and the black economy.
Attitudes towards work are partly shaped by a range of factors and barriers that can be divided into three groups:

- **personal barriers**, including age, family commitments, qualifications and experience, lack of confidence and lack of childcare facilities;
- **labour-market related barriers** including the availability of work, job prospects and satisfaction, long travel to work distances, employer attitudes, and lack of jobsearch advice;
- **financial barriers** including a lack of understanding about the contribution of out-of-work benefits and in-work benefits, a lack of ‘better-off’ calculations, low earnings disregards, long hours for low rates of pay for jobs, and a major concern of exchanging the perceived security of benefits for the perceived insecurity of work.

A person’s beliefs about work, their personal and financial circumstances, their attitudes towards work, and their perceptions of the barriers to work, combine to form a work-related strategy. Five strategies were in evidence:

- to search for full-time work only;
- to undertake part-time work whilst claiming, either as a route into full-time work, or as an end itself;
- to undertake undeclared work whilst claiming benefit;
- to delay the search for full-time work, until barriers to work, such as childcare responsibilities cease; and
- to avoid looking for work altogether in order to remain on benefit.

Where couples were involved, the decision-making approach could be seen to lie along a continuum ranging from joint decision-making to totally independent decision-making, with various shades in between. Typically, decision-making amongst couples took one of four forms:

- **joint decision-making** in which both partners actively discussed potential job options, with the decision being one that was mutually determined – in greater evidence amongst couples from professional backgrounds and with higher levels of education;
- **joint discussion/male decision** in which the issues were often discussed but ultimately it remained with the man to make the decision;
- **male decides for both partners** in which the man feels he has the right to make decisions about work for both partners in the household;
- **independent decision-making** in which neither partner consults nor discusses either their finances or work-related plans. Where couples were recruited for a paired interview in many instances the partners had to be interviewed separately because of the hostility between partners.
Where couples were discussing their work-related options together five issues tended to predominate:

- whether the household would be financially better-off by taking (additional) work;
- the advantages and disadvantages of moving areas in order to secure work;
- the trade off between increased income and the cost of childcare;
- the viability of job opportunities given travelling distances and times; and
- the perceived status of the job on offer.

The attitudes that help to define people's 'work' strategies are shaped by a set of beliefs and personal circumstances, as described below.

**Beliefs (Section 2.5)**

As respondents talked about their experience of unemployment and work aspirations it was clear that there were a range of beliefs that people held in relation to work. These can be divided into four categories:

- **work ethic**: a belief that it was the responsibility of the individual to support themselves through full-time employment;
- **parental role regarding children** in which people have definite views about the acceptability of working whilst children are very young;
- **gender roles**, often held more strongly by the males in the study, and predominantly suggesting that the man should be the breadwinner;
- **job status and remuneration** — a belief that the 'job defines the person', with some people being unwilling to take low paid, manual, or unskilled jobs because of the way in which this was felt to reflect on their status within the household.

**Personal Circumstances (Section 2.6)**

In addition to beliefs about work there were a number of factors that help determine a person's overall attitudes to work and its viability given their personal and financial circumstances. These were:

- **family responsibilities**: looking after children or elderly relatives;
- **existing financial circumstances** which allowed people to be more selective about work they took, or to avoid conventional work;
- **employment and unemployment histories**, where unemployment had become a way of life, occasionally supplemented by partially declared casual work;
- **age and lifestage**, for example older people who felt their age was against them in finding work;
- **mismatch between skills and experience** and what was required by the job;
- **physical disabilities and mental health problems.**
Compared to the baseline study, disaffection with the traditional labour market seemed to be in greater evidence, a feature that appeared to go hand in hand with greater use being made of undeclared earnings. However the key features taken into account when making the decision as to whether to take a job were very similar to the baseline study.

A major change in the present study was the reluctance of many partners to discuss work and financial issues, although it is difficult to know whether this is a sampling issue or a change in the relationship between partners as a result of long periods of unemployment.

The Back to Work Bonus  
(Chapter 3)

Overall, there was a marked lack of awareness of the Back to Work Bonus scheme, even amongst those who were eligible. There was also considerable confusion with other Employment Service schemes. Even where there was some awareness, the connection between part-time work and the Bonus was missing.

Information about the Bonus came from a number of sources. These included computer generated letters informing benefit recipients that they were eligible to start accruing a bonus, which were either not read, or read but not understood. Another source of information was a letter indicating amounts accumulated under the scheme. These letters were incomprehensible to those who did not know about the scheme in the first place. There was little evidence of information being proactively offered by Employment Service or Benefits Agency staff about the Bonus and little evidence of jobseekers or lone parents looking for additional information.

A variety of administrative problems with the payment of the Bonus were reported by respondents, including instances of payment without a specific request from the recipient, and on applying for the Bonus after starting full-time work, recipients being told that they had already received it.

As there was little awareness of the Bonus, the principles of the Bonus were described to the respondents. Overall, the Bonus was seen as providing financial help on starting full-time work for living expenses and travel costs prior to receiving the first pay cheque. However, some respondents felt that the Bonus was an 'enforced saving' since the Bonus comprised of half the money 'taken off' them on declaring their earnings above the earnings disregard. There was considerable strength of feeling that it was more important to have this money at the time of greatest need – while claiming benefit. This mitigated against any incentivising effect of the Bonus.

There was no evidence of the Bonus acting as an incentive to increase hours or move from part-time work to full-time work, even amongst those who were eligible for the Bonus. This was in part because
many eligible people were not aware that they were accumulating a Bonus as well as a feeling amongst some that they would have moved to full-time work with, or without, the Bonus.

Because of this lack of awareness, respondents were asked if the Bonus could have an effect. Respondents did not, on the whole, feel that it could have an effect on moving people into full-time work because:

- some respondents, mainly men, only wanted a full-time job and would not contemplate a part-time job;
- some respondents only wished to work part-time;
- benefits were felt to offer more security than a full-time job; and
- respondents perceived a lack of suitable full-time jobs in the area.

In terms of moving people into part-time work, views were mixed. There was a perception that less than 16 hours a week was not financially viable because of low wages, and that the Bonus was not a sufficient incentive to encourage this. However, some hypothetical views were expressed that it could be an incentive for those on low incomes and those who would choose to work part-time anyway.

The Bonus was generally seen as a good idea in principle, but largely ineffectual in practice. The amount of Bonus payable after working part-time was perceived to be very small, as there was a perception that recipients would have to work a long time to build up a sizeable Bonus.

There was minimal awareness of the term ‘earnings disregard’, although there was more awareness of the concept. There was some confusion over the amount of the disregard.

The current level of the earnings disregard was seen as derisory and perceived to act as a disincentive to do part-time work. This was because the amount earned was felt to be ‘negligible’, especially once work expenses were taken into account. This low level of disregard would encourage people to not declare part-time work to the jobcentre.

Many respondents felt that the level of the earnings disregard should be raised as this would act as more of an incentive to take up part-time work than the Back to Work Bonus. Suggestions for an increased earnings disregard ranged from £20 to £40 per week.

At the time of the baseline study the Back to Work Bonus had only just been introduced. At that time, reactions ranged from ‘better than nothing’ to laughter – ‘the point of working is to get the money now’ and little appears to have changed. Taking account of the fact that, in the present study, awareness and experience of the Bonus were slight, the incentivising effect was felt to be minimal. As with the baseline study, the level of the earnings disregard continued to be a disincentive to take work, particularly part-time work.
Men, on the whole, did not regard part-time work as a 'proper job' whereas women, especially those with children, saw part-time work as complementary to their family commitments. Perceptions of part-time work related therefore to a person's availability and desire for full-time work. Some lone parents, for example, saw it in a positive light whereas those used to full-time work and wanting full-time work, saw part-time work in negative terms. The more positive attitude of some lone parents towards part-time work whilst claiming may be due partly to the higher earnings disregard available for those claiming Income Support, and partly to their lower aspirations for work, given their family responsibilities. Typically lone parents were looking for a relatively small number of hours of work per week such as cleaning, being a 'dinner lady', or undertaking bar work which they felt did not require any particular qualifications or skills.

Part-time work was described as casual or temporary and seen as quite insecure. Wages were felt to be low and hours were often anti-social. As a consequence, part-time work was seen as low status. However, some respondents described their part-time work as more permanent which was a very acceptable arrangement for them.

Respondents were generally aware of the need to declare part-time work to the Employment Service/Benefits Agency, although there was some confusion over the number of hours that could be worked and the effect of any earnings on their benefits.

Respondents felt that jobcentres, on the whole, were indifferent towards part-time work and not particularly helpful or forthcoming with advice. Some felt that jobcentre staff had insufficient knowledge to help work out strategies for combining part-time work with claiming benefits.

One of the principal factors underpinning people's attitudes to the take-up of part-time work is the work ethic. This varied for people, who could be divided into three broad categories:

- **active work seekers** – who desperately wanted to work and regarded work as essential to their sense of self. These people tended to take part-time work as long as it fitted in with family circumstances and responsibilities;

- **conditional work seekers** – those who wanted to work but because of a variety of reasons could not work part-time;

- **work-shy** – those who seemed to be uninterested and presented a number of excuses why they could not do part-time work.

Generally those who did part-time work showed a willingness to work for small amounts of income, which was sometimes seen as supplementary to benefits. Some saw part-time work as an activity to keep them
busy. Part-time work helped to increase confidence, self-esteem and motivation, as well as to keep up or learn new skills. These provided the reasons for some people to work part-time.

Some individuals choose part-time work over full-time work because of the independence it offered them. There were a small number of respondents who took up part-time work in the expectation that it would act as a stepping-stone to full-time employment, although they were sometimes disappointed.

Some people decided against taking up part-time work for the following reasons:

- a belief that part-time work was not a 'proper job';
- part-time work was regarded as menial and of low status;
- the de-skilling effect of perceived menial part-time work;
- low pay and costs of part-time work;
- low earnings disregard;
- fluctuation of hours and wages;
- disruption to family life;
- a need to be available for full-time work; and
- confusion over benefit rules regarding part-time work.

The study found some evidence of undeclared part-time work, although there was a general view that not declaring part-time work was wrong. However, some reasons were given to justify non-declaration and these included the low earnings disregard, the 'hassle' of the benefits system, and the low wages paid for part-time work.

Some respondents felt that part-time work was more likely to lead to full-time work if it was related to their job aspirations. Part-time work could also help develop skills and confidence to move into a full-time position. It could be useful in making contacts, or may unexpectedly lead to a full-time position. However, there were others who felt that part-time work could be both an irrelevance and a hindrance in gaining full-time employment.

Overall, the study found little evidence of part-time work leading directly to full-time work, as most respondents found it difficult to find part-time work which fulfilled their expectations and enabled them to move off benefit. However there was some evidence of part-time work having an indirect effect. Consequently, part-time work was seen less as a direct stepping-stone and more of a transitional activity between unemployment and full-time work.
The present study tended to confirm the baseline study findings of the perception of part-time work. An increasing emphasis on shift working, particularly split shifts, meant that the ‘disruptive’ view of part-time work was heightened in the present study, especially amongst the lone parents.

In the baseline study there was a sense that part-time work could offer a useful route to gaining confidence, skills and possibly work. In this study, there was a view that part-time work could easily become a treadmill ultimately leading nowhere, a reflection of the fact that the part-time jobs obtained were unskilled, low paid and often temporary. As with the previous study, some respondents were attracted to part-time work, for much the same reasons. Unlike the previous study, there was greater emphasis on the value of relatively small earnings, which was particularly apparent amongst the lone parents.

It was also apparent in the current study that reliance on undeclared earnings had become more ‘legitimate’ in the sense that respondents, while condemning the practice in principle, were more likely to see this as a way of making ends meet. The overall belief that part-time work could be a stepping-stone had dissipated somewhat compared to the previous study, since the predominant view was that the ‘right type’ of part-time work hardly existed anymore. Where people were very motivated to find work there was a tendency to see part-time work more as a distraction.

The most stereotypical views about voluntary work were held by those who had never thought about it. There was no clear pattern to those who had or had not ever thought about voluntary work. The perception was that volunteers tended to be either older people or middle-aged women who liked doing good deeds. However, those who were doing voluntary work had more open-minded views.

Knowledge regarding the rules relating to combining voluntary work with the receipt of benefits was mixed, although for Jobseeker’s Allowance clients there was widespread recognition of the need to declare voluntary activities because of the actively seeking work rule. People undertaking voluntary work generally understood the rules correctly.

There was an overall perception that jobcentres had a negative attitude towards voluntary work and provided little active encouragement, although it must be emphasised that advising clients about voluntary work is not actually within the remit of the Employment Service. There was virtually no awareness of the national poster campaign by the Voluntary Service.
The reasons for doing voluntary work can be summarised as follows:

- **Direct work-related reasons.** Those taking up voluntary work with a specific job in mind were very focused individuals and were generally younger recipients. They saw voluntary work helping them in a variety of ways, including networking and making contacts, learning specific skills, gaining experience and qualifications in their field. There are also specific occupations for which unpaid working is an accepted route into the profession, such as nursing, journalism and television camera work.

- **Indirect work-related reasons.** Voluntary work was seen as having some benefits that might enhance a person’s prospects of getting a job, although it may not be related to a specific field of work. There was an awareness that employers preferred people who were already working and voluntary work showed a willingness to work. Voluntary work could also help a person gain skills and experience and keep them in the habit of work.

- **Non work-related reasons.** Some people did voluntary work for reasons unrelated to opportunities for paid employment, for example for philanthropic reasons, as well as for enjoyment and personal satisfaction. Others did it simply for something to do, or to raise their social status.

There were several reasons put forward by respondents for not participating in voluntary activities:

- **lack of awareness** – while there was no defining characteristic, there were some people who were generally ignorant about voluntary work. In a small number of cases, people were generally unfamiliar with the concept of voluntary work. Others, while recognising the concept, had simply never given any thought to it at all;

- **barriers to jobsearch** - some people could not see the connection between voluntary work and a full-time job and felt that voluntary work may actually prevent this;

- **working for nothing** – while there was no defining characteristic, there were some respondents who were adamant that they would not work for nothing and felt angry and insulted at the suggestion;

- **other responsibilities** – some lone parents felt that their home responsibilities prevented them from taking up voluntary work;

- **costs of volunteering** - there were instances where voluntary work involved extra expenses such as travel and food, which people on benefit felt they could not afford;

- **negative images** - the perception of the volunteer ‘do-gooder’ dissuaded some respondents from taking up voluntary work.
Voluntary work as a stepping-stone to work (Section 5.6)

The evidence from this study shows voluntary work to be more of a transitional activity between unemployment and employment, or as an indirect route into paid work rather than a direct stepping-stone into employment. Many respondents could see the potential of voluntary work as a way of enhancing job prospects. People with mental health problems or people who had suffered a breakdown or trauma saw voluntary work as a way of gaining confidence. Some lone parents saw voluntary work as a way of ‘trying out’ different professions.

Younger people within the study, with a definite work-related focus, tended to see voluntary work as a direct stepping-stone into their chosen career and were using voluntary work in a very focused way. This tended, however, to relate to very specific professions, such as journalism and television camera work.

Voluntary work had provided a direct stepping-stone for a handful of respondents in the study. However, for the most part, voluntary activity worked in a variety of indirect – yet positive – ways in helping people back to work. Many shied away from the idea of voluntary work and felt aggrieved at the suggestion of working for nothing.

Comparison with the baseline - ‘stepping-stones’ – research (Section 5.7)

Little change has taken place in the perception and reasons for undertaking voluntary activities since the baseline study was undertaken. However there was some evidence to suggest that volunteering was not as likely to be seen as useful a work-related activity as it had been in the previous study, partly because there were felt to be less voluntary opportunities currently available.

A change from the previous study, was that certain occupations almost ‘required’ people to provide their services on a voluntary basis as a form of apprenticeship.

The concerns expressed about doing voluntary activities and the perceived barriers to participation were broadly similar to those identified in the baseline research, although an additional barrier, expressed particularly by the men in the study, was that by volunteering they would limit their job search and miss potential work opportunities.

In the present study, the stepping stone effect was less evident in that respondents did not feel that volunteering had necessarily directly led to work, but rather that the voluntary activity was a transitional period that bridged the gap between periods of unemployment, short term contracts and more permanent work.
1.1 Background

Jobseeker’s Allowance, which was introduced on 7 October 1996, unified and replaced Income Support for unemployed people and Unemployment Benefit. Jobseeker’s Allowance was intended to improve the operation of the labour market by helping people in their search for work, encouraging people to keep in touch with, and return to, the labour market, and generally enhancing the service to unemployed people by providing a simpler and more consistent benefit structure.

Introduced at the same time as Jobseeker’s Allowance, the Back to Work Bonus (the ‘Bonus’) was designed to encourage Income Support and Jobseeker’s Allowance recipients and their partners to undertake, stay in, or increase, small amounts of work whilst claiming out-of-work benefits and eventually to move off benefit into work. Recipients who have been entitled to Income Support or Jobseeker’s Allowance for over 91 days can build up a tax-free lump sum, subject to a maximum of £1000, which is equal to half of any earnings above the disregard. This can be claimed when the recipient, or their partner, increases their hours or earnings so that their entitlement to benefit (Income Support or Jobseeker’s Allowance) ceases.

This study comprises part of the Department of Social Security, Department for Education and Employment, Benefits Agency and Employment Service’s continuing programme of research to evaluate Jobseeker’s Allowance and Back to Work Bonus. The research reported here was commissioned by the Department of Social Security and conducted by BMRB Qualitative, a specialist unit of BMRB International. It comprises a qualitative study into the impact of the Back to Work Bonus and the role of part-time work and voluntary activity in helping unemployed people and lone parents in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance and/or Income Support to maintain contact with the labour market.

The research was based on a ‘before and after’ model and was designed to assess whether there were any changes in clients’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviour towards undertaking activities whilst claiming benefit that can be attributed to the Back to Work Bonus. ‘Baseline’ research was carried out before the introduction of the Bonus which examined clients’ attitudes towards part-time and voluntary work whilst claiming; the incentives and costs respondents perceived in returning to work, and the extent to which part-time work and voluntary work were seen as a ‘stepping-stone’ into full time work.
The research on which this report is based took place after the introduction of the Bonus, and additionally explored issues such as clients' knowledge and understanding of the Bonus, attitudes towards the scheme, and the role of the Bonus in smoothing the transition off benefit and into work.

1.2 Research aims

The aims of this research are fourfold:

- to evaluate the Back to Work Bonus, with the specific aim of ascertaining whether the initiative is associated with any changes in jobsearch behaviour or labour market activity;
- to determine whether there is any change in the role of part-time work and voluntary activity as a means of increasing participation in the labour market, since the introduction of the Bonus;
- to explore the decision-making processes involved in jobsearch activities; and
- to provide a detailed understanding of the interaction between earnings disregards and people's decision-making.

In turn, the research sought to explore the following specific issues:

- the attitudes of recipients and their partners towards employment generally, and part-time work and voluntary activities, specifically;
- the role of the benefits system in the decisions made by recipients and their partners;
- the role of 'incentives', such as the earnings disregard and the Back to Work Bonus, in the decision to work;
- whether part-time work and voluntary activities can act as stepping-stones from benefits to employment;
- the impact of part-time work and voluntary work on jobsearch activities; and
- the identification of the factors that would, from the recipient's perspective, encourage greater participation in part-time work and voluntary activities whilst claiming out-of-work benefits.

1.3 Research design and methods

1.3.1 Qualitative methods

The study was wholly qualitative in nature and used a series of in-depth interviews and paired depth interviews. Qualitative methods were used because they provide an ideal methodology for exploring complex issues, such as attitudes and barriers to work, as well as intricacies involved in the decision-making surrounding the take-up of part-time and voluntary work whilst claiming.

1.3.2 Study design

The research comprised 76 individual depth interviews with respondents and 35 paired depth interviews with respondents and their partners. Respondents were either jobseekers (claiming Jobseeker's Allowance), former jobseekers who had since moved into work, or lone parents claiming Income Support. Some respondents had had
experience of part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming, whereas others had not done any activities whilst claiming.

As one of the aims of the study was to update existing knowledge about the potential 'stepping-stone' effect of participation in voluntary activities and part-time work, the study used the same sample groups as the previous research. The sample groups are summarised in Figure 1.1.

A purposive and structured sample was selected to reflect a broad range of individuals in terms of:

- age;
- sex;
- duration of benefit claims;
- household composition; age of children;
- educational background; and
- whether they had received a Back to Work Bonus payment.

Figure 1.1 Sample composition

**Jobseekers**
- working part-time in this claim (15)
- voluntary work in this claim (15)
- not working part-time or doing voluntary activities in this claim (17)

**Former Jobseekers**
- working part-time in last claim (15)
- voluntary activity in last claim (12)
- working part-time and voluntary activities in last claim (7)

**Lone Parents claiming Income Support**
- working part-time in this claim (16)
- not working part-time in this claim (14)

The sample included:

- jobseekers and lone parents currently doing part-time work, either regular, occasional, seasonal or ad hoc part-time work;
- clients with previous experience of part-time work;
- jobseekers and lone parents with current or previous experience of voluntary work;
- ex-clients who had participated in part-time or voluntary work whilst unemployed and claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, but who had since signed off and moved into employment or education;
• jobseekers or ex-jobseekers, with their partners; and
• clients who had worked, or are currently working, without declaring all their earnings.

1.3.3 Research methods

Participants in the study were drawn from three sources:

• unemployed recipients (doing part-time work, doing voluntary activities, not involved in either part-time work or voluntary activities) were identified through 'street recruitment' and their eligibility for participation in the study determined using a screening questionnaire;
• Income Support Computer System records of lone parents currently in receipt of Income Support;
• ex-jobseekers (involved in part-time work or voluntary activities at the time of their claim) were identified through the Jobseeker’s Allowance Recipient Survey.

For reasons of comparability the research was conducted in the same, or similar areas, as the previous ‘Stepping-Stones’ research, that is the catchment areas of three Employment Service jobcentres and related Benefits Agency Local Offices. Areas that were common between the two studies were Stafford and Ashford; Liverpool was substituted for St. Helens, the third area included in the previous research. In addition, as the Jobseeker’s Allowance Recipient survey was unable to provide sufficient sample within the Ashford catchment, the fieldwork area had to be widened to include Bromley, Dover and the South Coast.

The profile of the sample is shown in Figure 1.2

The fieldwork, 76 depth interviews and 35 paired depth interviews, was conducted between September and November 1998, using a topic guide designed in consultation with all the sponsoring agencies. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. Each interview was analysed using Matrix Mapping, a sophisticated method of analysing qualitative material.

Copies of the fieldwork materials may be found in the Appendices.

1.3.4 The scope of qualitative methods

Qualitative methods use small, purposively selected, samples. A qualitative approach is intended to provide understanding about, and illumination of, a set of issues. It cannot provided statistical evidence that can be generalised, numerically, to a broader population. The aim of qualitative methods is to define and describe the range of emergent issues rather than to measure their extent.
### Table 1.1 Sample profile

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<th>Activity Whilst claiming</th>
<th>Former Jobseekers</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lone parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Part-time work</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time + voluntary work</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No activities</td>
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<table>
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<th>Former Jobseekers</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
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<td>Lone parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 weeks but less than 3 months</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-12 months</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 12 months</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<th>Former Jobseekers</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<table>
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<th>Age</th>
<th>Former Jobseekers</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Lone parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25 years</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-40 years</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 years and over</td>
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<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sex</th>
<th>Former Jobseekers</th>
<th>Total number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>Lone parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>47</td>
</tr>
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</table>

1.4 Report outline Following this introduction, Chapter 2 considers the factors that are involved in the decision making process of moving from unemployment into work or of remaining on benefits as part of a 'work' strategy, with particular emphasis on the interplay between people's beliefs about work and the barriers that present themselves. The impact of the Back to Work Bonus and the earnings disregards, in encouraging people into employment, will be examined in Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, consider the role of part-time work and voluntary activities whilst claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and/or Income Support as a means of keeping in touch with the labour market and moving off benefits into full-time work. Finally, Chapter 6 presents some conclusions from the research.
The process of moving off benefit and into work, part-time or full-time, is rarely straightforward. A number of factors come into play that contribute towards a person’s decision to look for work or take a specific type of job. A considerable body of research evidence supports this premise\textsuperscript{[1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10]}. However, what is less evident is how the various factors interact and underpin the decision-making processes surrounding the transition from unemployment to work or from part-time to full-time employment. The central focus of this research was to provide a qualitative evaluation of the Back to Work Bonus in the context of two ‘return to work’ strategies, namely the role of voluntary activities and part-time work. However, the use of individual and paired depth interviews also allows a more detailed exploration of the decision-making process that individuals and couples go through when considering their participation in the labour market.

On the basis of the individuals interviewed for the present study this chapter attempts to ‘model’ the labour market-related decision-making process and explores the links between the various factors that are involved in people’s decisions about work. This is shown in diagrammatic form in Figure 2.1 and is discussed in full in the following sections\textsuperscript{1}.

2.1 An overview of labour market-related decision making

People receiving Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support, apart from those who are not engaged in any activities, may be in part-time employment; they may be working on an ad hoc basis, as and when they feel they need extra money; they may be doing voluntary work and/or they may be in training or in further education. For some benefit recipients the ultimate goal of these activities is work-related, either in the short or long-term, while for others there is no work-related outcome envisaged. For some people, the aim is to avoid work altogether and continue to rely on state benefits for their income.

The factors which influence the decision-making process and determine ‘work’ strategies (including non-work strategies) can be seen in Figure 2.1.

\textsuperscript{1} It is useful to note that the model of decision-making that arises out of this research is not unlike the theory of attitude change put forward by Fishbein and Ajzen\textsuperscript{[10]}. They propose that changes in behaviour are underpinned by a person’s stated intentions, which are themselves determined by a person’s attitudes and beliefs. Whilst there are a number of similarities it is important to point out that the model of labour market decision-making put forward here has been derived from the research data. It is a ‘grounded’ model of decision-making and not a model that has been imposed on the data. Indeed, it was only after the model had been derived that the similarity was noticed. However, it is useful to point out the apparent similarity between labour market decision-making and an existing theory of behaviour change as the combination of the two may be useful in considering future policy in this area.
Attitudes to work, shaped by a set of personal beliefs and adjusted if necessary according to personal circumstances, feed directly into the decision-making process. Attitudes and 'work' strategies will be influenced also by barriers (perceived and actual) and by incentives to work. Work strategies might range from a decision to avoid work altogether to a decision to take any work at all so long as it was paid. Within that range would fall decisions to do part-time and voluntary work, either for work-related or non-work-related reasons, and also decisions to only pursue work within a very narrow band of employment sectors. The roles of part-time work and voluntary work in people's work strategies will be discussed fully in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

The way in which the benefit system works in relation to earned income was a major disincentive for many people, particularly those who felt their earnings potential was limited through ill-health, lack of qualifications or (appropriate) skills, or a limited range of job opportunities. Of particular concern was the loss of Housing Benefit and a worry that they would be unable to pay their rent in the future, despite the fact that it is still payable if a client is in work but on low income. Consequently, a key barrier to increasing participation in the labour market, for many people, was the concern about moving from the relative security of out-of-work benefits to a perceived insecurity of work, particularly where this is part-time and contract work. Financial incentives can play a part in redefining a person's 'work' strategy. Two features of the benefit system which may be conceptualised as financial incentives are the Back to Work Bonus and the earnings disregard. The role of each of these in the decision to increase one's hours, take part-time work or move to full-time work is discussed fully in Chapter 3.

People have a set of attitudes to work. These, combined with barriers to work, determine the strategy they adopt in terms of when and what work they seek. Attitudes are, in turn, shaped by beliefs and personal circumstances. In the following sections, each of the factors that are
involved in work-related decisions are discussed. For the sake of clarity we begin by discussing people’s attitudes to work together with the barriers – perceived and actual – that define the way in which these shape a person’s ‘work’ strategy. The discussion then returns to the way in which attitudes are underpinned by beliefs and shaped by personal circumstances.

2.2 Attitudes towards work

Attitudes towards work varied enormously across the sample of respondents. However, the set of attitudes expressed could be captured within a five item typology:

- active work-seekers;
- conditional/restrictive;
- resigned;
- unmotivated;
- disaffected.

Active work-seekers were to be found across all age groups. They may have had chequered work histories, failed to gain permanent employment, experienced redundancy, or had never worked since leaving full-time education. However, the unifying features were a view that work was ‘the right thing to do’ and was essential in order to gain and sustain a lifestyle to which they aspired.

Conditional work-seekers were similar in many respects to active work-seekers but, due to their set of beliefs about work, ill-health, or family commitments, their ability to work was conditional on support being available. For example, many lone parents were keen to work but were unable to do so because the work available did not fit in with their childcare responsibilities. Apart from the fact that most lone parents receiving benefits did not feel that childcare facilities were considered to be affordable, many lone parents believed they ought to be at home with their children. Most of the lone parents in this study felt they should be at home with their pre-school age children and many also thought they should remain at home even when their child was at school up to the age of 10 or 11. Some were less concerned about being at home when their child was at school, but would only contemplate work that fitted with school hours and holidays. Consequently, the only work opportunities were those that fitted around school hours. Few job opportunities presented themselves. As one lone parent said: ‘The ideal job for me, for many single parents probably, is being a dinner lady...it fits in perfectly with school hours and school holidays...but the waiting list is as long as your arm’. If lone parents had close family living nearby who were prepared to help, they were much more likely to consider going out to work.

Respondents who were caring for elderly relatives, or ‘just drop in to make sure they are alright’ would be able to work if they felt that adequate
support and care was available in their absence. In all cases this was not felt to be available and as a consequence their work-related intentions were conditional on the provision of adequate support.

Similarly, people with physical disabilities or mental health problems often required jobs with sufficient flexibility to reflect their health needs. Were these available their ability to work would be enhanced.

In some instances, the restrictive nature of a person's attitudes towards work reflected their fundamental beliefs about the amount of money they should be earning as well as the relative status of the job they would be willing to accept. This is discussed fully in Section 2.5.

Often starting out as active work-seekers, many of those individuals who had been made redundant in their later years were moving towards, or had adopted, a more resigned attitude towards work. Often now willing to consider a much wider range of job opportunities than before, they had often resigned themselves to either unemployment or casual work for the rest of their working life. Although such resigned attitudes tended to be associated with age, with age being perceived as a primary barrier, the underlying issues may include the need to acquire more appropriate skills and learn how to sell oneself at interview. (See Case 1).

**Case 1: Older jobseekers ('resigned')**

Married man, 58, working in a casual but full-time job with the Royal Mail after being unemployed for eight months. An ex-chief cashier for a large company he had never been out of work before and was very keen to find a job, although he was resigned to the fact that he might not get anything.

'I was hoping that I might possibly pick up something similar to what I had been used to over the years, but at the same time I knew it was going to be very difficult. ...I was perfectly happy to try almost anything.'

During his period of unemployment he had looked for steady part-time jobs as well as full-time work and ended up doing some agency work: '... it was a case of take what you can, in the end I did.'

Asked about whether or not he had considered voluntary work: 'Had I been in the same situation now, after 12 months, I am sure I would certainly be doing something on the voluntary side because I would possibly have given up the ghost by then.'

He knew that his current employment would come to an end within a few months and had resigned himself to being either unemployed or in casual work until he retired.
Two further groups of individuals could be distinguished in terms of their attitudes towards work. Often appearing ‘work-shy’ in general, the underlying reasons were often different, giving rise to two groups of individuals: Unmotivated and Disaffected.

The ‘unmotivated’ tended to provide the socially acceptable response that they want to work, but their actions tended to belie their works. Often having not visited the jobcentre to look for work for many weeks, if not months, they had rarely pursued any other jobsearch activity. Typically, this group of people did not really need to work as they had adjusted to a low income lifestyle and the facilities that they enjoyed were often provided by others, primarily parents. As a group they tended to be young people, had no commitments and often lived with their parents. It was often difficult for them to identify any particular skills that they had. Their work ethic (Section 2.5) was weak, they often had no aspirations and were content to exist on a very low income with handouts from parents.

Lack of motivation come in a number of shades, as Case 2 demonstrates.

Case 2: Young jobseeker in and out of jobs (‘unmotivated’)

A 20 year-old man with GCSE qualifications and an RSA in IT had been mostly unemployed during the past 12 months. He said he wanted full-time work but was prepared to take part-time work. However, he did not go to the jobcentre much, only when he had to sign on and most of his job-seeking was through the local paper: ‘…because I find in the jobcentre, when you look at the jobs, the problem is you go there and there’s fifty different other people who have applied for it…’

He appeared to want work and was prepared to take a part-time job or two part-time jobs if he could not get full-time work, but he needed some help and guidance. When asked how he spent his time he replied: ‘Basically, I wake up about now, about 12’ish, go and get my ciggies and then I’ll have a wash or shower, and then I’ll plan my day, either go into town or I’ll stay here.’

He said he would like more input from the jobcentre, some help with finding work and more frequent meetings with staff than every three months. He felt unable to raise issues and ask for help and advice during his fortnightly signing on visit.

By contrast, the ‘disaffected’ often had past experience of work. Their relationship with the conventional labour market was fractured by a range of experiences, including unhappy relationships with employers, wage expectations that were far in excess of their levels of skill or experience and difficult, but often manipulative relationships, with the jobcentre. There was often a sense of anger at the inadequacy of
the benefits system in making it worthwhile to work on a part-time basis. As a consequence, many were older respondents, in their 30’s and 40’s. Many were providing an income for themselves through the black economy and ‘less than legal deals’, some regularly, others on a more ad hoc basis.

Within this group of individuals were ‘wheelers and dealers’, individuals who had learned to ‘work the system’ and were quite happy to work on a casual basis when they wanted to but always with the out-of-work benefits providing their ‘bread and butter’ income. Quite often they were able to earn reasonable amounts of money without any effect on their benefit because they were paid cash-in-hand and declared only a fraction of their earnings. Also included in this group were lone parents who were unable to take up full-time work and who felt that the benefits system made it impossible for them to earn a secure living working part-time. (See Case 3)

**Case 3: Lone parent – no activities (‘disaffected’)**

A lone parent, aged 41, with two children 8 and 9 years, who had her own hairdressing salon before having children was now on Income Support and receiving Maintenance from her ex-husband. She had no plans for employment in the future and seemed to have given up on the idea of work altogether. She appeared to be very bitter about the benefit system, which she felt made it impossible for her to earn a decent wage and look after her children at the same time.

‘I don’t have any [plans]. I don’t feel I could earn sufficient money to keep us going, to make it worthwhile…what I could earn would only just pay the bills and that’s exactly how I am now with getting benefit to pay the bills.’

She saw the £15 earnings disregard as a disincentive to part-time working: ‘…if you were earning over the £15 they would just take it off you anyway, so there is no incentive to go out and work, because at the end of the day you are not going to be any better off, except for £15.' She saw it instead as encouraging people to do undeclared work and encouraging employers to exploit people prepared to do this work. She had in the past done car boot sales without declaring the money.

‘If it was a decent wage I would do it, and I wasn’t penalised for doing it. I wouldn’t be used like that, by an employer. I was self-employed and I could earn a lot more being self-employed than being part-time and a skivvy.’

This was someone who had been a full-time worker prior to having children, who could not, because of her circumstances, carry on working in the same way and who was disaffected because she felt the benefit system made it impossible for her to earn a reasonable amount working part-time.
In a couple of instances it was clear that an entire family was operating in this way with three generations living together in the same accommodation and the pool of benefits (out-of-work and disability benefits) and casual earnings providing the household income. (See Case 4)

Case 4: Young person living in a disaffected household

This young man, in his mid-twenties, had not had a ‘proper’ job since leaving school. He was living with his girlfriend – a single parent – her parents, grandparents and a lodger in a run-down privately rented property. None of the family worked: the grandparents were retired, both parents were receiving disability benefits and his girlfriend, who had had occasional jobs was receiving Income Support. He had a weekly newspaper round from which he earned £7 a week and was able to retain the £5 earnings disregard.

None of the household had any desire to work – ‘unless it’s for a £1000 a week’. The household income comprised disability benefits, out-of-work benefits and cash in hand from some of the ‘deals’ undertaken by the lodger.

The respondent was not considering part or full-time work, partly because he did not need the money, partly a view that it would not be worth working any more as he would lose out because of the earnings disregard and partly his commitment to the local pub’s darts team for whom he was the resident scorer.

2.3 Work-related barriers

A wide range of potential barriers to work emerged and which are consistent with many other pieces of research\textsuperscript{13, 14, 17, 12}. As these have been described in detail elsewhere and particularly in the previous ‘Stepping-Stones’ research they are presented in summary form below.

The barriers to emerge could be separated into three main types, those that were personal in nature, those that were labour market-related and the financial viability of work that was locally available.

Perceived personal barriers were:

- age, with some respondents considering that some employers would discriminate against older workers;
- lack of (up to date) qualifications and experience;
- a lack of confidence about going out to work, particularly lone parents and those who had been out of the labour market for some time;
- some lone parents perceived that there was a lack of affordable acceptable quality childcare facilities in their area, although they had not investigated this. Others, who had explored the options for childcare in their area, felt that this was an actual barrier; and
• family commitments, particularly to young children and elderly relatives who need care or ‘someone to keep an eye on them and see they are all right’.

Labour market-related barriers were:

• poor availability of work in the local area, with some areas in particular being described as having very little to offer. Ashford, for example, was described by both respondents and the local jobcentre as being a particularly poor place to look for part-time work opportunities;

• the absence of job prospects and job satisfaction as for many people simply having a job was not sufficient;

• travel to work distances were mentioned by a number of respondents as being a barrier. Although people varied in the amount of time they would spend travelling to work, generally people preferred to work locally or within 20-30 minutes of home. The amount of time needed to get to work in relation to their childcare commitments and their rate of pay could be a key factor in determining whether a job was deemed worthwhile;

• employer attitudes were mentioned by a small number of respondents as a potential barrier to employment. Although mainly perceived rather than experienced there was some concern that employers would discriminate against people who had been unemployed for long periods of time, single parents, people with disabilities and mental health problems and older workers. There was some evidence to indicate that employers did see some types of work as primarily for women, particularly shop-work;

• jobsearch advice and job placement facilities. These are discussed more extensively in sections 4.3 and 5.3.

The final set of barriers were concerned with the perceived financial viability of work and included:

• a lack of understanding about the contribution that could be made through both out-of-work benefits as well as in-work benefits such as Family Credit;

• a marked lack of ‘better-off’ calculations and a view that only well paid full-time work was a viable alternative to remaining on benefits;

• the desire to work for more than the amount paid by the earnings disregard;

• long hours and low rates of pay; in general, those people who were looking for work were not prepared to ‘work for nothing’. Many of the local jobs available for people with few, or out of date, skills attracted low rates of pay, with £1.50 to £3.50 an hour often being mentioned. These posed a serious barrier for people who wanted to return to work, particularly part-time work which was felt to be disproportionately low paid; and
a major concern that they would be exchanging the security of benefits for the insecurity of part-time work.

2.4 ‘Work’ strategies

The way in which people made decisions about work varied, although it was generally rare for individuals to have approached their return to work in a formal manner. More often, decisions were made in a piecemeal fashion over a period of time.

2.4.1 Decision making by couples

Where couples were involved, the decision-making approach could be seen to lie along a continuum and ranging from joint decision-making to totally independent decision-making, with various shades in between.

Typically, decision-making amongst couples took one of four forms:

- **joint decision-making** in which both partners actively discussed potential job options, with the decision being one that was mutually determined. Typically, joint discussion and joint decision-making were in greater evidence amongst couples from professional backgrounds and with higher levels of education;

- **joint discussion/male decision** in which the issues were often discussed but ultimately it remained with the man to make the decision;

- **male decides for both partners** in which the man feels he has the right to make decisions about work for both partners in the household. A number of lone parents indicated that this was often a contributory factor in the breakdown of their relationship; and

- **independent decision-making** in which neither partner consults nor discusses either their finances or work-related plans.

It is interesting to note that during the recruitment process for the study it was particularly difficult to recruit couples to take part in the study, especially where there was a history of unemployment. Where couples were recruited for a paired interview in many instances the partners had to be interviewed separately because of the hostility between partners. In these instances, independent decision-making was the norm.

Where couples were discussing their work-related options together five issues tended to predominate. As these are discussed elsewhere in the report (Sections 2.3, 2.5 and 2.6) they are presented below in summary form:

- whether the household would be **financially better-off** by taking (additional) work;

- the advantages and disadvantages of **moving areas** in order to secure work;

- the trade off between **increased income** and the **cost of childcare**;

- the viability of job opportunities given **travelling distances and times**; and
2.4.2 The strategies used

It was clear that a person's beliefs about work, their personal and financial circumstances and their attitudes towards work combined with their perceptions of the barriers to work to result in a specific work-related strategy. These strategies were:

- **a search for full-time work only**, a strategy that was determined by a fundamental belief in the value of work and based on two key views. The first of these was that only full-time work would pay sufficient money to enable them to obtain the lifestyle they wanted and avoid the 'benefits trap' of working for little more than is paid through out-of-work benefits. The second was the view that part-time work was invariably menial and low paid and would not ultimately lead to full-time work. Indeed, individuals who adopted this approach to work often held the view, quite strongly, that both part-time work and voluntary activities were 'distracting and leads to nowhere'. They were very determined to pursue their goal of full-time work and were adamant that this was the only valid job-search strategy;

- **part-time work whilst claiming benefit** was pursued by some people and seen as a way of keeping in touch with the labour market, keeping skills up to date, acquiring new skills, providing a small amount of extra money and having the potential to lead to full-time work. The role of part-time work is the focus of Chapter 4;

- despite people's intentions to find work, either part or full-time, it was also clear – as shown in Figure 2.1 – that well-intentioned return-to-work strategies could be thwarted by one or more barriers that could be encountered;

- participation in voluntary activities was a carefully thought out work strategy for a small number of people, particularly for those people whose aspirations towards work were in the longer term. The role of voluntary activities as a jobsearch strategy is discussed fully in Chapter 5;

- undeclared work was undertaken regularly by a small number of individuals, by others on an ad hoc basis. Although some people did a small amount of undeclared work while looking for a 'proper' part-time or full-time job, in the main most of those who were working and not declaring their earnings, or declaring only a portion of their earnings, were doing so as part of their overall 'work' strategy. They were generally content to operate in this fashion and had no intention of moving off benefits and into full-time work;

- primarily in response to their beliefs about how children should be cared for and the need for mothers to look after their pre-school children (see Section 2.5) many of the lone parents in particular had taken the decision to **delay their entry into the labour market** until their child was either at school or old enough not to require
constant parental supervision. Often, these respondents had plans to return to work and in some cases were actively considering how they might acquire the necessary skills to enable their transition back into the labour market;

* the final strategy, **the decision to avoid a 'proper' job** altogether, had been adopted by a small number of individuals. Often reflecting unmotivated or disaffected attitudes towards work, these respondents were content to live within the benefits system, sometimes supplementing their income with patches of undeclared work.

2.4.3 *The link between 'work' strategies and work incentives*

During the discussions with respondents about their intentions regarding work and particularly in the context of their comments about the Back to Work Bonus (Chapter 3) it was very apparent that many individuals needed additional 'services' or incentives to help them with the transition.

Reflecting some of the key barriers that people experienced in finding work three initiatives in particular were spontaneously mentioned. These were:

* the provisions of **childcare facilities** that were of acceptable quality, available locally, and at a cost that was affordable;

* **training** that reflected their lack of confidence and met their individual employment needs. A number of individuals, particularly those who were motivated to find work, felt that they also needed training advice and careers guidance;

* access to the **New Deals** for lone parents, young people and long term unemployed. Although few respondents had accurate knowledge about the New Deal programmes, a number, particularly amongst the lone parents in the study, felt that the initiative would be of use to them in their return to work planning.

Although the research team presented earnings disregards and the Back to Work Bonus as potential incentives, respondents rarely saw them in this light and often as either 'non-starters' or disincentives. The issue is discussed fully in Chapter 3.

2.5 Personal beliefs about work

As respondents talked about their experiences of unemployment and their work-related aspirations it became clear that there was a fundamental set of beliefs that people held about themselves in relation to work. While it was often very difficult to determine precisely how these beliefs had evolved it was apparent that many were deeply seated and probably reflected the views of parents, and in some instances the views of partners. Four different sets of beliefs emerged:

* Some individuals referred to a **work ethic** – a strongly held belief that it was the responsibility of the individual to support themselves and their family through full-time employment. Whilst recognising the value of out-of-work benefits there was a strong feeling amongst
some of the respondents that such benefits were purely a safety net. By contrast, the work ethic for others was held far less strongly and often in conjunction with the view that the benefits system was there to support them until they found the sort of job they wanted. Amongst this latter group of people were those who felt that it was their right to remain on benefits for as long as they wanted or until a job came along that ‘pays £1000 a week, then I might think about going to work’.

- Amongst lone parents, views on the work ethic existed within the context of an over-arching commitment to the needs of their children. Many of the lone parents in this study wanted very much to work, but they were angry and frustrated because they could not see how they could afford to work. The reasons for this will become clear as the report progresses, but essentially a low earning capacity combined with a low level of earnings disregard and the costs of working, made lone parents afraid to move out of the security of Income Support with the range of benefits provided.

- Beliefs about the parental role regarding children often played a key role in decisions about work. Held by both women and men alike, respondents tended to fall into one of three groups: those who felt that the woman should not work at all while the child was of pre-school age; those who felt that the mother should either not work or only work part-time while their child was in first school (up to the age of 10 or 11); and those who were happy to work when the child was pre-school, provided suitable childcare arrangements could be made. In this study, there was evidence of lone parents being torn by deeply rooted ideology about parents – especially mothers – caring for children and a strongly felt desire to work and be part of ‘life outside the home’. Some managed to deal with this dilemma by handing over care of their children to close family, if they lived in the locality.

- Gender roles were often encapsulated in a discrete set of beliefs and often held more strongly by the males in the study compared to the females. Typical beliefs were:
  - the male should be the breadwinner and chief income earner;
  - men should not do part-time work, primarily because part-time work is seen as low paid, low status, and ‘women’s work’;
  - women, if they work, should only work in certain occupations. For example, many of the older respondents were quite resistant to the idea of their partner going out to work, as it would undermine their role of breadwinner. Many of the men in the study, across all age groups, were also concerned that their partners should not be involved in certain types of jobs, with bar work being a prime example. This was often mentioned by the lone parents in the study and sometimes one of the factors in the breakdown of their relationship;
there was no mention of the New Deal for Partners of the Unemployed which seeks to challenge the perception of the male as breadwinner.

* While views were very mixed about the types of jobs a person might consider and the rate of pay that would be acceptable, there was a strength of feeling to indicate that in many instances job status and remuneration were a further component in this fundamental set of beliefs. For example, a number of people felt that a 'job defined the person' and as a consequence they would not take a job that they felt was below their status. (See Case 5).

**Case 5: Job Status and Remuneration**

One middle-aged unemployed respondent had been a middle manager for many years. On being made redundant he had sought similar jobs but with little success. Keen to set up his own business trading from a market stall, his wife had been very much against the idea because it did not reflect the status to which they aspired. In a similar vein the rate of pay was a key issue with many people simply not entertaining remuneration rates lower than they had been used to. This was partly a desire to hang on to their existing lifestyle but was also intrinsically linked to their beliefs about lower paid work reflecting a lower social status.

Job status was not an issue generally for lone parents. They often did not have high aspirations or expectations in terms of work, but they felt they needed to be able to get out of the house and to benefit from the morale boosting effects of doing something outside the home and family, earning money and (perhaps) enjoying some adult company.

Job remuneration was, however, very important for lone parents. All spoke of the difficulties of managing on benefits and how impossible it was to consider working without family nearby to help out with childcare. However, these beliefs were based on the practical realities of their circumstances, or their perceptions of them, and not on a notion of their 'employment value'.

A person's beliefs provide only one set of factors that shape their work-related plans and help to determine their overall attitudes towards work. A further set of issues in terms of a person's individual circumstances play a significant role. These are discussed in the following section.

### 2.6 Personal circumstances

In addition to their beliefs about work there are personal and financial factors which help to determine a person's overall attitude to work and their views about the viability of work. These are:
• **Family responsibilities** which include:
  - the need to remain at home to look after children, either because of the costs of childcare or the lack of (suitable) nurseries, crèches, or child-minders in their area; and
  - care commitments to elderly relatives.

• Existing **financial circumstances**, which either allowed people to be more selective about the work they took or enabled them to avoid conventional work altogether. For example, in the former case a redundant lecturer had sufficient means, both personal and collectively with his wife, that he could afford to adopt a contract work/out-of-work benefits lifestyle as and when he pleased. For others, cash-in-hand jobs, sporadic work in the black economy and occasional (unspecified but not legal) ‘deals’ meant that they could provide a lifestyle that was adequate for them without having to adopt a conventional approach to work.

Lone parents, on the other hand, felt themselves to be trapped by the benefit system and their lack of qualifications. Without financial assistance of some kind from other family members, they could not see how they could earn enough from part-time working to cover the costs of working (childcare and travel). If they worked less than 16 hours and remained on benefit all they could earn was likely to be £15 – the level of earnings disregard for lone parents. Out of those lone parents who would consider working more than 16 hours, some were aware of Family Credit and thought that this might enable them to earn more than being on benefit and earning up to £15. Others were not aware of in-work benefits at all, while others thought they would be worse off on Family Credit, because other benefits such as council tax, free school meals would not be paid and neither would a mortgage.

• The employment (unemployment) histories of many of the respondents also helped to define their overall approach to work. For many of the long-term unemployed, unemployment itself had become a way of life and was reflected in their overall attitude towards work and the very limited jobsearch behaviours they described. For others, a lifetime of out-of-work benefits and partially declared casual work determined an approach to work that met their needs and provided sufficient financial security to continue in this way for the foreseeable future. Case 6 provides an excellent example.
Case 6: Financial security from a range of sources

Having always worked as a jobbing builder and in his early fifties, this respondent was very keen to pursue the 'mix and match' approach to income that he had adopted. Receiving both Jobseeker's Allowance and Housing Benefit and having been in receipt of benefits for many years, this respondent liked his lifestyle. His housing was secure because the rent was always paid through Housing Benefit, he had adequate money to go to the pub at lunch times and during the evening from his cash-in-hand jobs. When it was raining he did not work and either stayed at home or went to the pub. For him, the prospect of part-time work was problematic as he was scared that a job would be insecure and he would lose the security of his rent being covered by the benefit system.

Age and life-stage were circumstantial factors that often played their part in shaping an approach to work. Whilst it was clear that age per se was often an issue in relation to finding work – some employers were felt to favour younger, cheaper employees – this was often more to do with how people of particular ages perceived themselves within the labour market. Older people, in their fifties, who had been made redundant often felt that it was their age that was against them in finding work. However, on probing further, it was often found that the more pertinent issues were likely to be: fixed ideas about the type of work they were seeking; inappropriate or out of date skills; seeking work for which they did not have relevant skills or experience; and being out of practice at job interviews. At the other end of the age scale were young people who had yet to start work and who may have been unemployed for months or even years. Again, while age per se was not necessarily the determining factor in whether they would find work, it was the set of attitudes that had built up in people so young that was more important. For example, some of the younger unemployed took the view that as they had been out of work for so long, no employer would now consider them. Others took the view that, irrespective of the fact that they had no skills or experience, by virtue of their age, they were worth more than employers would currently be willing to pay them.

Inevitably, many people found that when they were looking for work there was a mis-match between the skills and experience they had to offer compared to that which was required. In general, most people in this situation found that they lacked the appropriate skills or experience required for a specific job. Some, particularly people who had been out of the labour market for a while (lone parents in particular), found that their skills were out of date. This was also true for some of the older people who had been doing the same job...
for many years who now found themselves redundant. Skilled in their previous occupation, they were now unskilled for many others.

By contrast, some people found themselves to be over-qualified. Often desperate to find work, people with higher qualifications, professional qualifications or many years of management experience found that the local supermarket did not want them as a shelf-stacker or till operator. People were often required to apply for these jobs by the local jobcentre. They could be quite scathing about such a requirement, but also depressed that their job applications were then rejected for such unskilled work.

Finally, physical disabilities or mental health problems often provided a set of circumstances whereby a person was unable to consider work without adequate support being made available. The type of support required could be wide ranging and included transport, physical access to buildings, flexible hours to accommodate hospital visits, slower paced work and emotional support.

For some people a disability meant that they felt their working life was over and no longer wished to work. Although with support they would be able to work, such individuals felt that it was no longer their role to work and that the state should support them.

2.7 Comparisons with the baseline – ‘stepping-stones’ – study

One product of the design of the present study has been a greater exploration of the components that feed into the work-related decision-making process. It is clear that people hold a fundamental set of beliefs about work which define their overall attitude towards work. It is also clear from the present study that people’s work-related goals differ. For some, the ultimate goal is full-time work, for others it is part-time work. Due to a set of personal circumstances they wish to go no further than part-time work. This clearly has implications for the way in which the Back to Work Bonus is both perceived and regarded by jobseekers.

Compared to the baseline study, disaffection with the traditional labour market seemed to be in greater evidence, a feature that appeared to go hand in hand with greater use being made of undeclared earnings.

The key features taken into account when making the decision as to whether to take a job were very similar to the baseline study. The financial viability of taking the job, the additional costs of going to work and the cost of childcare facilities remained the primary consideration.

The role of partners in decision-making appeared to be relatively similar between the studies, although there did seem to be greater account taken of the status implied by the job in the present study. It is difficult to know whether this is a genuine change in attitudes or a sampling effect, although it was certainly more apparent amongst those jobseekers who had previously held senior positions.
A major change in the present study was the reluctance of many partners to discuss work and financial issues. At the time of recruitment it was noticeable how many partners refused a joint interview and the obvious dislike in discussing such issues with their partner. Again, it is difficult to know whether this is a sampling issue or a change in the relationship between partners as a result of long periods of unemployment. However, it was clear that for many of these partnerships any initiative that required them to make joint decisions about work and benefits could be very difficult to implement.

2.8 Overview of findings:
Moving into work: attitudes and decision-making

A number of factors come into play that contribute to a person's decision to look for work, and this was modelled to explore the links between the factors involved in taking the decisions to work. All unemployed people have a work related outcome which can be seen as an immediate, short-term or long-term goal. Related to these goals are a series of beliefs which, together with personal circumstances and perceived and actual barriers, combine to shape a person's attitudes towards work.

Attitudes towards work can be captured in a five item classification:

- **active work-seekers** who felt that work was the 'right thing to do';
- **conditional work-seekers**, who held a similar set of views to active work seekers, but whose ability to work was conditional on support being available;
- **people with a resigned attitude towards work**, who had resigned themselves to unemployment or casual work for the rest of their working lives;
- **unmotivated**, a group of individuals who had adjusted to low incomes and did not really want to work;
- **disaffected**, a group of individuals whose past experience of work had been fractured by poor experiences and who were providing income for themselves through the black economy.

Barriers towards work can be divided into three groups:

- **personal barriers**, including age, lack of experience, lack of confidence and family commitments;
- **labour market-related barriers**, including availability of work and lack of jobsearch advice;
- **financial barriers**, including a lack of understanding about benefits, and exchanging the perceived security of benefits for the perceived insecurity of work.
A person’s beliefs about work, their circumstances and attitudes towards work combined with their perceptions of the barriers to work and resulting in a work-related strategy. These were:

* to search for full-time work only;
* to undertake part-time work whilst claiming benefit;
* to undertake undeclared work whilst claiming benefit;
* to delay the search for full-time work;
* to avoid looking for work altogether.

The attitudes that help define work strategies are shaped by a set of beliefs about work. These can be divided into four categories:

* **work ethic**: a belief that the individual has a responsibility to support themselves through full-time employment;
* **parental role**, where people have views about the acceptability of work whilst their children are young;
* **gender roles**, which were held strongly by some men in the study and tended to reflect the view that the man should be the breadwinner; and
* **job status and remuneration** – a belief that the ‘job defines the person’, with some jobs being seen as too poorly paid or of too low status to be considered.

There were also a number of personal and financial circumstances that helped determine a person’s overall attitudes towards work. These were:

* family responsibilities – caring for children or relatives;
* existing financial circumstances;
* employment and unemployment histories;
* age and lifestage;
* a mismatch between skills and experience; and
* physical disabilities and mental health problems.

Decision-making, amongst couples varied enormously. In some households, all the issues were fully discussed by both partners, in others the discussion was followed by one partner – usually the man – making the decision. Typically, the decision to work hinged on whether people felt they would be better off in work, with the status of the job, working conditions and travel to work distance also playing a role. By contrast, some couples refused to discuss such issues and independently made decisions. Often these households were characterised by ‘difficult’ relationships, unstable incomes and long periods of unemployment.
3 WORK INCENTIVES: THE BACK TO WORK BONUS AND THE EARNINGS DISREGARD

There are a number of initiatives which serve as an incentive to keep people in contact with the labour market and consider a return to full-time work. The Back to Work Bonus is one of these. The earnings disregard can also be seen in the same light as it encourages people to maintain contact with the labour market and earn a small amount of money whilst continuing to receive out-of-work benefits.

This section considers the impact of both the Back to Work Bonus and the earnings disregard as 'incentives' to keep in touch with the labour market. The chapter begins with the Back to Work Bonus and considers awareness, administration and perceptions of the role of the Back to Work Bonus, as well as the effects of the Bonus on people's work-related behaviours. The section continues by looking at views about, and the impact of, the earnings disregard. Individuals had a number of suggestions for change; these are reported at the end of this chapter.

3.1 The Back to Work Bonus

The Back to Work Bonus ("the Bonus") allows benefit recipients who have been receiving Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support for at least 3 months to accrue an amount of money equivalent to half the part-time earnings taken into account against these benefits. This accrued money (the Bonus) can be claimed by the client once they move into work which removes entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support. It is designed as an incentive to encourage benefit recipients and their partners to use part-time work as a stepping stone to full-time employment. See Appendix A for a more detailed explanation.

3.1.1 Awareness of the Bonus

Overall, there was a marked lack of awareness of the scheme, even amongst those who were doing part-time work and were eligible for the Bonus.

'I mean, like he didn't know about that and he's on Jobseeker's Allowance, why hasn't he been told about that? Why don't they tell you them things?'

(Partner of jobseeker, female, 18-25, no activities)

There was also considerable confusion with other Employment Service schemes and initiatives. For example, some people wondered whether the Bonus was part of the New Deal, others thought it might be an initiative to help the self-employed, a scheme for returning mothers, a system of tax credits, or part of Career Development Loans.

'Well the Back to Work Bonus I got told about that...You have to go on a training scheme to train you to run your own business. I was told if...I started my own business, I would get £1000.' (Jobseeker, male, 26-40, voluntary work)
However, even when people showed some awareness of the Back to Work Bonus, there was a considerable lack of understanding. Some respondents suggested correctly that it was a sum of money on commencing full-time work, but missed out on the connection between part-time work and the Bonus. Others believed that ‘points’ were awarded for carrying out part-time work.

‘It’s [the Bonus] a grant, they said that if you find a job they’ve got to be able to get in touch with your employer and then you get £200 grant off them for finding a job.’ (Jobseeker, male, 26-40, voluntary work)

‘To be honest with you I thought it was just a bonus to get people to go to full-time work. I didn’t know you had to do it that way.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

3.1.2 Sources of information

Once a client has been claiming benefits for 3 months (that is the minimum claiming period before eligibility for the Bonus commences), the Benefits Agency automatically sends out a letter to inform the client of their eligibility to start accruing the Bonus. If they continue to have part-time earnings taken into account, they will receive statements every three months showing the amount accrued. Those who have stopped working part-time will receive annual statements, which will remind them of the amount they have accrued. Amongst those who were eligible for the Bonus, there was a marked lack of awareness, or recognition, that such letters had been received.

Of the small number of respondents who had some awareness, information about the Back to Work Bonus came from a number of sources, the most important of which was receiving the computer generated letter from the Benefits Agency informing them they were eligible for the Bonus. However, in many cases the letters were either not read, or read but not understood. Some recipients did not see the relevance of the letters and either discarded them or put them away for future reference.

‘You just get these little letters saying there’s this Back to Work Bonus. That’s it. I have not got the time to go into it.’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, child under 5 years old, part-time work)

Other methods of hearing about the Back to Work Bonus included receiving letters indicating they had accumulated amounts under the scheme. One respondent claimed he was unaware of the existence of the Bonus until he unexpectedly received a cheque; although this situation should not have arisen as clients are required to complete a claim form before receiving their Bonus.

There was little evidence of information being proactively provided by jobcentres and Benefits Agency staff. Some respondents had shown their letters about the Bonus to staff, who then informed them about the scheme or asked another member of staff to explain it to them.
There was also little evidence of respondents looking for additional information about the Back to Work Bonus.

3.2 Administration issues

Over the course of the study a number of respondents pointed out there had been some administrative problems with payment of their Bonus. Such problems arose in all three fieldwork areas.

A small number of people were adamant that they had not applied for the Bonus after starting full-time work but when they discovered their entitlement were informed they had already received it. Others said that their Bonus had been sent while they were still doing part-time work and therefore should not have qualified for it.

'I looked at my last slip and it was more than I usually got and I thought it must be the Back to Work Bonus. I can't remember someone explaining it...there was nothing with it or anything...I was really surprised.' (Former jobseeker, male, 41+, part-time work)

'Yes, I did [receive the Bonus], but not when I signed off, I got that when I started my part-time work...But I never got anything when I actually finished signing on, but I'm sure I should have had something.' (Former jobseeker, female, 26-40, part-time work)

The regulations require that the Bonus is claimed within twelve weeks of ceasing to receive Jobseeker's Allowance or Income Support. Some respondents were unaware of this and a few claimed to have been refused their Bonus because they had claimed too late after starting full-time work.

3.3 Perceptions of the role of the Back to Work Bonus

Respondents, both those who knew about the Bonus and those who did not, had the scheme explained to them by the research team, and were asked what they perceived its role to be. There was no appreciable difference between the views of those who knew about the Bonus before the interview and those who heard about it for the first time, or who understood it for the first time, during the interviews.

Generally, it was seen as providing financial help on starting full-time work and before they received their first pay cheque. Some respondents felt that as during this time there would not be any income coming into the household the Bonus would pay for living expenses and contribute to the travel costs of getting to work. In addition, some respondents felt that on commencing full-time work they would not have suitable work clothes, such as suits for office work or boots for building work. The Bonus would be useful for purchasing these items.

'It would help you through the first few weeks until you have sorted yourself out, sort you out with your rent and it is really good that way.' (Jobseeker, male, 26-40, voluntary work)
However, some respondents believed that the Bonus was an ‘enforced saving’, and that they would be receiving their own money back, as the Bonus comprised of half the money ‘taken off’ them when they declared their earnings. This tended to mitigate any incentivising effect that the Bonus may have been intended to have.

3.4 The impact of the Back to Work Bonus

In addition, views about the Bonus were often coloured by respondents’ perceptions about the labour market, particularly the very low wages offered for part-time work and the perceived absence of local full-time work. As many argued, if there is little full-time work available, how can the Bonus act as an incentive.

Amongst those who were eligible for the Bonus, were building up a Bonus, or, indeed, had received a Bonus, there was not a single example of the Back to Work Bonus having acted as an incentive to increase the number of part-time hours worked or to move from part-time work into full-time work. This was for the following reasons:

• a lack of awareness and knowledge about the Bonus scheme, even amongst those who were eligible;

‘I think they should be reminding people of this scheme. You get so many bits of paper, this scheme, that scheme. I don’t remember seeing anything on the TV about it.’ (Lone parent, male, 26-40, voluntary work)

• lack of awareness, amongst some respondents, that they were accumulating a Bonus which prevented it acting as an incentive to move into full-time work;

• those who had received the Bonus felt they would have moved into full-time work anyway with, or without, the Bonus; and

• for a few people, who were aware of the Bonus, there was a perception that they would never make a claim for the Bonus payment because part-time work and the security of benefits suited their lifestyle.

This was typical of a number of people, including lone parents and those individuals who enjoyed the freedom of the combination of part-time work and benefits.

3.5 Could the Back to Work Bonus act as an incentive to move into work?

Because of the lack of awareness about the Back to Work Bonus, respondents were asked if they thought the Bonus could have the effect of encouraging people to move off benefits and into work. Respondents could see three possible ways in which the Bonus could have this effect. This would be by encouraging people:

1 to move into part-time work;
2 to increase the number of part-time hours worked; or
3 to move from part-time into full-time work.

However, these potential effects of the Bonus were largely seen as hypothetical. When asked whether the Bonus would be useful, or act
as an incentive, for them personally, the answer was almost always negative.

'I think it is a good idea, it gives someone an incentive.

[So is it an incentive for you?]

Not for me, no.' (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time work)

Because of the low awareness of the Bonus within the sample, it was often difficult for some respondents to conceptualise the Bonus and think through some of the issues.

3.5.1 Moving into part-time work

In terms of moving into part-time work views about the effect of the Bonus were mixed:

• There was a strong view by some respondents that doing less than 16 hours work a week was not financially viable since the wages offered by part-time work were so low. The Back to Work Bonus was not considered to be enough of an incentive to counteract this. This view was held equally by the highly motivated ‘active jobseekers’ who were only interested in finding full-time work and by the ‘unmotivated’ or ‘disaffected’ who did not feel it was enough of an incentive to make them begin to think about part-time work.

• Some respondents believed that for those on low incomes it could be seen as an incentive, especially in the case of single people, often living with their parents, who had few financial commitments and who would be able to build up a Bonus. It was also thought to be a possible incentive for those who would choose to work part-time anyway, such as lone parents. However, such views were often hypothetical and were rarely felt to apply to the individual themselves.

• Many respondents believed that there were simply not enough part-time jobs available in their local area.

• One member of the study felt that it would be useful to accumulate a Bonus to build up capital to start their own business. However, this was not a well thought-out plan. The respondent in question was unemployed and primarily looking for full-time work but with a ‘reserve plan’ of becoming self-employed. Mention of the Bonus during the interview sparked the idea of looking for part-time work and using the Bonus to set up his own business.

3.5.2 Increasing part-time hours

There were some isolated examples of recipients who, on learning of the Bonus during the interview, said that they would consider increasing their part-time hours. They tended to be recipients who were earning up to the disregard level and who considered that it would be worthwhile working more hours because they intended at some stage, to move into full-time work. However these were the only instances where the Bonus might have an incentivising effect – people had to be considering, or at least entertaining, the idea of working full-time.
There was one person in the study who used to claim Jobseeker’s Allowance and do part-time work, who said that had she known about the scheme she would have increased her part-time hours in order to build up a Bonus.

‘I must admit if I had known that it was 50% of what you got after your L15 I would have done more hours at […]. Because I would have been getting the same money but I would have known that when I went back to work I would have had a bigger bonus. This is a bit of a pain, because the work was there. I didn’t think it would have been worth my while doing it, but it would have been.’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, pre-school child, part-time work)

However, it must be pointed out that these individuals did not regard the Bonus as an incentive to get back into full-time work — they would do that as soon as they could in any case — but rather as a recompense for ‘working for nothing’ now, knowing that they would at least get some of their earnings back in the future.

3.5.3 Moving into full-time work

In terms of moving into full-time work some of the perceived, potential, effects were:

- some respondents, mainly men, only wanted a full-time job, and would not contemplate a part-time job;

- others preferred part-time work and so could not see the Bonus acting as any extra incentive to move them into full-time work. Part-time work was preferred because of the flexibility it offered and it was particularly favoured by lone parents because of the way it could dovetail with childcare commitments:

‘That is why I didn’t bother with it [the Bonus]. I know I can’t see myself doing full-time work for the next two to three years, my children are not young, but they are not teenagers yet; I still have to look after them.’ (Lone parent, 26-40, female, no activities)

- some respondents, who tended to be lone parents or those with a low earnings capacity, felt that benefits offered them more security than they would get from moving into full-time work:

‘That [the Bonus] wouldn’t work for me though, because who would pay for my mortgage, how could I earn enough to pay for my mortgage. Even if I got that lump sum, say I got L1000 that would help with my mortgage for two months, then where do I go from there?’ (Lone parent, 41+, female, part-time work)

‘Why would I want to go full-time. I get lots of [undeclared] work and get my rent paid. I would lose the security of my rent and I couldn’t be doing that!’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, (undeclared) part-time work)

There was a perception, across all fieldwork areas, that there were few suitable full-time jobs that they could apply for and so building up a Bonus could be a ‘waste of time’.

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3.6 Overall views about Back to Work Bonus

Generally, although the respondents felt that the Bonus was a good idea in principle, in practice they did not feel it would act as an incentive for the reasons given in the previous sections.

The amount of Bonus payable after working extra part-time hours was perceived to be very small, since there was a perception that recipients would have to work a long time in order to build up any substantial amount of money because of the low rates of pay offered for part-time work.

As previously discussed, some respondents also felt that it was ‘their’ money that was being paid through the Bonus. There was a considerable strength of feeling to indicate that it was more important to have this money at the time of greatest need – whilst claiming benefit – than when commencing full-time work.

‘Basically they are saving up what you have earned already aren’t they?’
(Lone parent, female, 26–40, no activities)

‘At that time, I needed the money more than anything. I couldn’t understand why they’d done that when I needed that money there and then, and not when I started working.’
(Former jobseeker, female, 26–40, part-time work, paired depth)

3.7 Earnings Disregard

Everyone claiming benefit is entitled to earn a small amount of income-called an earnings disregard – without having their benefit reduced. The standard disregard for a single person without dependants is £5. For couples on income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, it is £10. For lone parents and other designated categories on income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance there is a higher earnings disregard of £15. Earnings over the disregard amount are deducted from a client’s benefit payment on a penny for penny basis.

There was minimal awareness amongst respondents of the term ‘earnings disregard’, although there was more awareness of the concept, once the term was explained.

3.7.1 Awareness and understanding of the Earnings Disregard

There was some confusion over the amount of disregard with suggestions ranging from £5 to £100. Others believed that it was equal to the amount of benefit received, or was equal to benefit plus a little more. Some respondents considered that 16 hours work a week was allowed before it affected the benefit.

Others believed it meant they could do a day’s work before it affected their benefit. This mistaken belief was based on the fact that under the previous benefit regime, Unemployment Benefit was only paid Monday to Saturday. Clients were therefore able to work on a Sunday and earn up to the weekly earnings limit (around £60) without losing any benefit; whereas undertaking the same job on a Saturday would result in the loss of a day’s benefit.
3.7.2 Views about the Earnings Disregard

Some respondents simply were unaware of the earnings disregard rules and did not understand how part-time work affected their benefit.

However, once explained by the research team, the current earnings disregard levels were seen as derisory, especially the £5 for single people. There were many comments that the level was ‘insulting’ and ‘not worth getting out of bed for’.

‘They’ve got cleverer men than me sorting it out, but it seems to me that £15 on top of your benefits is not an incentive at all to go out.’ (Lone parent, female, 41+, pre-school child, no activities)

Disregards were therefore perceived to act as a disincentive to do part-time work since the amount that could be earned was felt to be ‘negligible’, especially once travel and lunch expenses are taken into account.

‘But that £10 you would lose on a bus fare. You’re working at a loss.’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)

There was also some feeling that the low level of disregard would encourage people to not declare part-time work to the jobcentre. This, in turn, would encourage employers to pay low wages for part-time work since they could pay ‘cash in hand’.

‘I can imagine not a lot of people are doing work and declaring it, because if they do, there’s not much of an incentive because it’s only £5.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, voluntary work)

However, given these views about the earnings disregards, there were still people for whom declared part-time work was worthwhile. This was for the following reasons:

• Some lone parents found that their disregard level of £15 meant that working up to this amount became worthwhile and suited their lifestyle.

• A few single young people worked for a couple of hours a week (e.g. washing cars) in order to earn up to the disregard level of £5.

• A view that part-time work could act as a stepping stone into full-time work and or it could provide access to contacts for full-time work.

3.7.3 Suggested changes to the Earnings Disregard

Many respondents considered that it was important to raise the level of the disregard. This would, in their opinion, act as much more of an incentive to take up part-time work than the Back to Work Bonus. This was because recipients would receive money while they were on benefits – when they most needed it. Suggestions of an increased earnings disregard ranged from around £20 to £40.

‘People need help during that time of difficulty. When you get a full-time job, you’re going to probably be better off and people need help when they are going through difficult times.’ (Former jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)
As well as raising the level of earnings disregard, other suggested changes included:

- a tapered disregard whereby the more money a person earned, the more was taken away;
- keeping 50% of earnings received in part-time work whatever the level; and
- being allowed to work a certain number of hours or days a week without loss of benefit.

On balance, respondents felt that the best way to encourage people to increase their part-time hours, or move from part-time to full-time work, was to provide immediate financial rewards. In this respect, a higher earnings disregard was felt to be a much more effective incentive than the current levels of the earnings disregard or the delayed financial incentive encapsulated in the Back to Work Bonus.

3.8 Comparison with the baseline - 'stepping-stones' - research

At the time of the baseline study the Back to Work Bonus had only just been introduced. Nevertheless, initial reactions to the initiative were sought. At that time reactions ranged from 'better than nothing' to laughter - 'the point of working is to get the money now' [3]. Little appears to have changed. Taking account of the fact that, in the present study, awareness and experience of the Bonus were slight, the incentivising effect was felt to be minimal. Partly this was because some people only wanted to work part-time and partly because people wanted the money now - their time of greatest need.

As with the baseline study, the level of the earnings disregard continued to be a disincentive to take work, particularly part-time work. As previously suggested, an increase in the level of the earnings disregard could provide a considerable incentive for people to keep in touch with the labour market, provided that other barriers such as the costs of providing childcare facilities do not intervene.

3.9 Overview of findings: Back to Work Bonus and Earnings Disregard

Overall there was a marked lack of awareness of the Back to Work Bonus Scheme, with only a handful of people recalling the initiative, even amongst those who were eligible. Even where there was some awareness, the connection between part-time work and the Bonus was missing. Information about the Bonus mainly came from letters, but there was little evidence of information being proactively offered by Employment Service or Benefits Agency staff. A number of respondents pointed out numerous administration problems with the payment of their Bonus.

The Bonus was seen as providing financial help on starting full-time work and for living expenses and travel costs prior to the first pay cheque. However, some respondents felt that the Bonus was an 'enforced saving' since it comprised of half the money 'taken off' them
on declared earnings above the disregard. It was felt more important to have this money while claiming benefit, and this mitigated against any incentivising effect of the Bonus.

There was no evidence of the Bonus acting as an incentive to increase hours or to move from part-time into full-time work because of:

• a lack of awareness about the scheme;
• confusion about the rules; and
• a feeling that respondents would have moved into full-time work with, or without, the Bonus.

Because of the lack of awareness about the scheme, respondents were asked if the Bonus could have an effect on moving into full-time work. It was felt that it would not, because some respondents wanted a full-time job only, some only wished to work part-time, that there was more perceived security on benefits than in a full-time job, and that there were a lack of suitable full-time jobs in the area.

In terms of the Bonus acting as an incentive to move into part-time work views were mixed. There was a perception that less than 16 hours was not viable due to the low wages of part-time work and that the Bonus was not enough of an incentive to overcome this. However, it was thought that it could be an incentive for those on low incomes and those who would choose to work part-time anyway. In principle the Bonus was seen as a good idea, but was felt to be ineffectual, as there was a perception that recipients would have to work a long time to build up a sizeable Bonus.

There was some confusion over the term earnings disregard and the amount of the disregard. The current amount was seen as derisory and a disincentive to do part-time work, as the amounts that could be earned were negligible once expenses were taken into account. It was felt that this low level would encourage people not to declare part-time work. It was also felt that the level of earnings disregard should be raised, since this would act as more of an incentive than the Back to Work Bonus.
This chapter looks at the role of part-time work in the ‘work’ strategies of unemployed people. First of all the varied perceptions of part-time work are identified and are linked to the reasons why some people choose to do part-time work whilst claiming benefit and why others do not, even when such work might be available.

Recruitment for the research targeted three groups with experience of part-time work: jobseekers currently doing part-time work whilst claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, lone parents currently doing part-time work and former jobseekers who had worked part-time during their last benefit claim.

This study confirmed, what the baseline research [3] had shown, that part-time work was rarely seen as a direct route into full-time employment. Rather than acting as a stepping-stone into full-time work, because of family or other commitments, part-time work could be one of a range of transitional activities that occur before joining the labour market full-time.

A transitional activity is one which takes place in the intervening period between one type of activity and another, in this case between unemployment and full-time employment. Part-time work can be a stepping-stone into a full-time job but the research findings suggest that this rarely happens. More likely is a further period of unemployment or possibly additional periods of part-time employment. Also, a full-time job is not always the desired outcome of part-time work, for example in the case of lone parents, or those doing voluntary work, or training, with a specific career in mind. This is not to say that part-time work has little value. Rather, the value of part-time work is less concerned with the potential ‘stepping-stone’ effect into full-time work and more concerned with providing a longer-term, ‘transition’, between long-term unemployment and participation in the labour market through a series of unrelated part-time jobs.

4.1 Perceptions of part-time work

Perceptions of part-time work can best be understood in the light of people’s perceptions of work. As a broad generalisation men did not regard part-time work as a ‘proper job’ whereas women, especially those with dependent children, saw part-time work as complementary to their other, equally important, family work.

Perceptions of part-time work also related very strongly to a person’s availability for and desire for full-time work. Lone parents as a group generally saw part-time work in a positive light, and as a means of staying
in the employment market when they could not manage a commitment to full-time work.

‘If I didn’t do part-time work it would drive me mad. At the moment I get the best of both worlds. I get to be at home with my daughters and have some financial independence of just claiming benefit.’ (Lone parent, female, 26–40, part-time work)

However, those used to full-time work and available for it, tended to see part-time work in negative terms, as not offering what they required from employment.

Part-time work was commonly described as casual or temporary. Often it meant doing a job of varying hours. Respondents saw part-time work hours consisting of anything from 1–2 hours a week up to 2 days a week. For many respondents the reality of varying hours of work and varying days of work meant that they saw part-time work as very insecure and unpredictable. There were examples of individuals who worked from home, such as checker packers who often experienced periods of no work followed by a very busy period.

Many respondents saw part-time work as low status employment. Wages were felt to be very low and hours were often anti-social. In line with this was the view that part-time work was not a ‘proper job’, held particularly by men.

‘If you can get it yes, but sometimes doing part-time work you are working long hours and for less than £40 a week. In some respects it is as if you are doing a full-time job.’ (Jobseeker, male, 26–40, no activities)

‘If the wage was right I would probably take part-time work like £80 a week’ (Jobseeker, male, 26–40, no activities)

‘I would not do part-time work. I used to be self-employed and I could earn a lot more being self-employed than being a skinny doing part-time.’ (Lone parent, female, 26–40, no activities)

However, several individuals described their part-time work as either being a semi-permanent or permanent position. This was often a very acceptable arrangement for some lone parents but for others who said that they would prefer full-time employment, part-time work was reluctantly accepted as the only practical and economic option.

4.2 Rules about part-time work whilst claiming benefits

To qualify for Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support, recipients must be unemployed or working less than 16 hours per week, or their partner must not be working more than 24 hours per week.

Respondents were generally aware of the need to declare part-time work to the jobcentre or the Benefits Agency. However, there was an element of confusion in terms of the hours one could work and whether income earned from part-time work affected Jobseeker’s Allowance or other benefits.
Some respondents had the impression that it was only necessary to declare part-time work if the hours worked were in excess of 16 hours per week. Others believed that entitlement to Jobseeker's Allowance stopped completely if you did part-time work. It is clear that many respondents were not taking into account their earnings disregard, nor the amount by which Jobseeker's Allowance was reduced as their earnings increased.

The findings from this study would suggest that a lot of conflicting advice is being given out to clients regarding their options for part-time work whilst claiming.

4.3 Jobcentre attitudes towards part-time work

While some people felt they were being given advice, the main thrust of respondent perceptions of staff attitudes towards part-time work was a feeling of indifference rather than any particular stance against part-time work. Jobcentre staff were not seen as being particularly pro-active or helpful when it came to discussing jobseeking strategies with recipients. Recipients' perceptions of indifference or even negative attitudes towards them on the part of jobcentre staff appeared to discourage them.

'`They don't seem in the remotest bit interested that you are trying to do things to help yourself get back in to work.' (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time work)

'The first person [I spoke to at the jobcentre] could hardly speak English and the second person's attitude was appalling. I was very angry. Sometimes some people can intimidate you and make you feel like you are nothing when you really are trying.' (Former jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time work)

Often they had to wait so long before seeing a member of staff that they would give up and leave without seeing someone.

There was also the accusation that staff were simply not forthcoming with information or advice for recipients. Some maintained that this was because they did not know how to advise recipients, that they did not have the information or they were unable to work out what information to give a particular person. Others were less generous:

'`...they do not know what the hell is available to the unemployed. That’s in my experience... They’ve been about as much use to me as chocolate... God bless them and everything. They’ve done what they can to help but I don’t think they know what they’re about themselves... you talk to two different people down there and they’ll give you two different stories.' (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)

Several respondents had the impression that the jobcentre staff had insufficient knowledge of the benefits system in order to help them work out appropriate strategies for combining part-time work with
claiming benefits. In fact jobcentre staff are able to carry out in-work benefit calculations but the research findings suggest that they were not always willing to do this or they did not make it clear to the recipient that they could do it. Respondents reported that they were told to first put in a claim in order to find out what benefits they were entitled to. What recipients really needed and what they seemed not to be getting was advice on what they were entitled to before they could make a decision to take up a particular part-time job.

Against this overall negative impression of jobcentres were some individual stories of particularly kind and helpful members of staff who offered information on local Job Clubs or training courses. There were also specific individuals who advised recipients on working strategies, how to maximise their working potential while still being able to claim benefits, for example, not working over 16 hours a week or showing how they might end up better off by working over 16 hours and claiming Family Credit.

Taking together all the comments of the respondents in the study, views were very mixed on how they had been treated by jobcentre staff. Some had no comment at all, as their interaction with jobcentre staff was so little. However, where respondents felt they had been treated particularly well or badly they often took time in the interview to comment on this. Respondents who were attending the same jobcentre could quite often have very different experiences. Whether this was due to their attitudes, or of those of jobcentre staff, is impossible to determine given the nature of this research design.

4.4 Reasons for doing part-time work

The study identified a range of reasons why people choose to do part-time work. The findings suggest that one of the principal factors underpinning people’s attitudes to the take-up, or not, of part-time work is the work ethic and that this varies for different groups of people.

Based on the typologies developed in chapter 2, people divided into three broad categories:

- **Active work seekers** were those who desperately wanted to work and who regarded work as essential to their sense of self-respect in the way that it defined them. These were often people who had been made redundant. It could also include younger recipients who had not found their way in the world of work and ended up moving from one job to another.

- **Conditional work seekers** were those who wanted to work but who, for a variety of reasons, - family responsibilities or ill health - could not work part-time. Their take-up of part-time work usually depended on certain conditions being met, usually in the form of support or help from other family members.
The work-shy were those who professed they wanted a job but who seemed to be decidedly uninterested in work and often presented a host of excuses for why they could not take up part-time work or indeed full-time work in many cases. Some of these individuals were doing undeclared work, on their own admission.

4.4.1 Part-time work better than no work?
In general, individuals with a keen attitude towards work tended to take part-time work, so long as it fitted in with family circumstances and responsibilities. Having said that, those who had recently been made redundant, in particular men who regarded their principal role as bread-winner, were often reluctant to take up part-time work unless they had been unemployed for a considerable length of time and were beginning to feel desperate. This ‘status-related’ attitude was prevalent amongst men of all ages.

4.4.2 Supplementary or essential income?
Some of those who were involved in voluntary activities worked part-time to supplement their benefits or to finance their voluntary activities. Others saw part-time work primarily as an activity that kept them busy and provided structure to their daily lives. Some of these, who had financial support from a partner, admitted to finding the money useful but not essential. Others regarded the small amount of extra income from part-time work as an essential supplement to inadequate benefits.

4.4.3 Motivation, confidence and self-esteem
Respondents reported that keeping motivated – having a sense of purpose – was an important reason for doing part-time work whilst on benefits. Respondents also stated that doing part-time work helped them maintain their confidence and self-esteem. This was particularly true for individuals who had been out of full-time work for some time.

‘Part-time work builds your confidence back up, even if it is only 5 hours a week. You have to make the effort.’ (Lone parent, female, 18-25, part-time work)

4.4.4 Keeping up skills or learning new ones
The experiences gained as well as the skills learned were also considered important reasons for doing part-time work. This view linked to respondents’ perceptions that employers preferred people who were in work rather than those who were out of work.

‘If I had been on the dole for a year then yes I would take part-time work. Because once you have a job the more employers are interested in you.’ (Jobseeker, female, 18-25 no activities)

4.4.5 Complementary to work or the only alternative
Lone parents faced specific barriers to work, generally, and some of these applied equally to part-time work. However, if certain conditions were met, – namely work within a reasonable travelling distance from home, working hours which fitted in with childcare responsibilities or family or voluntary support for childcare if working hours were outside nursery or school hours – then many lone parents welcomed part-time work as a means of supplementing their income from benefits and also as a means of having some sort of life outside of the home.
4.4.6 Choice of part-time over full-time work

There were some individuals who did part-time work in preference to full-time work because of the independence and flexibility which it offered them. These were people who liked to have free time to do other things, such as voluntary work, or who moved from one part-time job to another, or even did two part-time jobs at the same time, depending on their needs and circumstances at the time.

4.4.7 As a stepping-stone to full-time work

There were a small number of respondents who had taken up part-time work in the hope or expectation that it would lead to full-time employment.

'The chance of a full-time position at the end of working part-time did attract me to the job. As it turned out the boss said I could I could stay on full-time.' (Former jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time work)

In some case these expectations were fulfilled, but more often they were disappointed. Either people felt they were exploited and made to work anti-social or varying hours at short notice, or if they were taken on full-time it was only on a short term basis.

4.5 Reasons for not doing part-time work

As indicated earlier, people’s perceptions of part-time work linked into their decision not to take on part-time work.

4.5.1 Part-time work is ‘not a proper job’

The belief that part-time work was not a ‘proper job’ was a key factor for some respondents who refused to take up part-time work. This was particularly true for people who had worked full-time in the past. More specifically, these respondents felt that part-time employment would not lead anywhere in terms of their job aspirations. This view of a ‘proper’ job was more likely to be held by men rather than women.

'I think women would consider it more so than men because I think when men are unemployed their sole purpose is to get back into full-time employment and that’s all they’re focused on. They want a job, they want to be the breadwinner, they want to bring the salary in and they won’t consider part-time...' (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)

Women often had a more pragmatic approach to work and income earning than did men.

'I would go for part-time clerical work and accrue while I was looking for something full-time rather than not work at all.' (Jobseeker, female, 41+, voluntary work)

4.5.2 Menial, low status work

Some respondents, who had held fairly senior positions in previous full-time employment, regarded part-time work as menial and of low status. This view was reinforced by those who said that there were not many well-paid part-time jobs available. Indeed, many of the part-time jobs being done by respondents were menial jobs such as cleaning. Such jobs often paid very low wages.
In theory it sounds brilliant [the Bonus] but I don’t know in practice how it would work. It depends really what sort of jobs are available part-time and they’re very few and far between I think. I couldn’t do a cleaning job, a man that’s held my position in senior management.’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)

4.5.3 Low pay and the costs of part-time work

Low pay was also a reason given by many respondents for not doing part-time work. Wages quoted for non-skilled part-time work ranged from £1.50 to £3.50 per hour. People often said they felt insulted being offered such low rates of pay when they were trying to support themselves and their families.

‘It wouldn’t pay, it’s £4 an hour, that’s top whack, you can go through the vacancies now, you’re lucky if you get £3 an hour and goodness knows when this minimal wage comes in, a lot of them jobs won’t be there.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

Within this context several respondents reported that such low wages often put the costs of working higher than their potential earnings. This meant that in some instances the costs of travel and/or childcare costs were in excess of the wages that could be earned. As a result of this many respondents held the belief that one could easily be in a position where they were ‘working for nothing’.

In some cases respondents reported that working part-time would leave them worse off than on benefits and without the security of having certain expenses met which would otherwise be covered by Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support.

‘… they’re keeping it below 16 hours on part-time.…. that wouldn’t even bring me in what I was getting on the Jobseeker’s Allowance. So if I went back part-time I’d be worse off.’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work, paired depth)

4.5.4 Low earnings disregard

In combination with low wages the low level of earnings disregard was seen as a major deterrent to part-time work. For unskilled, low wage, earners the fact that all their earnings, apart from the disregard, were effectively taken back in the form of reduced benefit, meant that they felt they would be working for nothing. Some lone parents felt that the higher disregard of £15 made part-time work slightly more worthwhile, but there was a predominant view that it was still much too low to function as an incentive.

4.5.5 Fluctuating hours and wages

Several respondents pointed out that the fluctuation of wages due to varying hours of work was a contributory factor in their decision not to take on part-time work. They reported that their benefits would fluctuate with their wages and this caused a considerable amount of stress, partly because of the considerable amount of paperwork involved but also because of the disruption of family life.
4.5.6 Disruption of family life

Varying hours of work, part-time shifts, which vary from week to week, or working anti-social hours at short notice, were extremely hard to manage when there were young children in the family. Even when young children were not involved, unpredictable working hours were disruptive to family life and some respondents took the view that it was not worth the ‘hassle’ and they would prefer to wait for a full-time job.

‘If it would lead on to something better I would give it some thought. Otherwise I would say no straight away because I would be losing my benefits. I would be worse off and I’ve got my kids to think about.’ (Jobseeker, female, 26-40, part-time work)

For the lone parents in the study the issue of varying hours and shift working was exacerbated by the difficulties they felt they were likely to experience in arranging suitable childcare facilities. In addition, it was particularly evident that the lone parents in the study felt they faced additional barriers to re-joining the labour market. For lone parents with pre-school children the key issue was the cost of either part-time or full-time childcare; for those with older, school-age, children the issue was more to do with finding suitable after-school care together with a view that it was their responsibility to be at home when their child came home from school. Few work opportunities fitted in with school hours. Many lone parents, in particular, also felt very strongly that they would not even entertain the idea of work until their child was old enough to be able to look after themselves. It was only those lone parents with older children who were confident with their after-school arrangements (usually parents or relatives) who were able to work, or considered work as viable. While lone parents often expressed a great desire to work, the children came first and they were postponing their work decisions until their child was old enough. Lone parents tended to think that children were old enough to be left alone by the age of around ten or eleven.

4.5.7 Need to be available for full-time work

There was also a commonly held view that it was better not to take part-time work in order to be available for full-time work should the opportunity arise.

‘I don’t want to get trapped into a part-time job where I’ve suddenly got to stop and go looking for other work.’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, no activities)

4.5.8 De-skilling effect

These individuals alleged that being in part-time work might lead them to miss out in full-time work opportunities. Furthermore, they did not feel that they would be developing new skills while doing part-time work, primarily because part-time work was predominantly seen as unskilled.

Some respondents suggested that part-time work could effectively de-skill. They felt that the menial work offered on a part-time basis did not offer them a challenge nor the opportunity to maintain their existing
skills. This view tended to be prominent among those who had held long term full-time positions in the past and was particularly true for those who had worked at managerial level.

'I was a senior manager and the part-time occupations I have seen are basically at the bottom. I don't think I would like that again. I mean I would not like to have a foreman or a supervisor as my boss.' (Jobseeker, male, 41+, no activities)

4.5.9 Confusion over benefit rules regarding part-time work

As stated earlier, quite a number of respondents were confused about the rules regarding part-time work while claiming benefits. Some claimed that they had been misinformed by their local jobcentre. For those recipients who believed that their benefits would be immediately stopped if they were to take on part-time work, this confusion was clearly a factor in their reluctance to work part-time.

Jobcentre staff are, of course, able to discuss with jobseekers what benefits can be claimed whilst doing part-time work. There were, however, signs of communication problems between staff and clients which maybe the result of a long-standing culture of mistrust between those in 'authority' on one side and those in receipt of benefits or the other.

4.6 Undeclared part-time work

The study found some evidence of undeclared part-time work. Several respondents openly admitted to doing part-time work whilst receiving benefit and not declaring it. In addition, other respondents spoke of 'other people they knew' in receipt of benefits who did part-time work and did not declare it.

'I can quite understand why people on benefit go out and do cash-in-hand work, it is not easy living on benefit.' (Lone parent, female, 18-25, no activities)

Indeed, several respondents expressed fears of being reported or shopped if they undertook part-time work on such a basis.

However, there were a number of reasons cited as to why not declaring part-time work while in receipt of benefits could be justified. These are as follows:

• low earning disregard;
• the 'hassle' of the benefits system; and
• low wages.

4.6.1 Low earnings disregard

The low level of the earnings disregard was universally condemned as a major deterrent to accepting low-paid, part-time work. Consequently, it became the principal reason for people doing undeclared part-time work. There was a strong feeling expressed that living off benefits was not easy and that if people were prepared to 'get off their backsides' and earn a bit more money to supplement what they
considered to be a fairly meagre income, they should not be immediately penalised.

'I used to do car boot sales every Sunday, you can’t declare it, because it would affect your benefit. If you was to do part-time work you could only earn £15 before you had to declare it, so it would just be taken if off your benefit…… so there’s no incentive to go out to work, because at the end of the day you are not going to be any better off, except for £15.' (Lone parent, female, 26–40, no activities)

4.6.2 Low wages

The low rates of pay for unskilled part-time work, combined with the low levels of the earnings disregard, acted as a disincentive to declare small amounts of part-time work.

Because respondents generally considered the low level of the earnings disregard to be derisory they did not find the same sense of moral obligation to declare small amounts of income as they might have done if they had been earning large amounts of money. There was a sense, also, that not declaring small amounts of income would be much less of an ‘offence’ than if the amounts were larger.

4.6.3 Administrative complexity of benefits system

Many respondents felt that the paperwork required as a result of part-time earning was complex. Therefore, some recipients preferred not to declare small amounts of part-time work in order to avoid these perceived administrative difficulties.

'I didn’t want to say too much about what I was doing. I know there are these clauses where you have to declare how many hours you are working and how much you are getting paid but I did not want the hassle of the paperwork.' (Former jobseeker, male, 18–25, part-time work)

4.7 Part-time work as a stepping-stone into full-time employment

The findings from this study show part-time work to be more of a transitional activity between unemployment and full-time employment rather than a direct stepping stone into a specific job or into a particular type of work. Respondents were frequently keen to dispel the notion that part-time work could immediately precede full-time work, the implication of the term ‘stepping-stone’. Rather, they preferred to think of part-time work as a transitional activity, one where the ultimate outcome could be full-time work, but with a number of periods of unemployment and part-time work in between.

4.7.1 Positive views about part-time work

Many of the more positive views were based on the perceived opportunities that part-time work could provide rather than on actual experience of part-time work leading to a ‘proper job’. In other words, they come from people who had no personal experience of part-time working leading to full-time work but who responded positively when asked their views.
"I think it's a good idea, because you get paid for it and it's a stepping-stone into full-time employment, experience and whatever .... getting part-time work is starting the ball rolling." (Former jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time and voluntary work)

Respondents felt that part-time work was more likely to lead into full-time work if it was related to one's job aspirations. There was also a view that part-time work could act as a route into the job market generally. In this context, respondents explained that part-time work helped to develop and maintain work-related skills and confidence that would keep them ready to move into a full-time position should the opportunity arise.

Furthermore, there was the view that part-time work could be useful in terms of making contacts which might lead to full-time employment. Respondents who held this view tended either to have been self-employed at some point, or they were freelance professionals currently between jobs.

'I was working for a friend and got introduced to an art technician, it was very slow and sporadic part-time work. Then it gradually turned into full-time work.' (Former jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time work)

A small number of respondents thought that part-time work might develop unexpectedly into a full-time position.

4.7.2 Negative views about part-time work

Negative views about part-time work were mainly based on the perception that part-time work was irrelevant to the search for a full-time job and that it might even be a hindrance. Many saw part-time workers as susceptible to exploitation by employers because they were often prepared to accept low wages and unpredictable working hours in the hope or expectation of being offered full-time work. These negative views have been described in detail in section 4.5 and will only be listed briefly here:

- fluctuation of hours and pay, often at short notice;
- side-tracked into a job that would probably not lead anywhere;
- a possible de-skilling effect;
- unlikely to learn new skills; and
- a serious deviation from their search for a full-time job.

4.8 Has part-time work acted as a stepping-stone?

Overall, the study found very little evidence of part-time work leading directly, or indirectly, to full-time work. Most respondents found it difficult to find part-time work which fulfilled their expectations and enabled them to move off benefit. However, there was some very limited evidence that for some individuals part-time work had been an indirect route into full-time work. These respondents claimed that just being in the labour market had been a contributory factor in their finding full-time work.
Other respondents reported that part-time work had enabled them to network and make useful contacts. This in turn had led to an offer of full-time or more part-time work at a later date. Examples of this group included self-employed, freelance professionals.

Furthermore, a few respondents added that part-time work had helped them keep up to date with their skills and helped maintain a healthy work ethic.

For some individuals the move from part-time work to full-time work had been accidental rather than planned. There were examples of part-time retail work and bar work becoming full-time positions.

‘I didn’t think so at the time but through working in a pub I got another job with [a paint firm]. So I suppose it was a stepping-stone wasn’t it.’
(Lone parent, female, 18-25, part-time work)

Whereas part-time work can act as a transition to full-time employment, there are a number of instances where this is clearly not the case.

It is clear from this study that recipients’ needs in terms of help and advice from staff about combining part-time work with claims for benefits are not often being met. In addition, the jobcentres were not felt to be succeeding in promoting part-time work as a route into full-time employment. Recipients clearly would like staff to be more proactive in offering them help and advice.

Although jobseekers were required to report to the jobcentre once a fortnight, and they were asked about their jobsearch activities, many reported that these were little more than hasty signing-on sessions. They perceived jobcentre staff to be either extremely busy or ‘not interested’. Some younger recipients in particular, expressed a desire for a more frequent review of their situation, compared to the current review which takes place after 13 weeks of receiving Jobseeker’s Allowance. These respondents clearly felt unable to raise issues and ask for help and advice during their fortnightly visit.

A number of respondents also expressed a demand for more information concerning courses they could take whilst unemployed. In conjunction with this, several of these respondents mentioned that advice in terms of travel allowances whilst on benefit and undertaking a training course would also be welcome.

Finally, respondents highlighted a need for the Employment Service to signpost recipients to other information centres, for example, career advice centres which might be able to give more detailed information. Privately funded local community help groups and organisations such as Citizen’s Advice Bureaux were also mentioned in this context.
4.10 Comparison with the baseline - 'stepping-stones' - research

The present study tended to confirm the baseline study findings\(^\text{18}\) of the perception of part-time work. Part-time working continues to be seen, predominantly, as 'working' for nothing, due to the combined effects of the low level of the earnings disregard, the costs of going out to work and the cost and availability of transport. Part-time work also continues to be seen as menial, low status and offering poor job prospects. An increasing emphasis on shift working, particularly split shifts, meant that the 'disruptive' view of part-time work was heightened in the present study, a view held very strongly amongst the lone parents.

In the baseline study there was a sense that part-time work could offer a useful route to gaining confidence, skills and possibly work, a view that was encouraged by media concentration on part-time working and that a flexible workforce would be the way of the future. While there remained a number of people in the present study who saw a personal value in part-time work there was much less enthusiasm, overall, for getting involved in part-time work. This was for two main reasons. First, the wages associated with part-time work continued to be very low. Indeed, some of the hourly rates quoted by respondents in the present study were lower than those evidenced in the baseline study. Second, there was some sense that, despite what people felt they had been led to believe, part-time work rarely leads to better paid or more interesting work. This time, there was a view that part-time work could easily become a treadmill ultimately leading nowhere, a reflection of the fact that the part-time jobs that people had secured were unskilled, low paid and often temporary. The exceptions to these tended to be people who had sufficient skill to secure contract work, for example as a teacher or factory floor manager.

As with the previous study, some respondents were attracted to part-time work, for much the same reasons identified in the previous study. They were willing to work for small financial gains as they felt that part-time work could have indirect benefits and ultimately enhance their job prospects. Unlike the previous study, there was greater emphasis on the value of relatively small earnings. This was particularly apparent amongst the lone parents who felt that the extra £15 they could earn was valuable, albeit small.

It was also apparent in the current study that reliance on undeclared earnings had become more 'legitimate' in the sense that respondents, while condemning the practice in principle, were more likely to see this as a way of making ends meet. In this respect there were families in the present study - unlike the baseline study - where undeclared earnings formed a cornerstone of their income. Implicated in the previous research and much more apparent in the current study was the low level of the earnings disregard which was felt to almost encourage people not to declare their earnings.
Although there were one or two instances of part-time work acting as a stepping-stone to full-time work in the present study, the overall belief that there could be a stepping-stone effect for part-time work had dissipated somewhat compared to the previous study. Whilst recognising that the right type of part-time work could enhance skills and keep people in touch with the labour market, the predominant view was that the 'right type' of part-time work hardly existed anymore. Based on their perceptions of the wages offered, the unskilled nature of the part-time work available and evidence from friends and relatives who had found part-time work to be 'dead-end' jobs, the prevailing view was that part-time work was unlikely to lead to anything better. Where people were very motivated to find work there was a tendency to see part-time work more as a distraction. The seeds of this view were apparent in the baseline research; the view now seemed to be more strongly held.

4.11 Main findings: The role of part-time work

Men did not regard part-time work as a 'proper job' whereas some women, especially those with children saw it as complementary to family commitments. Perceptions of part-time work related to a person's availability, and desire, for full-time work. Part-time work was seen as low status and was described as temporary and casual. It was also seen as quite insecure and with low wages and anti-social hours. Respondents were aware of the need to declare part-time work, although there was confusion over the rules.

One of the main factors shaping people's attitudes towards the take-up of part-time work is the work ethic. People could be divided into three categories:

- active work seekers – who wanted to work and tended to take part-time work as long as it fitted with in their family responsibilities;
- conditional work seekers – who wanted to work but for a variety of reasons could not work part-time;
- work-shy – who seemed to be uninterested and presented excuses for why they could not do part-time work.

Generally, those who did part-time work showed a willingness to work for small amounts of income and saw it as an activity to keep them busy. For some, part-time work helped to keep up, or learn, skills and give increased confidence, self-esteem and motivation. Some chose part-time work over full-time work because of the independence it offered, and a small number of others took it up in the expectation that it might act as a stepping-stone to full-time work.

Some people decided against doing part-time work because:

- it was not felt to be a 'proper job';
- it was regarded as menial and low status;
• low pay and costs of part-time work;
• low earnings disregard;
• disruption of family life;
• the need to be available for full-time work;
• the deskillmg effect of potentially menial part-time work; and
• confusion over the benefit rules regarding part-time work.

There was some evidence of undeclared part-time work, although there was a general view that not declaring part-time work was wrong. Reasons given to justify non-declaration included the low earnings disregard, the ‘hassle’ of the benefits system and the low wages for part-time work.

Part-time work was seen as more of a transitional activity than a direct stepping-stone between unemployment and full-time work. Some felt that part-time work was more likely to lead to full-time work if it was related to a person’s job aspirations. Part-time work could also help to develop skills and the confidence to move into full-time work and could be useful for making contacts. However, there were some views that part-time work could be a hindrance or irrelevant in obtaining full-time work. Overall, the study found very little evidence of part-time work leading directly to full-time work, but there was some evidence of an indirect, or transitional effect.
5 THE ROLE OF VOLUNTARY WORK

This chapter examines the role of voluntary activities in the 'work strategies' of people claiming benefits. First of all respondents' perceptions of voluntary work are described. This is followed by respondent perceptions of jobcentre attitudes towards voluntary work and people's knowledge of the rules relating to voluntary activities whilst claiming benefits. The reasons why people do, or do not, do voluntary work will constitute the major part of this chapter. Finally, the role of voluntary activities will be examined in the context of being a 'stepping-stone' into paid employment.

Recruitment of individuals into the study specifically targeted two groups of people with experience of voluntary activities: jobseekers who were currently doing some form of voluntary work whilst claiming Jobseeker's Allowance and former jobseekers who had done some voluntary work whilst claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in the past. There were others in the sample who had either current or past experience of voluntary activities, some who were doing some sort of unpaid activity but had not thought of it as voluntary work and others who were very familiar with the concept of voluntary work through close friends or 'relatives.'

5.1 Perceptions and experiences of voluntary work

The way voluntary work was perceived by the respondents in this study appeared to depend to some extent on their knowledge and experience of it. At one end of the spectrum were those who had simply never thought about it or for whom the whole idea of working for nothing was an alien concept. At the other extreme were those for whom voluntary work was a central activity in their life or whose current employment or career originated in a spell of voluntary activity. Some were engaged in voluntary activities regardless of whether they were employed or unemployed, while others were motivated to do voluntary work during a period of unemployment.

The most stereotypical views were held by those who had no experience of voluntary activities or who had never thought much about it. There was no clear pattern to those who had or had not ever thought about voluntary work. A typical view was of 'the little old lady working in Oxfam' or a well-to-do person who did not need to earn a living; generally older or middle-aged women, probably retired and who liked doing good works.

'It's like working for Oxfam, working for the old people...' (Jobseeker, female, 26–40, no activities)

'... I think it appeals to older woman ... and women who retired...’
(Former jobseeker, female, 41+, part-time work)
Probably people who've already got plenty of money and don't need to go and earn extra money so they've got nothing to do with their time ... but some people are different, they just like to help.' (Partner of Jobseeker, 26-40 yrs, no activities)

People who are retired and bored. I was told at the jobcentre, why don't you do voluntary work. They said it didn't necessarily mean in a charity shop. I didn't understand what they were talking about.' (Jobseeker, female, 26-40, no activities)

Some made a distinction between charity work which seemed acceptable on a voluntary basis and work such as teaching or nursing which they thought ought not to be done on a voluntary basis.

Proper voluntary work is charities, but there's voluntary work that should be paid... like teachers' helps in school, nursery helps... I would never do it.' (Lone parent, female, 18-25, no activities)

The 'typical' voluntary worker was not, in their eyes, someone like themselves. However, when presented with a much wider range of voluntary activities than their limited vision of charity work allowed, they often realised that a volunteer could be someone like themselves.

Is it helping out, well, working but not getting paid for it? To be honest I don't know much about it... But later when asked what sort of people might do voluntary work he said '... could be older people, retired people, people like me looking for work.' (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

One young volunteer admitted that her perception of volunteers has changed completely since she started doing it herself. She had thought that only people with 'plenty of time on their hands and [who] don't need the money' would do voluntary work. Now, with little time and very little money she found herself doing it as a route into her chosen career of youth and community work:

'Until you look into what sort of voluntary work there is then you find out there is voluntary work for all sorts of things.' (Former jobseeker, female, 18-25, voluntary and part-time work)

Those who were either currently doing voluntary work themselves or who were closely connected to people doing voluntary work had much more varied and enlightened perceptions to offer. Some of the voluntary activities engaged in by respondents, or mentioned by those who might consider doing voluntary work, included helping in special needs schools, nursing, furniture recycling, teaching air cadets, special constabulary, environmental activities, advisory work, youth and community work, working in museums and indeed, working in charity shops.
Sometimes those with no direct experience of voluntary work themselves and who initially thought they had very little to say on the subject, with some persistent probing, were able to recall that they did know someone who was doing, or had done, voluntary work. Sometimes this led spontaneously to a recognition that they might be able to do voluntary work themselves. Case 7 below illustrates this.

**Case 7: Young jobseeker realises potential of voluntary work**

A 20 year old man had given the stereotypical response to what he thought voluntary work meant - working in the Oxfam shop - and how he could not possibly consider doing that himself because it was generally old ladies who did it and his friends would tease him. However, during the interview he also recalled that his father had once done voluntary gardening during a period of unemployment. This had led directly to him being offered a paid job looking after the gardens for the Probation Service and he had ended up training to be a Probation Officer himself. Our respondent then said: 'but I like gardening, I wouldn't mind doing gardening, because you could end up starting your own business.'

5.2 Rules about voluntary work whilst claiming benefits

There are no restrictions to the number of hours voluntary work can be undertaken but recipients must be able to show that they are willing and able to respond to job offers and interviews at 48 hours’ notice and that they are ‘actively seeking’ work.

Knowledge of the rules relating to benefit recipients doing voluntary work was mixed. There was quite widespread recognition of the need to declare voluntary activities to the jobcentre, especially if claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance, because of the need to be actively seeking work and readily available for work. Lone parents were in a different category because they were not required to be available for work.

People who were doing voluntary work generally understood the rules correctly, that is that voluntary activities had to be declared and that one had to be prepared to give up voluntary work if they were offered paid employment. It was the lack of understanding of those not doing voluntary work which merits some attention.

There were five commonly held views:

- all voluntary activities must be declared;
- voluntary work is nothing to do with the jobcentre because it is unpaid;
- it is best to declare voluntary work in case one is accused of doing undeclared paid work;
- voluntary work is not allowed whilst claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance; and
only a prescribed number of hours of voluntary work is allowed whilst on Jobseeker’s Allowance.

‘[a member of staff at the jobcentre] said, you can’t just say you are doing voluntary work because they will just stop your Jobseeker’s Allowance because if you’re doing voluntary work, you can’t do paid work. You should be doing paid work if you are going to work at all.’ (Former jobseeker, female, 41+, voluntary work)

‘I don’t feel it’s got anything to do with them [jobcentre] … I certainly don’t inform them of my whereabouts, what I do and what I don’t do unless I’m earning money.’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, part-time work)

It would appear that conflicting advice was being given out to clients regarding their options for voluntary work whilst claiming benefits. The same point was made regarding jobcentre advice and part-time work in the previous chapter.

5.3 Attitudes of the jobcentre towards voluntary work

There was a sense in which some respondents felt disconnected from the jobcentre and the staff who dealt with them. Recipients often did not ask questions and did not seem to want to find anything out partly because of a lack of motivation, and because they were fearful of asking anything in case they were asked questions in return.

‘I didn’t want to say too much about what I was doing, because of these clauses where you have to declare how many hours you have done and during that time you are not actively seeking work.’ (Former jobseeker, 26-40, voluntary work)

Many went through the motions of going down to the jobcentre, some quite regularly, others only when they had to, merely in order to fulfil the requirements of looking for, and applying for, jobs.

There were numerous instances of respondents referring to ‘being shopped’. Some had been reported for doing undeclared work when, according to them, they were ‘just helping out’; some spoke of ‘people they knew’ who were reported for working ‘on the side’ and there was generally an aura of suspicion and mistrust in the relations between recipient and staff, from the perceptive of many recipients at least.

‘… Because people round here grass on you! Once they accused me of working and I wasn’t, somebody had phoned up maliciously and told them I was working and I wasn’t.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

Clients reported feeling degraded and discouraged when they went into the jobcentre and their perceptions of the way the staff treated them seemed to play a major part in this. It is in the light of these general perceptions, however acquired, that one must consider recipient perceptions of the attitudes of jobcentre staff towards voluntary activities.
‘It was harrowing, it really was… I just felt they were talking down to you, you felt a little bit worthless the way they were speaking to you. I used to dread going in there to sign on, I hated it, really hated it.’ (Former jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time and voluntary work)

Another benefit recipient described her recent visit to the jobcentre as ‘intimidating’ and ‘demoralising’. She said that it compared very unfavourably with her memories of signing on twenty years previously when she remembered coming out feeling so encouraged because the staff made the whole business of job hunting seem exciting.

The predominant view was that because jobcentres were seen as primarily concerned with getting people back to paid work, voluntary work was not taken seriously or was seen as a barrier to the search for full time work. In fact, the Employment Service do regard voluntary work as a stepping-stone to employment and there were instances of jobcentre staff actively encouraging clients to consider voluntary activities, but these were in the minority.

One respondent who was in and out of work and did regular bouts of voluntary work said he did not admit it to the jobcentre. When asked why he replied:

‘Because I knew they would be on my back. Nobody does voluntary work as far as they’re concerned, so if you’re working you must be paid.’ (Former jobseeker, male, 26-40, voluntary work)

‘… what they say is, if you are in voluntary work, then how can you be looking for full-time work, because you are too busy doing the voluntary work to look for paid employment.’ (Jobseeker, Female, 26-40, pre-school child, part-time and voluntary work)

Some respondents reported indifference from staff when they told them of the voluntary work they were doing. Others reported being told that they had to be prepared to drop their voluntary work as soon as a job came up. In fact, all jobseekers must be prepared to start a job within 48 hours and to re-arrange other commitments, including voluntary work. Some reported that jobcentre staff had told them they could not be looking properly for a job if they spent too much time doing voluntary activities and either told them they could only do so many hours or that were not allowed to do any at all.

There was also a perception that people who do voluntary or part-time work are seen as ‘soft’ by the jobcentre staff and that these people are targeted for questioning, as opposed to the hardened work resisters of whom the staff are perceived as being a bit ‘scared’.

Overall there was a perception of negative attitudes from jobcentre staff to the idea of voluntary work and certainly very little active
encouragement. However, it must be emphasised that advising clients about voluntary work is not actually within the remit of the Employment Service.

By contrast, there was one case of a person being told by the jobcentre to accept a specific voluntary job or else he would lose his benefit.

'They just said there's gardening, voluntary, if you want to go and do it, ... they said you either do it or you lose your money, and I thought I've got no choice.' (Jobseeker, male, 26–40, voluntary work)

In fact when he did it he found that he rather enjoyed it and said he would do it again.

There were some instances where jobcentre staff were reported to be encouraging individuals to do some voluntary work, saying that it would be good for their curriculum vitae, it might give them other skills which would enhance their job prospects, and it could improve their access to information about job vacancies. This is, in fact, the Employment Service view about voluntary work. However, these were isolated instances and certainly not the norm.

'... he said 'if you take voluntary work, you can always put that down, it's always another string to your bow'. ' (Jobseeker, male, 18–25, no activities)

'They said you should do it to put on your CV to show that you have at least done something.' (Jobseeker, female, 26–40, no activities)

5.4 Reasons for doing voluntary work

As previous research has shown, the reasons given by respondents for doing voluntary work can be summarised under three broad headings:

- Direct work-related.
- Indirect work-related, and
- Non work-related.

5.4.1 Direct work-related reasons for doing voluntary work

Those who chose to take up voluntary activities with a specific job in mind were very focused individuals who knew what they wanted to do and were setting out to achieve their goal. They were generally younger recipients who had not yet settled into a full-time working pattern and were actively pursuing a particular career. Depending on their chosen career, they saw voluntary activities helping them into paid employment in a variety of ways, including networking, learning specific skills, gaining experience and perhaps even getting qualifications in their field. For them, paid work was often a lower priority than the voluntary work they were doing.
5.4.1.1 Trade specific voluntary work

There are specific occupations for which unpaid working is an accepted route into the profession, although many would not have thought of themselves as doing voluntary work. A television cameraman and journalist were two professionals amongst the respondents who had used voluntary working in this way while claiming benefits. Whilst working for nothing they were networking within the field, gaining a reputation and ultimately making contact with future employers. Periods of voluntary working were often interspersed with periods of paid work.

Working in museums was also an accepted way of getting on in the profession:

'I suppose in a more specific way... like we get volunteers at [museum] ... it's standard there, the voluntary work. It's not always a means to get on in the Tate, but it always looks good on people's portfolios.' (Former jobseeker, female, 26-40, voluntary work)

5.4.1.2 Gaining skills, qualifications and experience

Although voluntary working was not a recognised route into such occupations as teaching and nursing there were examples where individuals had chosen to spend some time working in these specific fields on a voluntary basis in the hope that it would either give added value to an application for education and training or, for those already qualified, that it might lead them into paid work at some time in the future.

'I did use to do some voluntary work on the maternity ward at the hospital [when I was at College] ... so that when I put my nursing application in I could put that I'd done voluntary work and it looks really good because you've had that kind of an experience... I think people tend to do it looking for a full-time job.' (Lone parent, female, 26-40, pre-school child, part-time work)

One young woman had worked once a week in a youth club in order to gain experience and some qualifications, as a way into youth and community work. Her voluntary work did in fact determine what part-time or casual work she accepted because her priority lay in pursuing her career and not merely in earning a living. When interviewed she was no longer on Jobseeker's Allowance because she had enough hours working in a residential home on a casual basis.

5.4.1.3 Networking

Those who were very focused on a particular career path did see the possibilities of making useful contacts if they accepted some unpaid work in their field. Whilst they would not necessarily consider voluntary work generally they were certainly open to suggestions of working for nothing
if it meant they might meet someone who would offer them work or put them in contact with a future employer.

‘It’s worthwhile doing it, because if you are in voluntary work, you get to meet people and they might know if there’s a full-time job somewhere, and you are actually getting out and doing work.’ (Jobseeker, female, 18-25, part-time and voluntary work)

A young graphic designer who had not yet managed to find employment was very single-minded in his determination not to stray from his chosen career and would have been more inclined to do graphic work for nothing than do something else which was completely unconnected even though he would be paid. Similarly, a lone parent doing a course in travel and tourism was not interested in voluntary work generally but would consider a placement, working for nothing, in a travel agency. The desire to undertake voluntary work in a relevant area was frequently mentioned by respondents but often forgotten by placement agencies and organisations providing opportunities.

5.4.2 Indirect work-related reasons for doing voluntary work

Voluntary work was seen to have some benefits which might enhance a person’s prospects of getting a job although they might not be directly related to a specific field of work. Many were aware, through bitter experience, that employers tend to prefer taking on people who are already working.

‘I know that employers are not really interested in people being unemployed for more than a couple of months, in fact, they are not really interested in anyone who has been unemployed at all. I have applied for lots of jobs. A few years ago I would at least get an interview, but now they don’t even write back.’ (Jobseeker, female, 26-40, no activities)

5.4.2.1 Gaining skills and experience

Voluntary activities were seen by some as a way of extending skills and gaining experience generally, which might make one a more versatile and employable person.

‘If people haven’t worked it gives them experience of a workplace…. learning about work…. confidence in working with people, self-confidence.’ (Jobseeker, female, 18-25, no activities)

Even working in a charity shop or selling cosmetics from house to house without any financial reward was seen as a way of gaining experience with customers and showing a sense of responsibility and trustworthiness.

‘….and I always think well if I went for a job, surely if they heard that I had been responsible to collect orders, collect money, send money, so I think that’s a good thing.’ (Lone parent, female, 18-25, no activities)

‘…. and also it’s teaching you another skill if it is something you’re never done before. Even if you don’t get a job you are learning something about something else.’ (Former jobseeker, female, 18-25, part-time and voluntary work)
One respondent, who was in the Territorial Army part-time, was teaching air cadets map-reading skills on a voluntary basis in the evening. He got some personal satisfaction from passing on his knowledge, ‘putting something back in’ but he also saw it as a way of developing his leadership qualities by taking on this extra responsibility.

5.4.2.2 Retaining the work habit

Many unemployed people, in particular those who had spent a considerable time out of work, were aware that it was easy to slip into an undisciplined way of living – getting up late, not having to make an effort for anything or anybody, or to make an effort with one’s appearance. Taking part in some voluntary activity was seen as a way of keeping oneself in the habit, or discipline, of working which was good in itself but also good for the morale.

‘... you’ve got to turn up there at a certain time... you’re working with the public, you’ve got to look a bit smarter... and I think just by having something to do it gives people a little bit more pride in themselves.’
(Jobseeker, female, 41+, voluntary work)

Doing voluntary work also indicated to potential employers that they were willing to work and that they were not just sitting about all day doing nothing. It was a commonly held belief that employers preferred to employ people who were working and that if you did not have a paid job, it would be better to be doing voluntary work than nothing at all.

‘... If I go for a job interview and they say ‘what have you been doing for the past thirteen weeks?’ I can say I have done something, it’s better than saying ‘I sat at home looking for a job.’ It makes you sound a bit more, you know, not a dole dosser.’ (Jobseeker, female, 18-25, voluntary work)

This view was reinforced by some recipients who had been managers before being made redundant and who had experience of employing people themselves.

5.4.3 Non work-related reasons for doing voluntary work

Many people did voluntary work for reasons quite unrelated to opportunities for paid employment.

5.4.3.1 Social conscience

Social conscience or philanthropic reasons were often cited by those who were involved in some sort of voluntary activity.

‘I think of caring for the community... you know good neighbourly type thing, you help by doing the best you can... the only advantage I suppose is the fact that I’m doing my bit for these youngsters. I don’t class it as for my benefit.’ (Jobseeker, male, 41+, voluntary work)
People who had no experience of voluntary work themselves tended to see volunteers as special people who liked doing good and helping others without wanting anything in return.

‘Working for nothing. Those sort of people are kind-hearted anyway. I’m kind-hearted, I just don’t like the idea of working for nothing!’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

5.4.3.2 Personal satisfaction

People who did voluntary work for these reasons usually said that they enjoyed it and got a lot of satisfaction from doing it. They may have started doing it for reasons other than philanthropic, for example, as something to do, to build up confidence and self-esteem or as a form of rehabilitation after a nervous breakdown, but very often they would continue with it because of the personal benefits they derived from it.

The following example is someone who started doing voluntary work as something to take her mind off her husband’s illness, but found she got a lot out of it herself.

‘I enjoy it, I get a lot of satisfaction…. It’s just nice working with children …. you see them grow up, you see them excel at different things…’ (Former jobseeker, female, 41+, voluntary work)

5.4.3.3 Something to do

Some took part in voluntary work because they were unemployed and wanted something to do.

‘Just to have something to do really, more than anything. I thought I have retail experience and I might be able to help them through.’ (Former jobseeker, female, 26-40, voluntary work)

A view, commonly held by non-volunteers as well as volunteers, of why people might consider doing voluntary work was that it would get them out of the house, and meeting people, and would be better than sitting at home day after day ‘looking at the four walls’ or watching television.

‘I can’t sit in a chair and watch telly all day.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, part-time and voluntary work)

5.4.3.4 Raises social status

People in general, as previous research has shown, do not like being unemployed [41]. Respondents in this study said they found it lonely, demoralising and they are often embarrassed by it. Some admitted lying about being on benefits because of the reactions they got to saying they were unemployed. Being involved in voluntary work was a means of raising one’s social status and for some it could reduce the social
embarrassment of being unemployed. When people asked them what they did they could talk about their voluntary work.

One young man even admitted that he was going to do voluntary work in order to impress a girl he had met in his local church; she had not been very impressed by the fact that he was ‘on the dole’.

5.5 Reasons for not doing voluntary work

There were several reasons put forward by respondents for not participating in voluntary activities. It is important to bear in mind that for a number of respondents these may be excuses rather than reasons.

5.5.1 Ignorance

While there was no defining characteristic, there were some people who were generally ignorant about voluntary work. In a small number of cases, people were generally unfamiliar with the concept of voluntary work. Others while recognising the concept had simply never given any thought to it at all. They did not do it because they did not think about it, or because they did not know about it.

‘... not saying I wouldn’t, I have just never thought about it.’ (Lone parent, female, 41+, no activities)

‘... Even if I’d wanted to I wouldn’t have known how to go about it. [At the jobcentre] they never said “have you thought about doing voluntary work?” , they never suggested it.’ (Former jobseeker, female, 18-25, part-time work)

Although it is not part of the jobcentre staff’s role to advise clients about voluntary work, respondents felt that they should or could have done so.

5.5.2 Irrelevance

Others could not see the connection between voluntary work and getting a job. They thought that doing voluntary work might actually prevent them, or distract them from, getting work.

‘[The man at the jobcentre] did say that if you were to take on doing some voluntary work, two or so days a week, then it might lead to a job, but I didn’t want to do that because I need to be earning. I thought if I was going to do voluntary work will I get stuck in a rut?’ (Lone parent, former jobseeker, female, 41+)

Others simply did not think that voluntary work was relevant to their career.

‘If someone wants a bit of experience, usually ... in a job, maybe that’s good for learning how to meet people, sell things over the counter, but I don’t see anything voluntary that could help me in what I’m looking for.’ (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, doing computer training)

They were not necessarily against the idea of voluntary working when they were enlightened about the range of possibilities and they often agreed that it might be useful to do it for some of the reasons outlined above.
5.5.3 Working for nothing

However, there were some who were quite adamant that they would not work for nothing. They felt angry or insulted at the suggestion that they should work for nothing when they so obviously needed to earn money.

'I wouldn’t do it.’

[Why not?]

'Don’t want to. I won’t do it if I don’t get paid for it.’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, youngest child 7 years)

'It’s when you’ve got a family… you can do all the voluntary work in the world and it’s not going to help your family, you have still got to put food on the table.’ (Jobseeker, 26-40, pre-school child, part-time and voluntary work)

Another perspective on this was the idea that working for nothing is a form of exploitation, especially if done for companies who employ others in properly paid jobs. However, there was some evidence that this was a stance taken almost as a matter of principle and often the reality was much less categorical. The person quoted above, for example, admitted later in the interview that she had previously approached an old people’s home about doing voluntary work.

'I wanted to see if I liked it first, instead of going and getting a job there in case I didn’t like it…..’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, youngest child 7 years)

'A lot of people will not go out and do voluntary work because they think ‘why the hell should I when the person standing next to me is getting paid to do that job’. That is fair enough.’ (Jobseeker, female, 26-40, no activities)

5.5.4 Lone parents

For lone parents, time and the demands of young children often constituted the major barrier to doing voluntary work.

'I would do it if I had time, which I haven’t at the minute with (…) being the age he is…’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, pre-school child, part-time work)

‘…. To be honest, if I am going to be out working and using my time and getting people to look after (my son) I would rather be paid for it.’ (Lone parent, female, 26-40, pre-school child, no activities)

Certainly most lone parents were not in a position to be able to pay for childcare in order to do voluntary work.

5.5.5 Changes in attitudes over time

Sometimes people’s attitudes changed over time. The following respondent had been unemployed for two years and was getting to the end of his tether. He was now on a training course and said he would not rule out voluntary work.
"... as regards myself, where I am trying to get experience, don’t see why I should go out and volunteer for somebody for nothing. If you had asked me this six months ago I would have said to you that I don’t believe in voluntary work, because if I work I expect to get paid for it unless it is for somebody I know or it’s a favour for someone." (Jobseeker, male, 26-40, no activities)

Another side to this was brought out by one respondent who had suffered from severe depression during a long period of unemployment. He felt that one had to feel good about oneself to be able to do voluntary work. Voluntary work would not perhaps be the solution for every type of person.

"Yeah, I would do voluntary work but it would have to be like not the last straw... I’m in work now but if I was in a situation where I was two years ago it would be the damndest situation to do voluntary work." (Former jobseeker, male, 41+, part-time work)

5.5.6 Costs of volunteering

Sometimes the costs involved in doing voluntary work could act as a deterrent. There were instances where people reported incurring costs in order to carry out their voluntary activities. One woman, who was working voluntarily, but who really needed a job resented the fact that she has to pay her own parking fees, and:

"... there was no milk to make a cup of tea, just little things like that to make you feel that you’re valuable really." (Former jobseeker, female, 41+, part-time and voluntary work.)

When people were employed this was not usually a problem but for those on benefits and counting every penny the cost of a bus fare or a snack at lunchtime became an issue. For lone parents, voluntary work would not be considered if they had to pay for childcare in order to do it.

5.5.7 Negative image

There was, for some people, a negative image of volunteers, either the ‘little old Oxfam lady’ image referred to earlier with which young people in particular did not want to be associated; or there was the image of ‘do-gooders’ about which some were quite disparaging.

"Like people who go to Oxfam, I go in there because they sometimes have a nice jacket for a fiver or something, but there’s like a stigma around Oxfam... some people might think seeing someone in there, ‘oh, God, he works for Oxfam!’" (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, no activities)

One volunteer who was a Brownie leader said she used to get sneering comments from people at work:

"They think I’m a goody-two shoes." (Jobseeker, female, 41+, voluntary work)
5.5.8 Jobcentre attitudes

Misunderstanding of benefit rules, whereby Jobseeker’s Allowance recipients thought that they were not allowed to do voluntary work whilst claiming, was a clear deterrent for some. Some recipients dismissed voluntary work as something which would interfere with their jobseeking. These were usually those who were extremely motivated to find a job as quickly as possible, and often very anxious about being unemployed. For them looking for a job was a full-time activity.

‘... I mean I was literally looking every day. I was trying to get the paper every day or contact people. It was a full-time job looking for a job. I wouldn’t have liked to feel that I was tied down to voluntary work.’ (Former jobseeker, male, 41+, part-time work)

The perceived indifferent or negative attitudes of the jobcentre staff outlined earlier clearly had an effect on some people. This was underlined by how differently people felt when individual jobcentre staff showed an interest in what they were doing and in some cases actively encouraged them to think about voluntary activities as part of a back to work strategy.

In this context there was virtually no awareness of the national poster campaign by the Voluntary Service. However, it had been initiated once the fieldwork had already started and many of the respondents had not visited the jobcentre in the weeks prior to being interviewed.

5.6 Voluntary work as a stepping-stone into employment

The evidence from this study shows voluntary work to be more of a transitional activity between unemployment and employment or as an indirect route into paid work rather than a direct stepping-stone into employment. A transitional activity, as the name implies, is an activity which takes place in the transitional, or intervening, period between one type of activity and another, in this case, between unemployment and employment. Voluntary work might end up being a stepping-stone into paid work, but it is not necessarily so and the research findings, from this and the baseline research, suggest that it is unlikely to be so.

5.6.1 Views on voluntary activity as a stepping-stone into employment

Many of those interviewed who had never done any voluntary work could, nevertheless, see the potential of voluntary experience as a way of enhancing one’s job prospects. Given that employers tended to favour taking on people who were already in employment as opposed to the unemployed, they could see that although their field of work did not lend itself to voluntary working there might still be some benefit in doing even quite unrelated work on a voluntary basis.
5.6.1.1 People with mental health problems

People with mental health problems often saw voluntary work as a way into a paid job.

`... he's a contract leader at the [organisation], he says that a lot of volunteers come and go and if you're travelling around you may go to a nice house... or do some voluntary work to the person and you might just get a contract or someone who's got a landscape company or the type of work I'd like to do.' (Jobseeker, male, 18-25, voluntary work after a period of depression)

An 18 year old girl with mental health problems on Jobseeker’s Allowance had been encouraged by the jobcentre to do voluntary work. She had done a work placement at a stable and was hoping to get a paid job out of it but she had left because they had insulted her. She still saw voluntary work as her best chance of getting paid work.

5.6.1.2 Getting back into work after a long period of not working

People who had suffered a breakdown or trauma of some kind sometimes saw voluntary work as a way of getting back their confidence in a less stressful way than going straight into paid employment. Lone parents who may have been out of the job market for many years often lacked the confidence to go for jobs and often did not know what they wanted to do. For them voluntary work could be a way of regaining their confidence or perhaps a way of 'trying out' different professions without messing people about if they changed their mind.

`If I was unemployed I would go out and do it because I don't really know what I want to do career wise, but it is something I am thinking about now that she is due to go to school in a year or 18 months. That will be a way of not messing people about, but still being able to try different things.' (Lone parent, female, 26-40, children pre-school, no activities)

For these individuals, paid work was often a lower priority than the voluntary work they were doing.

See Case 8
Case 8: Voluntary activity as a possible route into employment

A single male, 25, had worked until the age of 20 with the same firm which then went out of business. For the past 5-6 years he has drifted from job to job, short-term contracts interspersed with periods of unemployment. He felt that he was not getting anywhere and suffered from bouts of depression. He did voluntary work to keep himself busy, as a way of regaining confidence after a motorway accident, and as a possible way of getting back into employment.

He did 12 weeks on a Prince’s Trust course and was currently doing about 35 hours voluntary work, half with a charity and half at an organisation. He was hoping he might get some contacts for gardening and landscape work through his work at the organisation. He was also trying to get onto a course to get some qualifications which might help him in his jobsearch.

He did not declare his voluntary work: ‘I think if I’m doing voluntary work and not getting paid for it they shouldn’t know. Why do I need to tell them?’ He was living at home and had tried to get part-time work but with no success.

This particular respondent was using voluntary work as both a direct and indirect route into employment but he appeared to be getting stuck in voluntary work and unable to get off benefits.

5.6.2 Has voluntary activity acted as a stepping-stone?

Voluntary work had worked as a direct stepping-stone for a handful of the respondents in the study who had been offered jobs by their ‘voluntary’ employer. (See Case 9). However, for the most part voluntary activity was something which helped many people back into work in a variety of indirect ways as we have already seen in this chapter. It sometimes worked as a route to employment in an unexpected way, as the example in Case 10 shows.

It must be said that many shied away from the idea of voluntary work altogether and, indeed, they felt aggrieved that anyone should suggest that they work for nothing when, as far as they were concerned, they so desperately needed money.
Case 9: Voluntary work leading directly to paid employment

A 27 year old woman with a mental health disability had been working in an charity shop for 6 years while on Jobseeker’s Allowance. She had not really had a proper job since leaving school although she had been on a number of training course and work placements. She had started off working, voluntarily, just one day a week. Over time this increased to three and then four days a week, with her gradually taking on more responsibility. A job had recently come up in customer care and she was assured that she was likely to get the job, although they had to advertise it first.

Case 10: Voluntary work leading to new career

A woman in her forties had done some advice work as a volunteer to get her confidence back after a nervous breakdown. She was, at the time of the interview, working part-time as a community advice worker and doing a university degree at the same time.

'I couldn't possibly have the job I have now had I not done that voluntary work... I thought about voluntary work initially as a way of doing stuff for me in terms of building up my confidence and going out again, meeting people again, getting my self-esteem better, getting my brain back in better gear... and then when I actually discovered I liked advice work, that was when I thought 'yes, this is what I would like to do as my new career'.

Overall, the findings from the present study indicate that little change has taken place in the way that voluntary activities are perceived since the baseline study was undertaken. Knowledge of volunteering continues to be sketchy, with uninformed respondents continuing to conceptualise volunteering as 'working for nothing' and 'employer exploitation' and undertaken by 'middle-aged, middle-class, do-gooders'. Even amongst those people who were aware of voluntary activities, the benefits of such activities continued to remain largely unrecognised.

Respondents continued to misunderstand, or be unaware of, the regulations concerning their involvement with voluntary activities whilst claiming benefits.

Amongst respondents with experience of voluntary activities, either now or in the past, their reasons for taking part were largely the same. For some, volunteering was undertaken for work-related reasons, either direct or indirect, while for others their participation in voluntary activities had no association with either their work aspirations or job search activities.

There was some evidence to suggest, in the present study, that volunteering was not as likely to be seen as useful a work-
related activity as it had been in the previous study. This was for a combination of reasons. First, there were felt to be less voluntary opportunities currently available. Second, those opportunities that were available were seen as less interesting and useful as they tended to be restricted to manual occupations, compared to a mix of manual and clerical occupations encountered in the baseline study. Third, there was some suggestion that voluntary activities were becoming more of a 'therapeutic activity' for people who had experienced mental health problems. Fourth, some respondents had either tried voluntary activities themselves, or had seen others become involved, but had come to the conclusion that the likelihood of finding work in this way was minimal. The exception, and a change from the previous study, was that certain occupations almost 'required' people to provide their services on a voluntary basis as a form of apprenticeship. Typical industry sectors where this occurred were in the television/film industries, journalism and specialist nursing, such as mental health nursing.

The concerns expressed about doing voluntary activities and the perceived barriers to participation were broadly similar to those identified in the baseline research, namely the costs of being a volunteer, transport difficulties, the need for childcare and a general lack of understanding about how to become a volunteer and the likely benefits from their participation. In addition, the present study also identified an additional barrier, expressed particularly by the men in the study, that by volunteering they would limit their job search and miss potential work opportunities.

In the baseline study a number of respondents were quite emphatic that volunteering could act as a stepping-stone to work. There were others who were less emphatic as well as those who felt that the stepping-stone effect was unlikely. In the present study the stepping-stone effect was less evident in that respondents did not feel that volunteering had necessarily directly led to work, but rather that the voluntary activity was a transitional period that bridged the gap between periods of unemployment, short term contracts and more permanent work. In this sense, volunteering could sometimes be their sole, temporary, activity in an otherwise unbroken period of unemployment. In addition, while in the baseline study there were instances where respondents felt that their period of volunteering had been instrumental in their securing work, respondents in the present study were much less convinced that this continued to hold true. While some respondents, nevertheless, were positive about the value of their participation in voluntary activities they felt that this was much more of a transitional - 'holding pattern' - activity than a stepping-stone from unemployment to work.
The perception of voluntary work consisting of older middle class people doing good deeds tended to be held by those who had never thought about voluntary work. However, those doing voluntary work tended to hold more open-minded views. There was recognition of the need to declare voluntary work although knowledge about the rules was mixed.

Reasons for doing voluntary work were:

- **direct work related reasons.** Those doing voluntary work with a specific job in mind tended to be very focused and saw voluntary work as helping them with networking, learning specific skills, and gaining experience. There were also specific occupations where unpaid work is an accepted route into the profession;

- **indirect work related reasons.** Voluntary work was seen as having some benefits that might enhance their prospects of getting a job, although it may not be related to a specific area of work;

- **non-work related reasons.** Some people did voluntary work for philanthropic reasons, as well as enjoyment, personal satisfaction and for something to do.

Several reasons were put forward for not doing voluntary work:

- lack of awareness about voluntary work;
- it would act as a barrier to jobsearch;
- that working for nothing was insulting;
- volunteering involved extra expenses such as travel and food; and
- the perception of the ‘do-gooder’ image dissuaded some.

The evidence from this study shows that voluntary work could have both transitional and a stepping-stone effect into employment. Many could see the potential of voluntary work as a way of enhancing job prospects, gaining confidence, and ‘trying out’ professions. Younger people with a definite work-related focus saw voluntary work as a direct stepping-stone. Voluntary work had worked as a direct stepping-stone for a handful of respondents in the study, but for the most part had worked in indirect, or transitional ways. However, many respondents felt aggrieved at the suggestion of working for nothing.
6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Back to Work Bonus
(Chapter 3)

Overall, there was no evidence of the Back to Work Bonus acting as an incentive to increase part-time working nor to encourage a move from part-time to full-time work. This could, to some extent, have been the result of a lack of awareness of the scheme and confusion regarding the rules, but there did appear to be a consensus of opinion that people moved to full-time work because they wanted full-time work and only when they were ready and available for full-time work. It was generally felt that people would choose to stay on benefits and not move into part-time or full-time work for specific reasons which would be unaffected by the payment of a bonus — especially since the money was paid only when the client came off benefits completely and which was felt likely to be seen as a relatively small sum in relation to a full-time wage.

There were, however, a few individuals who thought that they might have increased their part-time working hours in response to the Bonus, if they had known about it, but that their overall plan to get back to full-time work would have remained unchanged. Thus the Bonus might act as an incentive for people who already want full-time work to maximise their earning potential sooner, if they were aware of the Bonus, but is unlikely to have the desired effect of encouraging people to move from part-time to full-time work.

6.2 Earnings disregards
(Section 3.7)

By contrast, the earnings disregards were reported as having a considerable effect on benefit recipients’ decision-making and 'work' strategies. The amounts were almost universally condemned as derisory and acted as a disincentive to most clients undertaking part-time work. Apart from professional clients who had a high earning capacity, most of the respondents felt that they would be working for nothing because any earnings above the earnings disregard would be deducted from their benefit. For most people the Back to Work Bonus was not enough of an incentive to counteract this and a number of respondents made the point that they were only being paid back what they had earned in the first place. A higher earnings disregard was seen as much more of an incentive than the Back to Work Bonus.

6.3 Role of partners in decision-making
(Section 2.4.1)

The role of partners in decision making has remained virtually unchanged since the baseline research was carried out. While there was evidence of partners supporting each other in their 'work' decision in both studies there seemed to be more evidence in this study of male partners wanting to make decisions not only about their own 'work' strategy but also that of their female partner. In some instances this appeared to play a part in the breakdown of the relationship.
6.4 Lone Parents

Lone parents were the most vociferous in expressing their anxieties about moving out of the perceived security of benefits and into work. Many lone parents expressed a desire to work but felt frustrated by a benefit system which they felt made it difficult and unaffordable for them to do so. For many lone parents there is an active decision about whether to work if they have a pre-school or school age child. Some do not wish to work at all while they have a child at school. Others are more interested in the idea, but have difficulty in finding work that fits in with household commitments. Nevertheless there was a desire for work if not now, but in the future.

6.5 Roles of part-time and voluntary work

(Chapters 4 and 5)

The role of part-time work in the decision making and 'work' strategies of unemployed people claiming benefits remains virtually unchanged since the baseline research carried out immediately prior to the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance and the Back to Work Bonus. Neither part-time work nor voluntary activities were seen as direct stepping-stones into employment, be it part- or full-time. It is suggested in this study that they might be seen more appropriately as transitional activities which might, in some cases, end up being stepping-stones but which are more likely to have an indirect - but positive - effect on a person's readiness for work.

Respondents often felt that there were some feelings of mistrust between themselves and the Jobcentre or Benefits Agency, which made productive communication more an isolated event, rather than the norm. While not everyone would be enthusiastic about having more contact with the Jobcentre and Benefits Agency, others would welcome the opportunity to talk about employment, education, training and jobsearch.

Despite the fact neither part-time or voluntary work were not necessarily seen as nor acted as direct stepping-stones to full-time work, nevertheless there were some individuals who felt that both types of activity had merit. For example, some people readily identified advantages such as maintaining skills, developing new skills and keeping in touch with the labour market. While such advantages many not be inherent in all types of part-time and voluntary activities, active discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of part-time and voluntary activities might help to encourage more people to think about or consider these options.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A  NOTES ON JOBSEEKER’S ALLOWANCE, INCOME SUPPORT, BACK TO WORK BONUS AND EARNINGS DISREGARD

Jobseeker’s Allowance

Jobseeker’s Allowance can be either an income-based, or a contribution-based benefit and is paid to unemployed people. Groups such as lone parents and carers have the choice of claiming Income Support or Jobseeker’s Allowance. They, along with any other unemployed person can claim Jobseeker’s Allowance if they are available for, and actively seeking work. Customers claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance are allowed to work for up to 16 hours a week, and their partners are able to work for up to 24 hours a week.

For those customers who work part-time, the first £5 of their earnings is disregarded, or £10 when the customer claims income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance for a partner. Lone parents and carers have a £15 disregard in income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance although not in contribution-based Jobseeker’s Allowance. Earnings in excess of this amount are deducted from the customer’s benefit on a penny for penny basis. No allowance is made for any employment expenses, e.g. fares to work.

Income Support

Income Support is an income-related benefit that is paid to lone parents, disabled people, carers and certain other groups of individuals. A customer who is available for and actively seeking work can choose to claim Jobseeker’s Allowance.

Customers receiving Income Support are allowed to work up to 16 hours per week. For lone parent customers who work part-time, the first £15 of their earnings is disregarded, earnings in excess of this amount are deducted from the customer’s benefit on a penny for penny basis.

The Back to Work Bonus

Customers who work part-time whilst claiming Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support and declare earnings above the earnings disregard are eligible to join the Back to Work Bonus scheme. The Bonus is paid in a lump sum when the customer or partner moves into work which removes entitlement to Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support (due either to the hours worked or the amount of earnings).

The Bonus accumulates after the person has been in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance or Income Support for 91 days. It is calculated by taking the customer’s earnings and deducting the appropriate earnings disregard. 50% of the remaining earnings will count towards the Bonus. If a customer is in receipt of Jobseeker’s Allowance (Income based) or Income Support the partner’s earnings are taken into account in the calculation and contribute to the Bonus. The Bonus can build up to a lump sum of up to £1,000.
Everyone claiming benefit is entitled to earn a small amount of income—called an earnings disregard—without having their benefit reduced. The standard disregard for a single person without dependants is £5. For couples on income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, it is £10. For lone parents and other designated categories on income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance, there is a higher earnings disregard of £15. Earnings over the disregard amount are deducted from a client’s benefit payment on a penny for penny basis.
Dear xxxx

We would like to invite you to take part in a study of the role of part-time and voluntary work while claiming benefits that is being undertaken by this Department, in conjunction with the Department for Education and Employment, the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency. As part of this evaluation we have appointed BMRB International, an independent research organisation, to undertake some research for us.

The research will examine your experiences whilst claiming benefits and in order to do this, BMRB International are holding a series of individual interviews. These interviews will take place at a location and time convenient for you, and last for an hour.

All the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence by BMRB International. None of the information collected will be reported in a way that could identify you. Participating in this study will not affect your benefits in any way.

I do hope that you will be able to help with this important programme of work. A recruiter from BMRB International may contact you in two weeks time to see if you are willing to take part and to arrange a convenient time.

If, in the meantime, you have any queries or feel you are unable to take part in this study, please telephone Nick Pettigrew at BMRB International (0181 280 8285) or write to him at:

BMRB International
Hadley House
79-81 Uxbridge Road.
Ealing
London W5 5SU

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Rayner
Department of Social Security
Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to help with a study about the attitudes and experiences of people who are unemployed, which will help improve services. We are conducting this project on behalf of the Department of Social Security (DSS), the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Employment Service (ES) and the Benefits Agency (BA).

Everything you say will be treated in the strictest confidence. None of the information collected will be reported in a way that could identify you, and no-one outside BMRB will know the names of the people who agree to take part in the research. **Participation in this study will not affect your benefits in any way.**

If you have any additional queries or questions on this research please contact me on 0181 280 8285.

The details of your appointment are shown below and you will receive £15 as a thank you for your time. Should you, for any reason, have to cancel the appointment, please telephone Samina Awan on 0181 280 8380 as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Nick Pettigrew
Research Executive

---

**Appointment Details:**

**Date:** ..............................................................................

**Time:** ..............................................................................

**Researcher:** ......................................................................
APPENDIX C  JOBSEEKER'S SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

RECRUITMENT RECORD
SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE  UNEMPLOYED PEOPLE
Undertaking part time work, voluntary work, neither part time or voluntary work

This form is the property of British Market Research Bureau
Hadley House, 79-81 Uxbridge Road
Ealing, London, W5 5SU and is confidential

BLOCK CAPS INITIALS Surname

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms
First names
Address
Post Code
Telephone Number

DATE:  August 1998

JOBS NO:  1 1 5 6 - 5 6 7

JOB NAME:  Back To Work Bonus

QUOTA REQUIREMENTS

- Unemployment Duration
  - 4 wks to 3 mths
  - 3 mths to 6 mths
  - 6 - 12 months
  - 12 mths+
- Sex
  - Male
  - Female
- Ages
  - 18-25
  - 26-35
  - 36-45
  - 46-55
- Back to Work Bonus
  - range of Back to Work Bonus amounts
  - no Back to Work Bonus
- Education
  - higher
  - lower

RECRUITER'S DECLARATION
The person named above has been recruited by me in accordance with the instructions and within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Signed: ____________________________
Print name: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________

BACK-CHECKED
Signed: ____________________________
Print name: ____________________________  Date: ____________________________

91
"Good morning/afternoon, I'm from the British Market Research Bureau and we are currently running a survey on behalf of the DSS (Department of Social Security) about a study about the attitudes and experiences of people who are unemployed which will help improve services.

FIELD - AUGUST 98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1. Do you or any of your close friends or relatives work in any of the following industries or professions? (PLEASE CIRCLE BELOW)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td>Civil Servants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department of Social Security (DSS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Market Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre/Benefits Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IF ANY MARKED (*) PROFESSIONS MENTIONED

Q2. Are you currently seeking full-time employment?

Yes 1  GO TO Q3
No 2   CLOSE

Q3. Are you currently receiving benefits?

Yes 1  GO TO Q4
No 2   CLOSE

Q4. What benefits are you currently receiving?

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) 1  GO TO Q5
Other Benefits only 2  CLOSE

If other benefits as well write in ____________________________

Q5. How long have you been receiving JSA?

under 4 weeks 1  CLOSE
from 4 weeks to 3 months 2  GO TO Q3 CHECK QUOTAS
from 3 to 6 months 3
from 6 to 12 months 4
over 12 months 5
Q6 Are you currently or have you been involved in any of the following activities whilst claiming JSA?

- Part-time work 1)  
  (includes odd jobs and undeclared work)  
- Voluntary work 2)  
- None 3)  

GO TO Q7

CHECK QUOTAS

Q7 Are you accumulating a sum of money under the Back To Work Bonus scheme?

Yes 1) GO TO Q7.1
No 2) GO TO Q8

Q7.1 Do you know how much you have accumulated so far?

under £100 1)  
£101 to £250 2)  
£251 to £500 3)  
£501 to £750 4)  
£751 to £1000 5)  

GO TO Q8

Q8 Do you have any of the following qualifications:

No qualifications... 1) CHECK QUOTAS
GCSE 2) AND RECRUIT
CSE 3) AS 'LOWER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL'

O Level 4) CHECK QUOTAS
NVQ level 1 or 2 5) AND RECRUIT AS 'HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL' GO TO Q9
A'level 1)  
AS level 2)  
HND 3)  
Degree 4)  
Professional qualification 5)  
NVQ level 3 or higher 6)  

GO TO Q9

Q9. How would you describe your race or ethnic origin?

White 1)  
Black African 2)  
Black Caribbean 3)  
Black Other 4)  
Indian 5)  
Pakistani 6)  
Bangladeshi 7)  
Chinese 8)  
Other (WRITE IN) 9)  

( GO TO CLASSIFICATION SECTION )
<table>
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<tr>
<td>C.1  SEX :</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C.3  AGE LAST BIRTHDAY:</td>
<td>18-25 1</td>
<td>RECRUIT TO QUOTA ON AGE</td>
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<td>(CODE AND WRITE IN)</td>
<td>26-35 2</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>46-55 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C.4  MARITAL STATUS</td>
<td>Single 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OF RESPONDENT :</td>
<td>Married/living as couple 2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Separated 3</td>
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<td>Divorced 4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Widowed 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C.5  IF MARRIED OR LIVING AS A COUPLE:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does your partner do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(WRITE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Recruit for paired depth if appropriate)</td>
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</tr>
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<td>ROUTE</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.1 Have you ever taken part in a market research survey before?</td>
<td>Yes 1</td>
<td>E.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.2 In the last 5 years how many market research group discussions have you attended?</td>
<td>None 1</td>
<td>E.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.3 How many market research group discussions have you attended in the last 6 months?</td>
<td>None 1</td>
<td>E.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.4 Thinking about all the times you've taken part in a market research survey, what were the subjects you've been interviewed about?</td>
<td>(WRITE IN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We would like to interview you in connection with this study. For this purpose an experienced researcher from BMRB will visit you in your (and your partner) home to conduct the interview.

Our interviews will be visiting your area on the following dates.

Would you be willing to participate in our study?

Please give us a place, date and time when you will be available for interview.

Place: .................................................................

Date .../.../1998; Time ........ hrs

Thank and Close
APPENDIX D  FORMER JOBSEEKER'S SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

RECRUITMENT RECORD
SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE: WORKING PEOPLE
Previously On Jobseekers Allowance undertaking
part time work, voluntary work

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Hadley House, 79-81 Uxbridge Road
Ealing, London, W5 5SU and is confidential

BLOCK CAPS INITIALS SURNAME
Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms

First names

Address

Post Code

Telephone Number

Depth Details  Respondent Type (please tick box)

Date of Interview

Time of Interview

Telephone Recruitment  [ ]  Sent Confirmation  [ ]

Face-to-Face  [ ]  Confirmed Attendance  [ ]

Delivered Invitation  [ ]

RECRUITER'S DECLARATION
The person named above has been recruited by me in accordance with the instructions and
within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Signed: __________________________
Print name: __________________________  Date: __________________________

BACK-CHECKED

Signed: __________________________
Print name: __________________________  Date: __________________________
Good morning/afternoon, I’m from the British Market Research Bureau and we are currently running a survey on behalf of the DSS (Department of Social Security) about a study about the attitudes and experiences of people who were previously unemployed which will help improve services.

FIELD - AUGUST 98

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<thead>
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<td>9*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q1. Do you or any of your close friends or relatives work in any of the following industries or professions?

(PLEASE CIRCLE BELOW)

- Advertising
- Civil Servants
- Department of Social Security (DSS)
- Journalism
- Local Government
- Market Research
- Marketing
- Public Relations
- Jobcentre/Benefits Agency

None of these

Q2. Are you currently in employment (full/part time)?

- Yes 1 GO TO Q3
- No 2 CLOSE

WRITE IN JOB

Q3. Are you currently receiving Income Support (IS)?

- Yes 1 CLOSE
- No 2 GO TO Q4

Q4. Whilst you were unemployed did you receive benefits?

- Yes 1 GO TO Q5
- No 2 CLOSE

Q5. What benefits were you receiving?

- Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) 1 GO TO Q6
- Other Benefits only 2 CLOSE

If other benefits as well write in

Q6. How long were you receiving JSA for?

- under 4 weeks 1 CLOSE
- from 4 weeks to 3 months 2 GO TO Q7
- from 3 to 12 months 3
- over 12 months 4

98
Q7 Whilst you were receiving JSA were you involved in any of the following activities?
- Part-time work (includes odd jobs and undeclared work) 1
- Voluntary work 2
- None 3

GO TO Q8 CHECK QUOTAS
GO TO Q9 CLOSE

Q8 Have you ever received a sum of money under the Back To Work Bonus scheme?
Yes 1 GO TO Q8.1
No 2 GO TO Q7

Q8.1 How much did you receive?
under £100 1
£101 to £250 2
£251 to £500 3
£501 to £750 4
£751 to £1000 5

GO TO Q9

Q9 Do you have any of the following qualifications:
No qualifications... 1 CHECK QUOTAS AND RECRUIT AS ‘LOWER EDUCATIONAL LEVEL’
GCSE 2
CSE 3
O Level 4
NVQ level 1 or 2 5
A’level 1
AS level 2
HND 3
Degree 4
Professional qualification 5
NVQ level 3 or higher 6

GO TO Q10

Q10. How would you describe your race or ethnic origin?
White 1
Black African 2
Black Caribbean 3
Black Other 4
Indian 5
Pakistani 6
Bangladeshi 7
Chinese 8
Other (WRITE IN) 9

(GO TO CLASSIFICATION SECTION)
FIELD - AUGUST 1998

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<td>Male</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td><strong>C.3 AGE LAST BIRTHDAY:</strong></td>
<td>RECRUIT TO QUOTA ON AGE</td>
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<tr>
<td>(CODE AND WRITE IN)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>C.4 MARITAL STATUS OF RESPONDENT:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Married/living as couple</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Separated</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Divorced</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**C.5 IF MARRIED OR LIVING AS A COUPLE:**

What does your partner do

(WRITE)

(Recruit for paired depth if appropriate)
**ELIGIBILITY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
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<td>E.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>No 2</td>
<td>RECRUIT</td>
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<td>None 1</td>
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<td>E.3</td>
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<td>7 or more 3</td>
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<td>E.4</td>
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<td>1 or more 2</td>
<td>CLOSE</td>
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E.1 Have you ever taken part in a market research survey before?

E.2 In the last 5 years how many market research group discussions have you attended?

E.3 How many market research group discussions have you attended in the last 6 months?

E.4 Thinking about all the times you've taken part in a market research survey, what were the subjects you've been interviewed about?

*WRITE IN*

We would like to interview you in connection with this study. For this purpose an experienced researcher from BMRB will visit you in your (and your partner) home to conduct the interview.

Our interviews will be visiting your area on the following dates.

Would you be willing to participate in our study?

Please give us a place, date and time when you will be available for interview.

Place: .................................................................

Date .../.../1998; Time ........ hrs

Thank and Close
APPENDIX E  LONE PARENTS SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

RECRUITMENT RECORD
SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE: LONE PARENTS
Undertaking part time work, or no part time work

This form is the property of British Market Research Bureau
Hadley House, 79-81 Uxbridge Road
Ealing, London, W5 5SU and is confidential

BLOCK CAPS INITIALS SURNAME

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms
First names
Address
Post Code
Telephone Number

DEPTH DETAILS  RESPONDENT TYPE (PLEASE TICK BOX)

Date of Interview
Time of Interview

TELEPHONE RECRUITMENT  SENT CONFIRMATION

FACETO-FACE  CONFIRMED ATTENDANCE

DELIVERED INVITATION

RECRUITER'S DECLARATION
The person named above has been recruited by me in accordance with the instructions and
within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Signed: ________________________________
Print name: ________________________________ Date: ________________________________

BACK-CHECKED

Signed: ________________________________ Print name: ________________________________ Date: ________________________________
"Good morning/afternoon, I'm from the British Market Research Bureau and we are currently running a survey on behalf of the DSS (Department of Social Security) about a study about the attitudes and experiences of people who were previously unemployed which will help improve services.

FIELD - AUGUST 98

Q1. Do you or any of your close friends or relatives work in any of the following industries or professions?
(PLEASE CIRCLE BELOW)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profession</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servants</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Social Security (DSS)</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
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<td>Market Research</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
<td>7*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobcentre/Benefits Agency</td>
<td>9*</td>
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<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>10</td>
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</table>

IF ANY MARKED (*)

Q2. Determine whether respondent is lone parent:

| Yes | 1   | GO TO Q3   
| No  | 2   | CLOSE     

Q3. Are you currently receiving any benefits?

| Yes | 1   | GO TO Q3.1 |
| No  | 2   | CLOSE      

Q4. What benefits are you currently receiving?

| Income Support (IS) | 1   | GO TO Q4   
| Other Benefits only | 2   | CLOSE      

If other benefits as well as Income Support, write in

Q5. How long have you been claiming Income Support?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>under 12 months</td>
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<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>5 to 5 years</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>
Q5  How many children do you have currently living with you?
   Enter number if children  GO TO Q6 
   and ages

Q6  In which category do your children fall?
   - pre-school (Under 5) 1  GO TO Q7
   - at school (over 5) 2

Q7  Are you currently or have you been involved in any of the following activities whilst claiming Income Support?
   - Part-time work 1  GO TO Q8
     (includes odd jobs and undeclared work)
   - Voluntary work 2  GO TO Q9
   - None 3

Q8  Are you accumulating a sum of money under the Back To Work Bonus scheme?
   Yes 1  GO TO Q8.1
   No 2  GO TO Q9

Q8.1 Do you know how much you have accumulated so far?
   under £100 1  GO TO Q9
   £101 to £250 2
   £251 to £500 3
   £501 to £750 4
   £751 to £1000 5

Q9  Do you have any of the following qualifications:
   No qualifications... 1  CHECK QUOTAS
   GCSE 2  AND RECRUIT
   CSE 3  AS 'LOWER
   O Level 4  EDUCATIONAL LEVEL'
   NVQ level 1 or 2 5  GO TO Q10
   A level 1  CHECK QUOTAS
   AS level 2  AND RECRUIT AS
   HND 3  'HIGHER EDUCATIONAL
   Degree 4  LEVEL' GO TO Q10
   Professional qualification 5
   NVQ level 3 or higher 6
Q10. How would you describe your race or ethnic origin?

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<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Black Other</td>
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<td>Indian</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (WRITE IN)</td>
<td>9</td>
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</table>

(.GO TO CLASSIFICATION SECTION)
<table>
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<tr>
<td>Male 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.3 AGE LAST BIRTHDAY: (CODE AND WRITE IN)</td>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td>46-55</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RECRUIT TO QUOTA ON AGE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ELIGIBILITY

E.1 Have you ever taken part in a market research survey before?

Yes 1

No 2

E.2 In the last 5 years how many market research group discussions have you attended?

None 1

1-6 2

7 or more 3

E.3 How many market research group discussions have you attended in the last 6 months?

None 1

1 or more 2

E.4 Thinking about all the times you've taken part in a market research survey, what were the subjects you've been interviewed about?

(WRITE IN)

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Please give us a place, date and time when you will be available for interview.

Place: ...........................................................................

Date ...../.../.1998; Time .......... hrs

Thank and Close
BACK TO WORK BONUS TG2/1
FINAL topic guide

Aims:

- To evaluate the Back-to-Work-Bonus
- To update the knowledge of the roles of part-time and voluntary activities as a stepping stone to employment
- To explore the decision making process that couples go through when considering part time and voluntary activities as a route into work
- To provide a detailed understanding of the interaction between earnings disregard and peoples decision making

1. Introduction

- About the project, funded by the DSS, DfEE, ES and Benefits Agency
- About BMRB International
- Confidentiality and taping
- Interview will last an hour

2. Background

- Age
- Number of children
- Qualifications
- Current Employment (if relevant), how obtained, long held, skills, responsibilities
- What is their ideal job

3. Experiences of Unemployment

- How long been or were unemployed / lone parent on benefits
- How did they become unemployed
- Occupation before unemployed or on benefits
- (If relevant) do they perceive any differences between JSA/IS and the previous UB/IS regime
- Intention to work

4. Activities whilst unemployed

- How do/did they keep busy whilst being unemployed or claiming benefits. Probe on
  - voluntary or unpaid work PROMPT ON activities that might not necessarily be seen as voluntary work e.g. helping in a school
  - part-time work, casual work or odd jobs
  - others such as looking after home, contact with other people, education and training, looking for work
5. Experiences of voluntary work whilst unemployed

**Jobseekers doing voluntary work or ex-jobseekers who did voluntary work**

- When did it start
  - are they still doing it, if not why not
- What do they do
  - what hours do they do
  - why not more regularly
  - have activities/hours changed
- How did they get involved/what attracted them
- What did they expect to get out of it/what do/did they get out of it
- What problems have they experienced PROBE on
  - Jobsearch
  - travel expenses
  - childcare
  - Contact with Jobcentre
  - advice received about voluntary work
  - attitude of Jobcentre/DSS towards them doing voluntary work/has this changed
    - sources of information
    - nature of jobsearch advice received
    - how has this changed after taking up voluntary work
    - did Jobcentre/DSS know about the rules regarding voluntary work
- Extent to which voluntary work is regarded as a **stepping-stone**
  - what are the benefits to jobsearch and future employment
  - PROBE on confidence levels, skills and experience gained
- **For those who are currently employed and did voluntary work**
  - how did doing voluntary work help them to get their current job
  - are they still doing voluntary work

6. Perceptions of voluntary work whilst unemployed

- What types of activities are classed as ‘voluntary work’
- What sorts of people who do voluntary work
- What could people get out of voluntary work whilst unemployed
- Is voluntary work suitable for unemployed /or for them personally
- Perceptions of costs and barriers to take up
  - e.g. travel costs, childcare
- What are the views of Jobcentres about voluntary work
  - has this changed at all
- How is voluntary work linked to job search
  - direct and indirect links e.g. confidence levels, skills and experience gained
  - does it help or hinder jobsearch e.g. time, priority
- Would/do they tell Jobcentres about voluntary activities
  - do Jobcentres/BA ask, has this changed
- what would happen if they did tell
  - perceptions of disincentives to report
7. Experiences of part-time work whilst unemployed

Jobseekers doing part-time work, ex-jobseekers who did part-time work, lone parents doing part-time work

- When did it start
  - are they still doing it, if not why not
- What do they do
  - what hours do they do
  - why not more regularly/have activities/hours changed
- How did they get involved
- What attracted them to part-time work
- What did they expect to get out of it
- What do/did they get out of it
- What problems have they experienced Probe on
  - changes in jobsearch activity
  - travel expenses
  - childcare
- Contact with Jobcentre/DSS
  - advice received about part-time work/has this changed
  - attitude of Jobcentre/BA towards them doing part-time work
  - sources of information
  - nature of jobsearch advice received
  - how has this changed since starting part-time work
  - did Jobcentre/DSS know about the rules regarding part-time work
- Extent to which part time work is regarded as a stepping-stone
  - what are the benefits to jobsearch and future employment
  - PROBE on confidence levels, skills and experience gained

For those who are currently employed and did part-time work
- how did doing part-time work help them to get their current job

8. Perceptions of part-time work whilst unemployed

- Views about regular part-time/casual work/odd jobs for unemployed people
- Perceptions and experiences of costs and barriers to take up/continuing part-time work e.g. travel costs, childcare
- What are the views of Jobcentre/BA about part-time work
  - has this changed at all
  - how do they know this
  - sources of information
- How is part-time work linked to job search
- direct and indirect links e.g. confidence levels, skills and experience gained
- does it help or hinder jobsearch e.g. time, priority
- Would/do they tell Jobcentres about part time activities
  - do Jobcentres/BA ask, has this changed
  - what would happen if they did tell
  - perceptions of disincentives to report
  - differences for part-time or voluntary work
9. Part time and Voluntary Activities considered

Jobseekers and Lone Parents who are not doing part-time or voluntary work

- Extent to which they have considered part-time or voluntary activity
- How have they found out about these voluntary/part-time activities
- Perceptions of availability/what informs these perceptions
- How regarded
- Why did they not take it up
- Would they in the future
- What would encourage them to take up part-time or voluntary work

10. Benefit rules

- What are the rules on part-time work/voluntary work whilst claiming benefits
  - what sort of restrictions might there be
  - what are the definitions of part-time/voluntary work
- Perceptions of why these restrictions exist
  - Probe on availability for work, actively seeking work
- Did these rules change when JSA was introduced
  - have these rules changed since
- Impact of understanding of rules for part-time and voluntary work on
  - decisions to continue or take up part-time work or odd jobs or voluntary work
  - jobsearch/intention to move from benefit on other factors in decision making

11. The Back to Work Bonus

- Have they heard of the Back to Work Bonus
  - what does it involve
  - are they eligible for it
  - who is eligible for it
  - how do the rules work
    - Probe on Maximum amount payable
    - not subject to tax or NI
    - waiting period of three months
    - partner’s earnings contribution to Back to Work Bonus
- Where have they heard about Back to Work Bonus
  - sources of information e.g. publicity
  - Jobcentre staff
  - computer generated notification after 13 weeks
- What were their initial views on Back to Work Bonus
  - how have these views changed (if) they know more
• Did they receive/Are they accruing the Back to Work Bonus
  - DETAILED PROBE how did/does it work
  - is/was it easy or hard to claim
  - did/do they understand it
  - Is/was it easy to accrue money
  - do/did they know how much they had accrued
  - are/were they sent information through the post on how much they had accrued
  - how long have they been accruing money
  - how much did/will they receive
    - views on amount
  - partner’s earnings contribution to Back to Work Bonus
  - did they have to wait a long period before receiving the Bonus
  - was the amount recalculated
• How did it affect the part time work they chose to do
• Thoughts and views about Back to Work Bonus
  - how is/has it helped with getting back into full-time work
  - encouraging keeping in touch with work
  - acting as incentive
  - acting as a disincentive by delaying moving into full-time work in order to build up a bonus
  - acting/acted as a reward
  - what do they intend to/did they spend the Bonus on
    - PROBE
      - in terms of financial expenses associated with starting work
      - did it affect type of job taken
• If respondent is unsure of the rules EXPLAIN
  - initial thoughts
  - what do they see as the purpose of the scheme
• How does it change their views towards part-time work
  - could it act as an incentive
  - acting as a reward for finding work
  - keep people in touch with labour market
  - what are the perceived advantages to the scheme
  - what are the perceived disadvantages
• What sort of encouragement should there be from the DSS/Jobcentre for part-time or voluntary work whilst claiming
• Should the DSS/Jobcentre encourage part-time/voluntary work
12. Disregards
- Have they heard of Disregards
- What do they understand by disregards
- How did they find out about disregards
  - sources of information
- EXPLAIN DISREGARDS
  - Probe on level, length of time
- Have these rules changed
- How did/does disregards affect them PROBE IN DETAIL
- Can they act as a disincentive to work

13. Household Decisions (particularly for paired depths)
- What is taken into account when considering activities whilst unemployed
- What sort of differences do they look for between work and benefit
  - pay
  - self-esteem
  - contribution to household finances
- When does work become worthwhile
  - what factors do they take into account when deciding whether work becomes worthwhile
- Partner’s motivations to change activities whilst claimant is unemployed
  - if given up, how do they feel about it now
  - when did they change activities
- How are decisions made in the household
  - who makes decisions in the household about work activities
  - what sort of decisions do they each make
  - influences on decisions/past experiences
  - what do they take into account
  - have they ever decided not to take a job
- Sharing of part-time work between claimant/partner

14. Any other comments

THANK AND CLOSE
OTHER RESEARCH REPORTS AVAILABLE:

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<th>No.</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>ISBN</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Thirty Families: Their living standards in unemployment</td>
<td>0 11 761683 4</td>
<td>£6.65</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Disability, Household Income &amp; Expenditure</td>
<td>0 11 761755 5</td>
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<td>Housing Benefit Reviews</td>
<td>0 11 761821 7</td>
<td>£16.50</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Social Security &amp; Community Care: The case of the Invalid Care Allowance</td>
<td>0 11 761820 9</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>The Attendance Allowance Medical Examination: Monitoring consumer views</td>
<td>0 11 761819 5</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Lone Parent Families in the UK</td>
<td>0 11 761868 3</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Incomes In and Out of Work</td>
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<td>Working the Social Fund</td>
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<td>Evaluating the Social Fund</td>
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<td>Customer Perceptions of Resettlement Units</td>
<td>0 11 761976 6</td>
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<td>Preparing for Council Tax Benefit</td>
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<td>Employers’ Choice of Pension Schemes: Report of a qualitative study</td>
<td>0 11 762073 4</td>
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<td>GPs and IVB: A qualitative study of the role of GPs in the award of Invalidity Benefit</td>
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20. Invalidity Benefit: A longitudinal survey of new recipients
22. Pension Choices: A survey on personal pensions in comparison with other pension options
23. Crossing National Frontiers
24. Statutory Sick Pay
25. Lone Parents and Work
26. The Effects of Benefit on Housing Decisions
27. Making a Claim for Disability Benefits
30. Lone Mothers
31. Educating Employers
32. Employers and Family Credit
33. Direct Payments from Income Support
34. Incomes and Living Standards of Older People
35. Choosing Advice on Benefits
36. First-time Customers
37. Contributions Agency National Client Satisfaction Survey 1994
38. Managing Money in Later Life
40. Changes in Lone Parenthood
41. Evaluation of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance
42. War Pensions Agency Customer Satisfaction Survey 1994
43. Paying for Rented Housing
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<td>Social Assistance in OECD Countries: Synthesis Report</td>
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<td>0 11 762411 X</td>
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<td>Women and Pensions</td>
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<td>Child Support Agency Client Satisfaction Survey 1995</td>
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<td>Take Up of Second Adult Rebate</td>
<td>0 11 762390 3</td>
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<td>Moving off Income Support</td>
<td>0 11 762394 6</td>
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<td>Disability, Benefits and Employment</td>
<td>0 11 762398 9</td>
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<td>Housing Benefit and Service Charges</td>
<td>0 11 762399 7</td>
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<td>Confidentiality: The public view</td>
<td>0 11 762434 9</td>
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<td>Helping Disabled Workers</td>
<td>0 11 762440 3</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td>Employers' Pension Provision 1994</td>
<td>0 11 762443 8</td>
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<td>Delivering Social Security: A cross-national study</td>
<td>0 11 762447 0</td>
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<td>Exploring Customer Satisfaction</td>
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